

SERMON I.*

THE EVERLASTING COVENANT, THE BELIEVER'S SUPPORT UNDER DISTRESS.

Although my house be not so with God, yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure: for this is all my salvation, and all my desire, although he make it not to grow.—2 Sam. xxiii. 5.

BEFORE I open these words, I shall read the whole context, from the first verse unto the end of the seventh. ‘Now these be the last words of David; David the son of Jesse said, and the man who was,’ &c.

‘Now these be the last words of David;’ not absolutely, for you will find, both in the book of Samuel, and also in the book of Chronicles, that David spake many words after these: but these were the last prophetic words of David; or this is the last prophecy of David: and he gives an account in this prophecy of all the faith and experience he had had in the world; and it comprises also the sum and substance of all he had prophesied of; prophesied of as a king, the anointed of the God of Jacob; and prophesied of as a psalmist, as he was ‘the sweet psalmist of Israel.’

Now there are three parts of this last prophecy of David:

The first of them concerns the subject of all prophecy and promises, that he had preached about and declared, and that is Christ himself, in the third and fourth verses.

The second of them concerns himself, as he was a type of Christ, ver. 5. And

The third part concerns Satan and the enemies of the church, in opposition unto the kingdom of Jesus Christ.

The first part of his prophecy concerns Christ himself; ver. 3, 4. ‘The God of Israel said, the Rock of Israel spake to me; He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God.’ So we have rendered the words; but if you

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look into the Bible, that [must be] is put into the text, by the misunderstanding of them by interpreters. The words are, מוֹשֵׁל בְּאָדָם צַדִּיק; 'the ruler in or over men, is the just One;' which is Christ himself, who alone is this מוֹשֵׁל, this ruler. The word may be two ways interpreted (for to interpret it of a man that ruleth over men, the word will no way bear it, nor the prophecy); the בְּאָדָם must be, either he that rules in the human nature, is the just One; or he that rules over the human nature, in all saints, 'he is just,' saith he: 'and he rules in' or by 'the fear of God.' As in Isa. xi. 3. it is prophesied of him, 'He shall be of quick understanding in the fear of God;' so here it is prophesied of him, that he shall rule in or by the fear of God; that is the sceptre he shall have in the hearts of men, that is the law he shall put upon the souls of his subjects; he shall rule them neither by outward violence nor force, nor any thing of that nature; but he shall rule them by the fear of God. Ver. 4. declares by sundry comparisons what he shall be: 'Why,' saith he, 'he shall be as the light of the morning, when the sun riseth, even a morning without clouds, as the tender grass springing out of the earth by clear shining after rain.' You know how often these things are applied unto Christ. He is called in Malachi, 'the Son of righteousness that ariseth;' chap. iv. 2. He is called 'the day-spring from on high;' Luke i. 78. And he is called 'the bright and morning star;' Rev. xxii. 16. He is both a sun, and morning star, and day-spring. He shall be as the morning that brings light, comfort, joy, refreshment to the church. 'He shall be as a morning without clouds:' there is no darkness in the kingdom of Christ. 'And he shall be as the tender grass springing out of the earth, by clear shining after rain;' the same with that in Isaiah, 'He shall spring up as the tender branch out of the earth.' You know the reason of the allusion; when the grass hath been long dried, and there comes a great rain upon it, and clear shining upon that rain, how will the grass spring up? There was to be a great drought upon the church; but Christ comes, and he was as the rain, and as the sun shining upon the rain; then there was a springing up with great glory, and unto great fruitfulness.

I will at present overlook the fifth verse, to which I am to return; and only shew, that the sixth and seventh verses

do contain a prophecy of the enemies of the church; as this does of Christ. 'Belial shall be thrust away as thorns.' We render it, 'the sons of Belial;' but it is only Belial; 'Belial, all of it, the whole name of Belial.' Sometimes the word is taken for wicked men, and sometimes for the prince of wicked men; as here for the devil and all his agents. And he follows on his allusion, 'that they cannot be taken with hands;' Satan and his seed are so full of thorns and prickles against the church, that you can never seize them by the hand to bring them to any order. And the next verse gives caution how well we must be fenced if we touch them. This is the design of the prophecy.

