

## SERMON II.\*

### ON THE EVERLASTING COVENANT.

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*Although my house, &c.—2 Sam. xxiii: 5.*

I DO remember I have spoken in this place formerly from these words; and delivered somewhat concerning the covenant of God, so far as the exposition of the words did lead me.

I shall now add only one consideration, which is taken from the introduction of David's retreat unto, and assertion of, the everlasting covenant in this place; and that is in these words, 'Although my house be not so with God.'

David took a prospect now in his latter days, of all the distresses and calamities that should assuredly come upon his family; and it may be, he had regard unto those great and dreadful breaches that had before been made upon it, in the sins and judgments that ensued upon some of his children. This was enough to work in him a consternation of spirit and trouble of mind; and, in the view and prospect of it, he repairs for his relief unto the covenant of God; 'Although my house be not so with God, yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure.' What I would observe from it is this:

Under present distresses, and the saddest prospect of future troubles, it is the duty, and wisdom, and privilege of believers, to betake themselves for relief and support unto the covenant of God. Nothing can befall them, no case happen, for which there is no relief provided; and it is the greatest and best relief that can be provided for any case whatsoever.

Having laid down this assertion, the substance of what I shall do at present is, but to confirm it with some Scripture instances, and the practice of believers in former ages.

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We have one instance in Gen. xxviii. 3, 4. Isaac was sending away his son Jacob unto Padan-aram, to take him a wife; and he might easily know, and did no doubt, what troubles, and distresses, and dangers, would befall Jacob in that great undertaking. And one would somewhat wonder, why so great a man as Isaac was, should send away his son with no better provision than Jacob was sent away with. He gives the account of it, I had nothing but my staff; 'With my staff,' saith he, 'I went over Jordan.' But it seems, that temporal blessings being then a great token and evidence of God's covenant mercies, he would have Jacob work for himself, that he might have experience of God's blessing him in what he did. He should try God by his own experience. And what provision doth he give him, besides his staff, for this great undertaking? It is this, ver. 3, 4. 'God Almighty bless thee, and give thee the blessing of Abraham.' Why does he say, 'God Almighty?' Because that was the name whereby God revealed himself to Abraham, when he entered into covenant with him in Gen. xvii. 1. 'I am the Almighty God.' Isaac calls his son Jacob to renew his covenant interest with God, and to betake himself unto the blessing of the covenant, against that long and hazardous journey he was to go, against the hard, false, oppressive, deceitful dealing he was to meet with, against the dangers he was to encounter. He gives him the covenant for his security. And Jacob was not wanting to take the same course himself, Gen. xxxii. 9. and so onward: he was in as great a distress, and under as just a fear, as ever man was in this world, or could be in; and so he expresses his fear unto God, ver. 11. 'Deliver me, I pray thee, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau; for I fear him, lest he will come and smite me, and the mother, with the children.' He feared the universal destruction of himself and family, and so the failing of the promise he had received, and which he had pursued through so many difficulties and dangers. What course now doth Jacob take? Why, he appeals to the covenant, ver. 9. 'O God of my father Abraham, and God of my father Isaac;' which was the plea whereby they did plead the covenant that God entered solemnly into with them. Two things, it is evident, Jacob pleaded in this very great distress: one was the co-

venant that God made with Abraham; that is, the covenant of grace; for so he doth, ver. 9. He refers unto what blessing Isaac gave him when he went away; God Almighty bless thee, and give thee the blessing of Abraham. And, secondly, he appeals unto that particular covenant engagement, which he himself had made unto God; for in chap. xxviii. 13. God comes unto him, and renews his covenant. 'And, behold, the Lord stood above it, and said, I am the Lord God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac;' and thereupon Jacob renews his covenant in particular with God, ver. 21. 'If God will be with me, and keep me in this way, then shall the Lord be my God.' These two things doth Jacob in his great distress, he minds the covenant in general, and the particular covenant engagement God had brought him into; for so he pleads, 'Thou saidst unto me, return unto thy country, and to thy kindred, and I will deal well with thee.' Where did he say so? He said so in chap. xxxi. 13. When Jacob made his covenant with God, he pleaded these two things, in the greatest distress that could befall him in this world.

