

## SERMON XI.\*

### THE USE OF FAITH UNDER REPROACHES AND PERSECUTIONS.

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*The just shall live by his faith.*—HAB. ii. 4.

YOU may remember, I spake occasionally from that of the psalmist, Psal. xcvi. 2. 'Clouds and darkness are round about him; righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne;' and from thence took occasion to consider what is our especial duty, when clouds and darkness are round about us, as they are at this day. And some of you know I have had a great persuasion, that the clouds that are gathering, will at least, in their first storm, fall upon the people of God. I must repeat it again and again; I have been warning you for some years, and telling you it would be so. The present frame wherewith I have to conflict in my own spirit, and that frame of spirit which I have observed in others, the state and condition of all churches and professors (so far as I know) is, they are gone into a dreadful security. I speak my heart, and what I know with reference unto our present state, and the cause of God; we are gone, I say, into a dismal security, which still confirms me, that the storm will come upon us, and that it will not be long ere we feel it. My design is, therefore, to shew you how we ought to behave ourselves under the perplexities and difficulties we are to conflict withal in this world. And I have not sat studying for things to speak, but only tell you the experience of my own heart, and what I am labouring after. I have already shewed you, what our duty is under the approach of these distressing calamitous times that are coming upon us; and what faith will do in such a season.

II. I am now in the second place to shew you, how faith will carry it under other perplexities, that either are present, or are coming upon us. And here I shall shew you,

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1. How we may live by faith, under all the reproaches and persecutions that do or may befall us, upon the account of that order and fellowship of the gospel, of that way of God's worship which we do profess.

2. How we may live by faith with reference unto the returning upon us of antichristian darkness and cruelty, if God shall suffer it so to be.

3. How we may live by faith under an apprehension of great and woful decays in churches, in church members, in professors of all sorts, and in the gradual withdrawals of the glory of God from us upon that account.

1. How may we live by faith with reference unto those reproaches, that scorn and contempt which are cast upon the ways of God, which we profess; that worship of God wherein we are engaged, and that order of the gospel that we do observe; with the persecutions that will attend us upon the account thereof. Truly I may say of it as the Jews said to Paul about Christianity, Acts xxviii. 22. 'As for this way, we know that it is everywhere spoken against.' The whole world seems to be combined, that the name of Israel, in this way, may no more to be had in remembrance. There are few that are concerned about these things, while it is well with them, their families, their relations, estates, inheritances; let the ways of God be reproached, what is that to them? They are not concerned in it. They cannot say as the psalmist doth, when he speaks in the person of Christ, Psal. lxxix. 9. 'The reproaches of them that have reproached thee, are fallen upon me.' Perhaps some of us are more sensible than others (or at least have reason so to be), of these reproaches that are continually cast upon the ways of God, seeing they are more particularly upon us. But those that are not concerned in this scorn and contempt, I would say three things.

First, What evidence have you, that you have a concern in God's glory? for these things are those whereby God is glorified in this world; and if you are not concerned, when there are so many reflections thrown upon it, pray consider what evidence you have in yourselves, of any concernment in the glory of God.

Secondly, What evidence have you that you have a love

to these things, that can hear them reproached, scorned, contemned, and never be moved at it? An honest good man would find himself concerned, if his wife or children were reproached with lies, and shameful things, because of his interest in them. But for them that can hear the ways of God reproached every day, and so long as it is well with them and theirs, are not concerned thereat, they can have no evidence that they have a love unto them. Nehemiah cries out upon such an occasion, chap. iv. 4. 'Hear, O our God, for we are despised; and turn their reproach upon their own head, and give them for a prey in the land of captivity.' God hath made special promises to such as are thus concerned, Zeph. iii. 18. 'I will gather them,' saith he. Whom will he gather? 'Them that are sorrowful for the solemn assembly, who are of thee, to whom the reproach of it was a burden.' The solemn assemblies were reproached and mocked; and there were some of them (not all) to whom this reproach was a burden; 'These,' saith God, 'I will gather;' gather them under my gracious protection.

Thirdly, To add one word more; if you are not concerned in the reproaches that are cast upon the ways of God, persecution shall awaken you, and either make you concerned, or put an end unto all your profession.

Now the inquiry is, how, under these difficulties that we have to conflict withal, we shall glorify God, and pass through them without loss, unto our spiritual advantage.

The apostle, in the tenth chapter to the Hebrews, where he describes this very condition I have been speaking of, doth fully direct us. 'Ye endured,' saith he, 'a great fight of afflictions, partly while ye were made a gazing-stock, both by reproaches and afflictions, and partly whilst ye became companions of them that were so used; for ye had compassion of me in my bonds, and took joyfully the spoiling of your goods,' &c. ver. 32—34. But how shall we carry ourselves under this condition here described? 'Now,' saith he, ver. 38. 'the just shall live by faith.'