I now return unto that part, which I shall a little more distinctly open unto you, that concerns David himself as he was chosen to be the great type of Christ. Saith he, 'This ruler of men, he shall be as the clear morning without clouds; although my house be not so with God.'

There are two things in the words:

First, A supposition of a great disappointment and surprisal.

Secondly, A relief against, and under that disappointment and surprisal.

First, A great surprisal and disappointment; 'Although my house be not so with God.' I have looked that it should be otherways, saith he, that my house should have a great deal of glory, especially that my house should be upright with God; but I begin to see it will be otherwise. You may observe David's heart was exceedingly set upon his house; therefore, whenever God spake to him concerning his house, it mightily wrought upon him; as 2 Sam. vii. 18, 19. 'Who am I, O Lord God, and what is my house, that thou hast brought me hitherto? And this was yet a small thing in thy sight, O Lord God; but thou hast spoken also of thy servant's house for a great while to come; and is this the manner of man, O Lord God?' Ver. 25. 'And now, O Lord God, the word that thou hast spoken concerning thy servant, and concerning his house, establish it for ever, and do as thou hast said.' I am sometimes afraid, that David had (as under the Old Testament they generally had) some carnal apprehensions of these spiritual promises that God gave to David's house, which were principally to bring Christ out of his loins,

that should reign for ever: but David thought all things would come well out of his house also. How stands the case now? Now David sees, that in his house Ammon had defiled Tamar, Absalom had slain Ammon for his sin; and he was cut off in his rebellion; and he foresaw, by a spirit of prophecy, that his whole house was like to perish, and be cut down: and so comes to that now, 'Although my house be not so with God.' So that from hence we may take this observation,

That the best of the saints of God, do oftentimes meet with great surprisals and disappointments in the best of their earthly comforts: their houses are not so with God.

I will give you one or two places for this; 1 Chron. vii. 23. 'Ephraim went in to his wife, and she conceived, and bare a son, and he called his name Beriah, because it went evil with his house.' Ephraim had received a special blessing from God by Jacob, for the multiplying of his house; 'He shall be great, and his seed shall become a multitude of nations;' Gen. lxxviii. 19. Now in Ephraim's old age, some of the chief of his sons are killed; 1 Chron. vii. 21, 22. 'There were Zabad, and Shuthelah, and Ezer, and Elead, whom the men of Gath, that were born in that land, slew, because they came down to take away their cattle; and Ephraim their father mourned many days.' And he called his other child Beriah, because it went evil with his house. It was a great surprise unto him, because he had a promise for his house; though God afterwards retrieved it.

You know how great a surprisal befel Job. See what his thoughts were, Job xxix. 18. After, in all the foregoing part of the chapter, he had related the manifold blessings of God upon him in his prosperity, the uprightness of his own heart, his righteousness in his way, as he declares them to the utmost in the beginning of that chapter, he tells you his thoughts; 'Then said I, I shall die in my nest, and I shall multiply my days as the sand.' He expected, from the blessing of God, long life and peace. You know what surprisal befel him, and disappointment to all his comforts in this world, that never man fell into greater; and he gives you an account how great his surprisal was throughout the next chapter.

The reasons hereof, why it may be thus, are,

First, Because there is no promise of the covenant to the contrary. There is no promise of God secures absolutely unto us our outward comforts, be they of what nature they will, be they in our relations, in our enjoyments, in our persons, of what kind they will, why yet we may have a surprisal befall them in reference to them all; because there is no promise of God to secure the contrary, therefore it may be so.