Shall I give you one instance more? David gives it us in his own person, Psal. xxxi. 9—13. He makes as sad a complaint of such a complication of distresses upon him, as there is any where extant in the whole book of the Psalms. 'Have mercy upon me, O Lord, for I am in trouble; mine eye is consumed with grief, yea my soul, and my belly,' &c. I could easily manifest, what a confluence of evil this holy man was now under; within, iniquities prevailed, and the fear of them; and without, friends forsook him, and enemies took counsel to take away his life. Whereunto doth he retreat? What doth he seek for relief in? What is the contrivance of this man of wisdom and courage, and interest in the world? See ver. 14. 'But I trusted in thee, O Lord: I said, Thou art my God;' and this put an end to all his difficulties. But this matter I have hinted in a former sermon.

It were an easy thing to multiply instances, both of particular persons, and the church in general, who were taught this wisdom of God, and knew this to be their duty, To let go all other vain contrivances, and to take up their relief

only in the covenant of God; as David doth here in the text.

Let us see a little more into the nature of it, that it may give us encouragement to our duty. And,

First, When a man betakes himself for relief unto God's covenant, 'he doth put God in mind of it,' wherewith he is greatly delighted; because therein he hath wrapped up his greatest glory in this world; and God is greatly delighted to be put in remembrance of that wherein he hath wrapped up the glory of his grace. It was Jacob's argument, when he wrestled with God, and prevailed; as signal an instance of the work of faith, and the deportment of a believer under great distresses, as the whole Old Testament affords us; and is given as an example to confirm our faith, Hos. xii. 4. 'Thou saidst thou wouldst surely do me good;' Gen. xxxii. 12. He put God in mind of what he had said to him, when he made the covenant with him; and you know what a glorious issue it had. Jacob could not have done any thing more pleasing and acceptable unto God, than to put him in remembrance of what, out of his goodness, grace and bounty, he had promised; for he professes that 'he was not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth which God had shewed unto him;' I plead not any thing, says he, of my own deservings; but, 'Lord, didst thou not say thou wouldst do me good?' God is greatly pleased with being remembered of the effects of his own grace, and wherein he hath wrapped so much of his own glory.

Secondly, As God would have us mind him of the covenant, 'so his remembrance of it, is still laid at the bottom of all the good he doth unto us,' and of all the dispensations of his love and grace.

God made a covenant with Noah, and with all the world in him; wherein he gave the preservation of the world, from a universal destruction, in covenant unto his saints; for the world is at this day, and to the last will be preserved upon this account, that God hath given the preservation of it in covenant unto Noah, and to them that succeed in the faith of Noah. But how comes it to pass, that God will destroy this world no more with a flood, when he had made this covenant? Saith God, 'I will set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of the covenant; and the bow shall be

in the cloud, and I will look upon it, that I may remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature.' It is spoken after the manner of men, when they have made an engagement, that they will do such a thing; it may be out of their mind, but if you remind them of it by a token, then they will recover their memory, and do according to their engagement. Now, saith God, I will take it upon myself, to remind myself. And when he remembers the covenant, what will he do? Then I will restrain my wrath and indignation, and I will destroy the earth no more. The withholding of troubles, judgments, and desolations, is laid in God's remembering of the covenant. It is all comprised together, Luke i. 72—75. 'To perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant, the oath which he sware to our father Abraham that he would grant unto us, that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all the days of our life.' All deliverance from our enemies, of whom we are afraid; all communication of grace and of spiritual strength, to enable us to serve God in holiness and righteousness; it all springs from this, God's remembering of his covenant.

Now he that retreats to God in his distresses, reminds God of his covenant; 'Thou saidst thou wouldst do me good.' And the bringing forth of God's word of promise, is as good a token as his own bringing forth the bow in the cloud. And this is the foundation of all the good he doth for us or in us.