What is the work of faith in this condition, that we may glorify God, and carry it through to a good and comfortable issue to ourselves? call your own hearts to an account, and see how faith will work to give you support and

supply. I will tell you what I am labouring after in my own heart; and the Lord direct you to find out what will be more useful. What will faith do in such a case? I answer,

(1.) Faith will give us such an experience of the power, efficacy, sweetness, and benefit of gospel ordinances, and gospel worship, as shall cause us to despise all that the world can do in opposition unto us. Here I would cast my anchor, and exhort you, not to be confident of yourselves, for nothing else will keep and preserve you. An opinion, a well-grounded opinion and judgment, will not preserve you. Love to this or that man's ministry, will not preserve you; that you are able to dispute for your ways, will not preserve you; I can give you instances wherein they have all failed: resolutions, that if all men should leave them, you would not, are insufficient. Nothing can preserve you, but a sense and experience of the usefulness and sweetness of gospel administrations, according unto the mind of Jesus Christ. This faith alone can give you. 'Desire,' saith the apostle Peter, 'the sincere milk of the word;' 1 Pet. ii. 2. Desire, and labour to continue in the ordinances of the gospel, and the worship of God under the administration of the word. How? 'If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious;' ver. 3. otherwise you will never desire it. I should hope, that through the grace of God (and otherwise I do not hope it), I might yet continue, if indeed I could keep alive an experience, that in the dispensation of the word, I find a constant exercise of faith in God, delight in him, love to him; if I find, that I come to the word, as expecting to receive from God a sense of his love, and supply of his grace; I should then, I say, have good hope through grace, that ten thousand difficulties should never shake me in my continuance in this way. But if it be otherwise, there will be no continuance nor abiding. I mention these things, because, to the best observation, such a poor worm as I am can make, there is a mighty coldness and indifferency grown upon the spirits of men, in attending to the worship of God. There is not that life, spirit, courage, and delight in it, as hath been in times past; and if so, where it may end God only knows. This, I say, is the first thing that faith will do in this state, if we set it on work. If we would but labour to stir up faith to find those supplies of spiritual life and

strength in the ways of his worship and ordinances; if we would labour to overcome prejudices, and set ourselves against sloth and negligence, we should find ourselves as other men, and greatly set at liberty, as to what the world can do unto us. This is that which faith can do for us, in such a state of things; and this is that I would be labouring to bring my own heart unto.

(2.) Faith, in such a season, will bring the soul into such an experimental sense of the authority of Jesus Christ, as to make it despise all other things. I profess, if it were not for the authority of Christ, I would renounce all your meetings; they would have neither form nor comeliness in them, why they should be desired. But a deep respect unto the authority of Christ (unless our evil hearts are betrayed by unbelief and weakness), is that which will carry us through all that may befall us. Faith will work this double respect unto the authority of Christ:

[1.] As he is the great head and lawgiver of the church, who alone hath received all power from the Father, to institute all worship; and whoever imposes herein, usurps his crown and dignity. All power to institute spiritual worship is given unto Christ in heaven, and in earth. What then? 'Go, therefore,' saith he, 'and teach men to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you;' Matt. xxviii. 18. 20. Bring your souls to this exercise of faith, that these things we do, are commanded us by Christ, who is the sovereign Lord of our consciences, who hath sovereign authority over our souls. We must all appear before his judgment-seat, who will require of us, whether we have done and observed what he hath commanded us, or no? Do not only say these things, but labour greatly by faith to affect your consciences with this authority of Christ, and you will find that all other authorities will come to nothing, however you may suffer for it.

[2.] Faith respects the authority of Christ, as he is 'Lord of lords, and King of kings;' as he sits at the right hand of God, expecting all his enemies to become his footstool; as he hath not only a golden sceptre in his hand, 'a sceptre of righteousness,' wherewith he rules his church, but also an iron rod, to break all his enemies in pieces, like a potter's vessel. If faith exercises itself upon this power and authority of

Christ over his enemies, it will pour contempt upon all that the world can do. You cannot be carried before any magistrate, but Christ is there present greater than them all, who hath their breath in his hands, their lives, and their ways at his disposal, and can do what he pleases with them. Faith will bring in the presence of Christ in such a season; when otherwise your hearts would fail for fear, and you would be left unto your own wisdom, which is folly, and your own strength, which is but weakness. But if you have but faith working in the sense of this authority, it will make you like those well composed persons in the third of Daniel. Do not wonder at the greatness of their answer, and the composure of their spirits, when they looked on the fiery furnace on the one hand, and the fiery countenance of terrible majesty, on the other. 'Know, that God,' say they, 'whom we serve, is able to deliver us out of thy hand; but if not,' if God will not give us this present deliverance, 'be it known unto thee, O king, we will not serve thy gods, nor worship thy golden image;' ver. 17, 18. Faith will give us the same composure of spirit, and the same resolution; and with these things should we relieve ourselves under the worst that can befall us.