Secondly, Sometimes it is needful it should be so, though we are apt to think the contrary; and that for these three reasons:

1. To keep continually upon our hearts a due awe of the judgments of God; of the actings of God's providence in a way of judgment; which otherwise we should be apt to think ourselves freed from. David testified that this frame was in himself, Psal. cxix. 120. 'My flesh,' saith he, 'trembleth for fear of thee, and I am afraid of thy judgments.' There ought to be in our hearts, an awe of the judgments of God; 'for our God is a consuming fire;' and if we were secured from surprisals in our own concerns, so fleshly are we, so selfish and carnal, it would be impossible we should keep up a due awe and reverence of the judgments of God. But when these judgments of God may reach our nearest concerns, our lives, and all we enjoy; then doth our flesh tremble in a due manner for fear of him, and we may be afraid of his judgments. A due fear of the judgments of God, is a necessary balance upon the minds of the best of the saints.

2. It is needful to keep us off from security in ourselves. There is such a treachery in our hearts, that we are able to build carnal security upon the spiritual dispensations of God's kindness and love. 'I said I shall never be moved,' saith David. An expression of carnal security. What was the ground? Thou Lord hast made my rock so strong. He built up carnal security upon God's dispensations. It is needful therefore God should sometimes break in upon our concerns, that we may not turn a constant course of his kindness into a sinful security of our own.

3. They are sometimes actually needful to awaken the soul out of such deep sleep of present satisfaction, or love of this world, which nothing else will do. Sometimes we so fall asleep in our own ways, either in our satisfaction, or

projects, and desires, and are so earnest in the pursuit of them, that no ordinary jog will awaken us; it is necessary God should break in upon us in the best of our concerns, and make us put in an 'although' in our course. Although my children live not, and my house be not so with God; although my house be destroyed, &c.

That which we should learn from hence, by way of use, is,

1. Not to put too great a value upon any contentment whatever we have in this world, lest God make us write an 'although' upon it. David seems to have put too great a valuation upon his house, the carnal flourishing of his house; but in his last words, he is forced to come to that, 'Although my house be not so with God;' q. d. what I placed all my hope and expectation upon, that I find is not so with God.

2. Let us be in an expectation of such changes of Providence, that they may not be great surprisals unto us. When we are in peace, let us look for trouble; when we are at liberty, let us look for restraint; and when our children are about us, let us look for the removal of them; and be content to see all our comforts in their winding-sheet every day. It is impossible but our hearts will be too much upon them, unless we keep them in this frame.

The second general observation is this;

That the great reserve and relief for believers, under their surprisals and distresses, lies, in betaking themselves to the covenant of God, or to God in his covenant. Although my house be not so with God; what shall I then do? What will become of me? Yet 'he has made a covenant with me, an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure: This is all my desire, and all my salvation, although he make not my house to grow.' I say, the great relief, and only reserve of believers in their distresses and surprisals, such as may befall them in a very few days, is to betake themselves to God in his covenant.

I will give you some instances of it, Gen. xv. 1, 2. There God leads us to this I now mentioned. Abraham was in a perplexed condition; God comes to him in the first verse, and renews his covenant with him. 'The word of the Lord came unto Abraham in a vision, saying, Fear not. Abraham,

I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward.' He minds him of the covenant, and bids him not fear. What is the matter that God comes to Abraham, with this, 'Fear not, Abraham?' The next verse discovers it; and Abraham said, 'Lord God, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus.' He was afraid, that all the travail he had taken, in reference to the promise, would come to nothing; and he must leave it to Eliezer of Damascus. Now God comes to give him relief, in minding him of his covenant.

Jacob also relieved his dying spirit with this, upon the foresight of great troubles in his blessing of Dan, Gen. xlix. 16—18. 'Dan shall judge his people as one of the tribes of Israel.' He alludes to the name Dan, which signifies in Hebrew 'to judge.' When did Dan judge his people? Why in Samson; this is matter of joy to Jacob. But what shall follow? 'Dan shall be a serpent by the way, an adder in the path; that biteth the horse's heels, so that the rider shall fall backward.' He shall be a serpent and an adder, saith he; that is, idolatry shall be set up in the tribe of Dan, and continue. The first idolatry that was set up in Israel, the work of the serpent, was in the tribe of Dan; Judg. xviii. 30. when the Danites took away the graven image, &c. from Micah, and set it up, and made priests, until the day of the captivity of the land; not the captivity by the Assyrians, but the captivity by the Philistines, when they overcame them, and took away the ark; for then were all those things destroyed at Dan: and afterwards Jeroboam comes and sets up the calf in the same place, and that continued to the last captivity. With what now doth Jacob relieve himself? 'I have waited for thy salvation, O Lord:' he betakes himself to the covenant, and therewith relieves himself against all the trouble which he foresaw was coming upon his posterity in that tribe, which, upon that account, when the other tribes were sealed in the Revelations, was left out, because idolatry first began and ended in Dan.