Thirdly, 'What is there in the covenant, that God doth thus remember,' that will give us relief in times of distress, and in our prospect of future calamities that may befall us? and what are we to have regard unto, that may give us that relief? I answer,

1. God himself is in it; there lies the nature of it. When he came to make it with Abraham, 'I am God Almighty,' saith he: He doth not speak a word there what he will do for Abraham, but 'I am God Almighty;' he leaves it there, then requires his obedience, 'Walk before me, and be thou perfect.' Abraham shall rest in this, that God himself is in the covenant; for the rest that is to be done, trust me with it, I take that upon myself. And, saith he, Hos. ii. 23.

‘They shall be my people, and I will be their God.’ Here we have the eternal fountain and spring of all relief (if our houses are not so as we could desire), that is, God himself. So that, if there be any thing in the nature of God, in his infinite, eternal excellency, that is suited to the relief of a soul, he hath made his covenant sufficient to convey it unto the souls of believers. And what we come short of, is not for want of fulness in the fountain, and ability in the means of conveyance, but for want of faith to receive it.

2. Christ is in the covenant, Gal. iii. 16. ‘To Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ.’ In all the promises made to Abraham, Christ as the seed, was intended, so that Christ shall be theirs with all his benefits. This is also in it. And,

3. All the promises of God are in it, which are in unspeakable variety, as effects of infinite wisdom, suited unto the wants that may befall us in this world. So, as that it is utterly impossible that any believer should ever want any thing, that there is not grace in one promise or other suited unto that want. They all belong unto the covenant. Consider the fountain of it, God himself, who is inexhaustible in stores of help and grace: consider the means of procuring; Christ is in it, who hath purchased for us every thing that is needful; and, lastly, consider the means of communication, which are the promises; so that there is nothing wanting for our relief.

Fourthly, If we would have relief in the covenant, let us consider our own entering into covenant with God, and what is comprised therein. Whosoever entereth into covenant with God, he doth accept God to be his God, for all the ends of the covenant whatever. And he that will retreat for relief unto the covenant, must stand to the covenant. And in this acceptance of God to be our God, there are two things:

1. An absolute renunciation of all expectation of any help for the ends of the covenant, from any other thing whatsoever. For what we look for therein (and therein we look for all), there is to be an express renunciation of any expectation from any thing else to that end and purpose. So do they in Jer. iii. 22, 23. ‘Behold, we come unto thee; for thou art the Lord our God. Truly in vain is salvation hoped

for from the hills, and from the multitude of mountains: truly in the Lord our God is the salvation of Israel.' Things are called hills and mountains, because they make a great and goodly appearance of help and relief. The people here are directed to take up their relief in God alone; 'We come unto thee, for thou art the Lord our God.' What is required hereunto? Why, an absolute renunciation of all help and assistance from the hills, and from the mountains. And one great reason why we are so slow in drinking in that relief, which God is so willing to give out unto us, is, because we are still casting our eyes towards the hills and mountains, looking this way and that way for something that may give us relief; but it is in vain, there is an absolute renunciation of all other help included in accepting of God to be our God in covenant. So Hos. xiv. 3. 'Ashur shall not save us; we will not ride upon horses: neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, Ye are our gods: for in thee the fatherless findeth mercy.' And if there hath not been a solemn renunciation of other helps in our covenant with God, it is no wonder we do so halt as we do, between God and the world, when we come to our straits and distresses. Where this hath been firm in the soul, and he is nakedly cast upon God as a poor fatherless creature, to find mercy in him; and goes to him and saith, Truly thou art our God, in thee is our help; that soul shall not fail of such supplies as shall be needful for him in his condition. This leads to observe,

The next thing to be done is, 'an actual resting upon God,' or casting of ourselves upon him for all things.