(3.) Faith, in such a case and condition, will bring to mind, and make effectual upon our souls, the examples of them that have gone before us, in giving the same testimony that we do, and in the sufferings that they underwent upon that account. When the apostle had told the believing Hebrews, that through all their trials, tribulations, and sufferings, they must live by faith, Heb. x. what encouragement, might they say, shall we receive by faith? Why, saith he, faith will bring to mind all the examples of them that have gone before you, that have suffered, and been afflicted, and distressed as you now are; which account takes up the whole eleventh chapter, and a good part of the beginning of the twelfth. It is a great thing when faith revives an example. Let us then by faith, carry in our minds the examples that are recorded in the Scripture. There is the example of Moses, the apostle gives it us; and it is an eminent instance; 'He chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of

Egypt.' He, by the dark promise he had to live upon, endured the reproach of Christ. My brethren, take the prophets for an example of them that have suffered; and consider how the apostles have gone before us; but do not stop at them, for there is a greater than Moses and the prophets, and apostles; greater than even a cloud of witnesses, and that is no less a person than the Lord Jesus Christ. Heb. xii. 2. 'Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who, for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, and despised the shame.' He underwent the contradiction of sinners against himself, 'and is now set down at the right hand of God.' Faith calling to mind these great examples, would give us great support under all the trials we may be brought unto, and conflict with. Whither are we going? What do we hope for? We would be where Moses is, and where the prophets are; but how got they thither? They did not get thither through the increase of riches, and multiplying to themselves lordships in the world, but by sufferings, and the cross. Through many tribulations they entered into the kingdom of heaven.

(4.) Faith will receive in the supplies that Christ hath laid up for his people, in such a season. Christ hath made peculiar provision for suffering saints. And it consists in two things: First, In his special presence with them. He will be with them in the fire, and in the water. Secondly, In the communication of the sense of God's love unto them. 'Their tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience, and experience hope; and then the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, which is given to us;' Rom. v. 3—5. Faith will bring all these things into the soul. But your minds must be spiritual, or you cannot put forth one act of faith for the bringing in this special provision that is laid up for suffering saints. And very few attain this spiritual frame, where faith fetches in these spiritual consolations Christ hath prepared for such souls. This is one way whereby we may live by faith in such a season. Search, therefore, and make inquiry in your entrance into troubles, what sense faith gives you of the love of God, to carry you through these difficulties.

(5.) It is faith alone that can relieve us with respect unto the recompense of reward. Moses suffered affliction

with the people of God, 'for he had respect to the recompense of reward;' Heb. xi. 20. The light and momentary afflictions which we undergo in this world, 'will work for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory;' 2 Cor. iv. 17. Who knows, but in a few days, some of us may be taken into that incomprehensible glory? where we shall eternally admire that ever we did put any manner of weight on things here below. Faith will fix your eye on the eternal recompense of reward. We have indeed a faith now at work, that fixes the minds of men upon this and that way of deliverance, and this and that strange accident; but we shall find that true faith will burn up all this as stubble.

(6.) And lastly, Faith will work by patience. The apostle tells us, 'we have need of patience, that after we have done the will of God, we may inherit the promises; and we are to be followers of them who through faith and patience, inherit the promises;' Heb. x. 36. vi. 12.

This is something of what I had to offer unto you, and I hope both seasonable and useful. However, it is what I can attain unto in these times of reproach, scorn, and contempt that is cast upon us, and persecutions approaching. I say faith will discover to us that efficacy, sweetness, power, and advantage in spiritual ordinances, as to make us willing to undergo any thing for them. Faith will bring our souls into such subjection unto the authority of Christ, as head of the church, and Lord over the whole creation, that we shall not be terrified with what man can do unto us. Faith will furnish us with examples of the saints of God, whom he hath helped, and assisted to go through sufferings, and who are now crowned and at rest in heaven. Faith will help us to keep our eye fixed, not upon the things of this world, but upon the eternal recompense of another world, and glory therein. And faith will also work by patience, when difficulties shall be multiplied upon us.