David expresseth the same course to the height. Psal. xxxi. 10—15. He describes a very sad condition upon all hands. 'My life is spent with grief, and my years with sighing; my strength faileth because of mine iniquity, and my bones are consumed. I was a reproach among all my

enemies, but especially among my neighbours, and a fear to mine acquaintance,' &c. Here is sin and reproach, and contempt, and persecution, and danger of his life, all at once fallen upon him. What doth the man do? Why, in the 14th and 15th ver. he tells you, 'But I trusted in thee, O Lord; I said thou art my God; my times are in thy hand.' He betakes himself to the covenant against all these troubles within doors, and without doors, from sin, the world, wicked men, in reproach, contempt, persecution, that had almost slain him: he hath but this relief, he goes to God, and saith, 'Thou art my God,' thou shalt undertake for me against all these. I am not in the hand of sin, nor in the hand of my enemies; but my times of suffering, my time of life and death are in thy hands. He betakes himself unto God's covenant, and there he finds rest. I might multiply instances.

Take one more, wherein the doctrine is plainly held out; Hab. iii. 17, 18. 'Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vine, the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat, the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation.' Though my house be not so with God; there is my family gone, the fruits of the earth gone, all is gone; it is no matter, saith the believer, I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation. Every word expresses the covenant of God. By these instances it doth appear, that in the most surprising trouble and disappointments, believers do, as David here doth, betake themselves unto God in covenant.

Why do they so? I will give no reason for it, but what lies in the words.

First, They do it, because of the author of the covenant. They consider who it is that makes it with us: because he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, saith David: there is a great emphasis upon that *HE*; who is that? Why it is the Rock of Israel, the God of Israel, *HE* hath made it. It is not a covenant that man hath made with me, nor an angel; but it is a covenant that God hath made with me. And you may observe, that God, whenever he would require our faith or obedience, he doth signally preface his commands and promises with himself. You must know who it is that

commands, and who it is that promises. So in the decalogue, the rule of commands, he preface them with that, 'I am the Lord thy God;' which influences the minds of men unto obedience, and brings them under his authority. And when he made this covenant that David speaks of here, he doth it thus, Gen. xvii. 1. 'I am God Almighty.' This David regards here, when he saith, 'He hath made with me this covenant.' He; who? God Almighty, God All-sufficient; hither I retreat in all my wants and straits. Now, if we make a covenant one with another, we engage all that is in us to make good that covenant; we engage our power and ability, and reputation, and faithfulness. If I have a covenant with any of you, I would reckon upon this covenant, just according unto the esteem I have of your persons, your abilities, reputation, faithfulness; for when you engage in covenant, all you have is engaged. Now God making this covenant, he engages according to his power, goodness, faithfulness; so that we have the reputation of God to secure us in the things of this covenant, his all-sufficiency to assure us of the making good this covenant. So saith the soul, I will retreat unto the covenant, because God hath made it, who is all-sufficient. This makes it a very honourable covenant; it is a covenant made by God; and it makes it a very satisfactory covenant, if all that is in God can give satisfaction unto the soul of a poor creature; and it makes it also a sure covenant, as we shall see afterwards.

This is the first reason why David makes his retreat, in straits and difficulties, unto this covenant, because of the author of it, God himself, who made this covenant.

Secondly, The second reason is taken from the properties of the covenant; what kind of one it is: and they are three. It is an everlasting covenant. It is a covenant that is ordered in all things. And it is a covenant that is sure.

1. It is the great relief of our souls, because it is 'an everlasting covenant.' The things we are troubled about, wherein our comforts consist in this world, are but temporal things; and an everlasting relief against temporal distresses will quite out-balance them.