Where these things are not, we do, in speaking of the covenant, but flatter God with our lips. There is no solemn covenant between God and us. This God required when he came to Abraham; saith he, 'Fear not, Abraham:' Why so? 'I am thy shield, and exceeding great reward.' Why so? Consider the condition of Abraham, and you will see what reason there was for God to give himself that title in this renewing of the covenant unto him. Abraham was in a wandering condition up and down the world, exposed to dangers, injuries, distresses from every hand. He knew not whether there was the fear of God in any place where he came. 'Fear not, Abraham,' saith God, 'I am thy shield,' trust me for thy protection, trust me for thy deliverance out

of danger. But, saith Abraham, I am engaged in a long and wearisome pilgrimage; 'and now, Lord God, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless.' Men will labour and take pains for their posterity in an ordinary way. Abraham had not only that thought about his posterity, but also about the promise: Why, saith God, 'I am thy reward;' a sufficient reward unto thee for all thy labour and travail, and sufferings. We would be glad to be freed from danger, freed from trouble in our pilgrimage, which encompasses us on every hand: and there is none of us, but would be glad to see some reward, some prosperity of the church of God in this world, and deliverance from trouble. But if we truly enter into covenant with God, we are to take him as a full satisfaction for all our dangers, for all our labours, though we see not the fruit of them in this world. He that enters into covenant with God, takes God for his protection and reward, and him alone. Had we but the power of these things in our hearts, it would alleviate all our troubles, and ease us under all our dangers, fears, distresses, and disappointments.

Fifthly, If we would find relief in the covenant, we may do well to consider upon what terms we did enter into covenant with God. Now entering into covenant with God, is twofold;

1. It may be explicit, as when it comes to these express terms mentioned, Hos. iii. 3. 'Thou shalt not be for another man: so will I also be for thee.' Some persons have laid the foundation of their obedience in direct express covenanting with God. And,

2. Sometimes it is implicitly wrought; as where God in the conversion of men, deals with them as he saith he will do with the church, Hos. ii. 14. 'I will allure them into the wilderness, and there speak comfortably unto them.' God by little and little, various workings and reasonings of the Spirit by the word upon the heart and affections, doth allure them from their former state, draws them aside to himself in the wilderness, there treats with them, and by little and little speaks comfort unto them; and so at length makes up the marriage covenant, which he mentions in ver. 19, and 'betroths them to himself for ever.' So it is with many: God hath, as to this covenant with himself, allured them, though



it would be useful, if not needful, for such persons, solemnly and expressly upon some occasions to renew their covenant with God as Jacob did.

Now as to those whom God hath thus taken into covenant, whom he hath thus allured, there are always these two things upon their minds, in their thus entering into covenant with God, which we may do well to consider and remember.

(1.) That they do surely accept God in Christ for himself, and make no conditions about peace and prosperity, and freedom from trouble in this world. Naaman made a reserve, that he would bow in the house of Rimmon, and that spoiled his whole covenant. Whoever hath in sincerity thus engaged in covenant with God, his own soul will bear him witness that he made no condition, had no reserve. And the proffer of any one condition to God or Christ whatever, is enough to ruin the whole marriage contract he tenders to us. Now for a man to faint and sink under any thing that befalls him, let him retreat unto the covenant, and inquire there whether ever he made a condition against it, against imprisonment, banishment, poverty, losses, troubles, distresses: did he say, if God would keep him from all these? God made no such condition with him. What God hath actually engaged before in promise, that we may plead with him as a condition, for Jacob did so; 'If thou wilt be with me, and bless me.' God had given him that promise; 'Thou saidst, I will deal well with thee, and I will surely do thee good;' but not else.

(2.) You may remember, with what affections you engaged unto God. It is a marriage covenant; Jer. iii. 14. 'I am married unto you,' saith God; and Isa. liv. 5. 'Thy Maker is thy husband; the Lord of hosts is his name.' And there is nothing more eminent in the marriage covenant, than a mighty prevalency of affection. I should much doubt whether I had really entered into covenant with God, if I had never found any thing of entire marriage affections towards God in Christ for himself. That soul that can under his distresses repair to some sense and experience of the prevalency of his affections in it formerly, it will relieve him against all his troubles, and only make him cry out for such affections unto God again: that will fully satisfy, when they are drawn out unto him. The remembrance and call-

ing over of these things, will greatly relieve and support a soul, whatever its distress or perplexity may be.

Sixthly, I have one consideration more, which is the last I shall insist upon; and that is, to consider in this covenant, whereunto I make my retreat, 'Who it is that hath made it with me.' And therein I would consider two things; the one whereof will have the endearment of admiration, and the other will have full and plenary satisfaction.

Why, it is God that hath made this covenant with us: he hath made with me, saith David. If a great, a mighty king and prince of the earth, had made a covenant with us, and confirmed it solemnly by his oath to take care of all our concerns; so carnal, and so fleshly are we, that it would give us great relief against imminent danger and hazards. But who hath made this covenant with us? God hath made it; and two things are considerable in this: 1. His condescension in entering into this covenant; 2. His sufficiency to satisfy us in it.

1. His condescension. And we may consider the condescension of God, upon the account of his greatness, upon the account of his holiness, and upon the account of his self-sufficiency.

(1.) Upon the account of his greatness. You may observe in sundry places, that where God doth mention his covenant, or the fruits of his covenant, he doth oftentimes mention his greatness with it. So, Isa. lvii. 15. 'Thus saith the Lord, the high and lofty One, that inhabiteth eternity; I will dwell with him also' (which is God's covenant) 'that is of a contrite and humble spirit.' The high and lofty One will condescend to dwell with the poor and humble. And Stephen, Acts vii. 2. mentioning God's calling of Abraham, saith he, 'The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham.' That the high and the lofty One, the great and the glorious God, should enter into this covenant with poor dust and ashes, worms of the earth as we are! the Lord help us to understand it. Condescension is endearing and satisfying: we find it so among men. If a man that is great in the world, doth but condescend to respect and be familiar towards them that are poor, that are beggars, it is looked upon as a very great matter, and doth wonderfully engage such persons to them that thus condescend. But let that

distance be what it will that is between the highest and greatest king and the meanest beggar, they are men still ; and, upon some accounts, the meanest may be the better. But there is an infinite distance between God and us, between the high and the lofty One, the glorious God, the possessor of heaven and earth, and poor dust and ashes : that he should take us into covenant, and engage himself by oath for the accomplishment of it ; and should accept of our answering of his covenant, and engaging of our hearts unto him that he should be ours, and that we should be his. No heart can fully conceive this condescension. But

(2.) There is greater condescension yet ; and that is, his great condescension with respect unto his holiness. It is a great condescension of God, upon the account of his greatness, to enter into covenant with man ; but it is a greater condescension for the holy God to enter into covenant with sinful man : and therefore, though there was great grace, and great excellency in the first covenant, wherein the Creator entered into covenant with the creature ; yet the second covenant is far more excellent and mysterious, where the holy God entered into covenant with sinners. In the first covenant there was no need of a mediator ; but when a covenant is made between the holy God and sinners, there comes in the person of Jesus Christ, which shews infinite condescension on the part of God.

(3.) Consider his condescension upon the account of his self-sufficiency. Though God be thus great, and though he be thus holy, yet may he not, however, have some use of poor man ? May he not have some need of his service ? As the greatest men upon earth have some need of their subjects and tenants, they have a revenue out of them : but God had no need of us at all, or of that service we tender him by virtue of this covenant. Psal. xvi. 2. ' O my soul, thou hast said unto the Lord, Thou art my Lord ;' what then will he do for God : ' my goodness extends not unto thee.' It is true, thou art my God in a way of mere sovereign grace ; but what I can do reaches not unto thee. So he saith, Job xxxv. 6—8. ' If thou sinnest, what doest thou against him ? or if thy transgressions be multiplied, what doest thou unto him ? If thou be righteous, what givest thou him ? or what receiveth he of thine hand ? Thy wickedness may hurt a

man as thou art; and thy righteousness may profit the Son of man.' God receives no profit, no advantage by it; so that it is an infinite condescension in God with respect to his self-sufficiency, and that upon two accounts; [1.] Upon the absolute, eternal self-sufficiency of his own nature. All the creatures in the world add nothing to God's state of blessedness. He made them, not that he might have advantage by them; but that he might communicate of his own goodness unto them. He was no less infinitely eternally-blessed before a creature was made to contemplate his glory, than he is now. [2.] Suppose all those he takes into covenant should fail him, 'he can out of stones raise up children unto Abraham;' he can bring up another people that may serve him to his praise and glory.