How is this everlasting? It is everlasting in respect of the beginning of it; it is everlasting in respect of the end of it; and it is everlasting in respect of the matter of it.

(1.) It is everlasting in respect of the beginning of it; it is a covenant that comes from everlasting love, Jer. xxxi. 3. 'I have loved thee with an everlasting love;' what then? 'Therefore with loving kindness have I drawn thee.' This drawing with loving kindness is the covenant here mentioned; and whence doth it proceed? from everlasting love. We had never had the drawing of the covenant, had not that been the spring. I will betake myself unto that covenant, which hath its spring in eternity. This covenant had not its beginning when first I laid hold upon it; but it had its beginning in God's love from all eternity.

(2.) It is everlasting in respect of the end of it: it ceases not until it brings the whole person, soul and body, into everlasting glory. So our Saviour manifests, Matt. xxii. 32. There arose a question whether the dead should arise or no, and so the whole person be brought to God in glory; and the Sadducees came to Christ with a pitiful sophistical question about a woman that had had seven husbands, whose wife she should be in the resurrection? Christ answers them; but how doth he prove that there shall be a resurrection? No otherwise but by the words of the covenant, ver. 32. 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob; God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.' They live unto God, by virtue of the covenant, unto this day; and, by virtue of the covenant, shall be raised again.

(3.) It is an everlasting covenant upon the account of the matter of it, the things concerning which it is. It is not a covenant about corn and wine and oil; about the growing of our houses, the increase of our families or selves in the world: but it is a covenant about everlasting things; 'things that are not seen;' 2 Cor. iv. 18. Grace is eternal, mercy eternal, spiritual life and joy and comfort are all eternal things. 'This is life eternal, that they may know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent;' John xvii. 3. Not only eternal glory, but the grace we have here by virtue of the covenant is eternal. It is not about the land of Canaan, thrones and kingdoms; it is not about the prosperity of our families, saith he, but about everlasting things.

Now is there not here great ground for retreat unto this

covenant in all our straits, that hath its rise in everlasting love, its end in everlasting rest, and the matter whereof are all everlasting things. This is the first property of it; and a reason why we ought to make it our relief, because it is an everlasting covenant.

2. The second property of this covenant is, 'That it is ordered in all things.' What is order? Order is the disposition of things into such a way, such a relation one to another, and such a dependance one upon another, as they may all be suited to attain their proper end. This is order. Now, saith he, this covenant is ordered. The truth is, order is the beauty of all things, the glory of all things; and it is but a little, I acknowledge, that I am able to look into, of the order of this covenant, which renders it exceeding beautiful and glorious, and much less that I shall now speak unto you.

I would refer the order of the covenant to these three heads; to its infinitely wise projection; to its solemn confirmation; and to its powerful execution. These three things give this covenant its order. Its infinitely wise projection, in the love and eternal wisdom of the Father; its solemn confirmation, in the blood and sacrifice of the Son; and its powerful execution, in the efficacy of the Holy Ghost, the Spirit of grace. These are the heads of the glorious order of this covenant, that gives it its life, beauty, and glory.

(1.) Its projection was in the wisdom and love of the Father. Whatsoever is spoken concerning the love, grace, and wisdom of the Father, before the world was, was laid out in the projection of this covenant. Take it as it wraps Christ in it, as it brings forth the forgiveness of sin, as it is the centre of grace; and it compriseth the whole effect of divine wisdom, as far as the infinitely holy God ever manifested, or ever will manifest to eternity.

(2.) It had a solemn confirmation in the blood of the Son: hence the blood of Christ is called 'the blood of the covenant.' The covenant was solemnly confirmed in the blood of Christ. It is the design of the apostle, in the tenth chapter of the Hebrews, to prove the solemn confirmation of the new covenant, in the blood of the Son of God, that makes it irrevocable and unchangeable.

(3.) But when all this is done, how shall this covenant be executed? Why, that is the work of the Holy Spirit. He hath undertaken two things. [1.] To assure our souls of all things on the part of God; to reveal the terms of the covenant, and make known unto us the end of God in it. And [2.] to undertake on our parts to give us hearts, that we shall love him, and fear him; to write the terms of the covenant on our part in our souls; so that it shall have an infallible execution. If any thing had been wanting in this order, we could never had benefit by this covenant.

There is an addition of order, in reference to the matter of it, here expressed: as it is ordered, 'so it is ordered in all things:' it is ordered in all the things 'of grace on the part of God;' it is ordered in all the things 'of sin on our part.' (1.) It is ordered in all the things 'of grace on the part of God,' that all grace whatsoever, that is needful for the covenanters, shall be given out unto them. If there were any needful grace that we should come short of, in reference unto the end of this covenant, it would not be ordered in all things. If the covenant had been ordered but in some grace, in quickening grace, and not in persevering grace, we had never come to the end of the covenant; if in pardoning grace, and not renewing grace, we had never come to the end of the covenant; 'for without holiness no man shall see the Lord.' But whatsoever grace is needful to bring us to the enjoyment of God, it is ordered in all grace. The first covenant with Adam was ordered in grace, but not in all grace; it was ordered in righteousness, holiness, and innocency, but not ordered in the grace of perseverance; and, failing in that grace, the whole covenant failed: but this covenant is ordered in all things, with reference to believers. (2.) It is ordered in reference unto sin. There was a great deal of glory and beauty in the first covenant; but there was no order taken about sin; that, if any sin came in, the first covenant was gone and broken, and of no use any more. But this covenant hath taken order about sin; that there shall no sin befall believers, but what the grace of the covenant will extend pardon unto. If a believer should fall into any one sin, that would deprive him of the benefit of this covenant, it would not be ordered in all things. There are sins, that, if a believer should fall into,

would break the covenant; but the covenant prevents such falls.

This is another motive to rely upon this covenant, because it is ordered in all things. What could God provide more for poor creatures?

3. The last property of this covenant is, that it is sure. It is 'ordered in all things, and sure.' If it had not been sure, it would not have been a relief unto us. The springs of the security of this covenant are two: (1.) The oath of God; (2.) The intercession of Christ.

God hath confirmed this covenant by his oath; and that gives surety in itself, and security unto us; Heb. vi. 17, 18.

And it is made sure by the interposition of Christ. He 'is made the surety of a better covenant;' Heb. vii. 22. And he lives for ever to make intercession for them that come unto God by him, and so is able to save unto the utmost; ver. 25.

This is what I have to offer from the opening of the words, and the reasons contained in them, why they are the great relief and reserve of believers in all the surprisals, disappointments, and distresses, that may befall them; and we are marvellously unwise, if we do not live in a constant expectation of such surprisals. To say, that we shall die in our nests, and our mountain is so strong that it shall not be moved, this is carnal security.

I will answer one question, and I have done.

How do believers betake themselves to this covenant for relief? Or, what may we do, that we may betake ourselves unto it for our relief in our surprisals and distresses?

I answer, first, The first way is, by faith to get a due and dear valuation of the things of the covenant, above all things we here enjoy in this world. We shall never have relief by it, until we value the things of it as we ought; and those who do so shall never want relief from it.

Secondly, We should seek unto God in covenant, for strength to support us under our surprisals and distresses. When Abraham was going to battle, he took with him Mamre, Eshcol, and Aner, who were the men of his covenant; Gen. xiv. 13. When our souls are engaged in battle with our sins, oppositions, and fears, let us take with us the men of our covenant, I mean, take God with us, seek

strength from the covenant, it is the way to support under soul surprisals.

Thirdly and lastly, We must resolve finally to take up our rest in the covenant of God, and not in other things. In Isa. xxx. 15. God brings it to this; 'Thus saith the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel, in returning and rest shall ye be saved, in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength.' God, when he proposes the covenant unto us, doth it, that we should take up our rest and confidence alone in that. 'But ye would not, but said, We will flee upon horses; therefore shall ye flee.' If we have other reserves, the covenant will never be a stable reserve unto us.