That is the first thing that will greatly refresh our souls under distresses, if we consider God's gracious condescension in taking us into covenant with him, upon the account of his greatness, his holiness, and his self-sufficiency; and it is an endearing condescension. 'What am I,' said Elizabeth, 'that the mother of my Lord should come unto me?' Much more may we say, what are we, that the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ should thus come unto us, to take us into covenant with himself?

2. It will be a relief, if we consider God's all-sufficiency to 'satisfy our souls' in every state and condition. This he made the ground of his covenant with Abraham; 'I am God Almighty.' And, if there be any want in God, we are freed from the terms of the covenant; that I may speak it to aggravate the sin of our instability, and the not taking up full satisfaction in him. 'But is it so?' saith God, 'Have I been a wilderness unto you, or a barren heath? As waters that fail?' Have we, at any time, in our own experience, failed of any thing all our life long hitherto? Have we wanted any thing? Our want arises because we will not admit, we will not receive; or we long after other things which God is not pleased we should have. There is in God an all-sufficiency of grace and mercy to pardon us; there is an all-sufficiency of spiritual strength to support us and carry us through all our difficulties; there is an all-sufficiency of goodness and beauty to satisfy us; and there is an all-sufficiency of power and glory to reward us.

(1.) There is in God, to meet with our wants, an all-sufficiency of grace and 'mercy to pardon us:' Tit. iii. 3, 4. The apostle having made a description of what we were before our conversion to God, and notwithstanding all the paint we put upon ourselves, has given us a character as black as hell; 'We ourselves were foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another.' How were we delivered? 'The kindness and love of God our Saviour appeared.' God, who is rich in grace, of his mercy wherewith he loved us in Christ, notwithstanding that cursed condition of ours, pardons, sanctifies, and saves us. There is an all-sufficiency of grace and mercy in God, I say, to pardon us. Where is there a believer that cannot say, he has found God all-sufficient to pardon sin?

(2.) There is an all-sufficiency of spiritual 'strength in God to support us.' Here lies our great strait and perplexity, the experience of our own weakness, of the unspeakable variety of temptations wherewith we are exercised, of oppositions that we meet withal, especially in such a time wherein the floods lift up their voice and rage. Who shall be able to go through all these difficulties? these remaining trials, temptations, troubles of our pilgrimage? How shall we be able to withstand them? I know not how it is with others, but it is a wonder to myself, that my soul is alive, considering what is come already: But 'there is the residue of the Spirit with God.' He tells you, Isa. xl. 28. to the end, that he will not faint in this work of giving out grace and spiritual strength; 'He will give power to the faint; and to them that have no might, he will increase strength.' He is able to carry us through all, and cause us to sing, because of his majesty, in the very fire.

(3.) There is an all-sufficiency of goodness and beauty in God to satisfy our souls. We are scattering away our affections 'upon every high hill, and under every green tree, Jer. ii. 20. looking for, and seeking after satisfaction from perishing things; but we find them all vanity and vexation of spirit: they will appear so unto us. But, 'How great is his goodness? How great is his beauty?' Zech. ix. 17. O the excellency and desirableness of God to satisfy and

fill all the affections of our hearts in every state and condition!

(4.) And lastly, there is an all-sufficiency in God 'to reward us' when we shall be here no more. The lion lies at the door, death is ready to seize upon us. Let our condition be what it will, we are entering into eternity: but God hath engaged himself by covenant to be our God; he hath promised to carry us through the dark shade, and to crown our souls with glory. 'Be thou faithful to death, and I will give thee a crown of life.'