

The Kirk's Holy Resolution.

“In those days, and in that time, saith the Lord, the children of Israel shall come, they and the children of Judah together, going and weeping: they shall go, and seek the Lord their God. They shall ask the way to Zion with their faces thitherward, saying, Come, and let us join ourselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant that shall not be forgotten.”—JEREMIAH 1. 4, 5.¹



WE have heard, beloved in our Lord, a holy resolution of two kingdoms, to wit, Israel and Judah, after their deliverance from their captivity, to join themselves together to serve the Lord and His house, where He dwells, to ask the way to Zion with their faces thitherwards, and weeping. And their manner, how they went to seek the Lord—they went weeping. And their weakness when they are in the way—they speer² the way because they know it not. And then their encouraging one another into the way; they say, “Come, and let us join ourselves in a perpetual covenant with the Lord, never to be forgotten.” Anything of that which was spoken the last day I repeat nothing of it. Only this would³ be remembered, that the Lord’s people

¹ No date or place is given to this sermon or the preceding one, but from its contents the two would seem to have been preached at the same time as the sermon on Isa. xli. 14-16. See note p. 1.

² Ask.

³ Should.

of Israel and of Judah, every one of them encourages another to seek the Lord, and they set their shoulders together to help forward His glory, and for their brother's weal, and they come weeping one to another, and they speer¹ the way to Zion with their faces thitherwards.

Whilk² teaches a lesson that is most necessary for us, and is most worthy of our observation; and that is, that the Spirit of God allows³ the communion of saints, and that every man be careful for the soul of his brother, that so we have not Cain's answer to give unto the Lord, "Am I my brother's keeper?" And that according to the calling and station the Lord has put us in, we be careful to exhort, instruct, comfort, and admonish one another, to edify one another in our most holy faith.

Now what I spake concerning this, I speak nothing thereof again. Only a word of that which I spake concerning the mind of our divines disputing against the Papists and Jesuits in that controversy between us and them about the interpreting of the sacred Scriptures, where they avow this to be a point of Popery, that the gift of interpreting the Scriptures should be only bound to the Kirk and to Kirkmen. Now it is not their meaning, neither is it my meaning, in defending this point, that all private Christians they have warrant from the Lord either to expone the Scriptures in public to the people, or yet to expone them after that manner that ordinarily we take for exponing the Scriptures, and that is to expone them as doctors and professors, or yet as pastors, who may expone the same, and are declared

¹ Ask.

² Which.

³ Comments, approves of.

of God to be such as should understand and expone the Scriptures, and raise doctrines, and apply them to the people's use. Neither is this the mind of our divines, or of any in our Kirk, or of those on whom they lay the blame of Separatists. But the mind of our divines and our mind in this is—

First: That the faith of the people of God, in understanding the Scriptures, should not so depend upon the interpretation of Kirkmen, as that they themselves should be altogether ignorant of the sense thereof, for that were indeed to have a blind and implicit faith, and to believe as the Kirk believes. Again—

Secondly: That it is not against the Word of God, but agreeable thereto, that private Christians in a private way, they may apply the sense of Scripture to themselves and others, and that meaning that the Spirit of God has in such places of Scripture, and that they may confer, exhort, warn, rebuke, &c., one another. And this is not so meikle¹ exponing of Scripture as it is applying thereof rightly. But we are so far from giving anything which is due to the pastors or doctors who are in the house of God, or of any who are called to that holy function, or minds to follow the same, that we say with the apostle, Heb. v., "No man taketh this honour unto him except he be called of God for that effect." He ought not to meddle with what belongs to them.

Now the main thing that Israel and Judah shall do while they are in their journey this way—they shall seek the Lord their God, and shall ask the way to Zion with their faces thitherwards. Now a word of them.

¹ Much.

First: It is said that they shall be a company of seekers of God. That is the main thing that takes up the essence and the name of a believer, and a seeker of God, that he seeks the Lord. Now this seeking the Lord, it pre-suppones losing of Him. And having a reference to this losing of Him, God is sought this way, in four considerations. The

First is when the Lord's face is sought. This is when His favour and loving-kindness are sought, which is better than life. So it is said, Psa. xxiv. 6: "This is the generation of them that seek Him, of them that seek Thy face, O God of Jacob." These are the generation of them that seek the Lord's favour. So also Psa. xxvii. 8: "When thou saidst, Seek ye My face; my heart said, Thy face, Lord, will I seek"—that is the Lord's favour that is there spoken of. Sick-like, Hos. v. 15, "I will go and return to My place, till they acknowledge their offence, and seek My face: in their affliction they will seek Me early." Our natural condition and the state that we are in, that we have lost a sight of God's face and His favour, should put us to this. These who want should seek the Lord and the sense of His love. They who stand in need thereof should seek His face and loving-kindness, and blessed are they who seek this indeed.

A second thing that we are to seek under this, is to seek the image of God which we have lost. To seek wisdom, as it is Prov. ii. 4, 5: "If thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as hid treasures; then thou shalt understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God;" even to seek that which we lost in Adam at his fall. For as it is, Rom. iii. 23, "All have

sinned and come short of the glory of God ;” they have missed that glorious image, as it is well expounded, and therefore it would¹ be sought for again. And this is the Lord’s complaint, Jer. v. 1, that there is no man that seeketh the Lord ; and it is the charge given unto His people, Zeph. ii. 3, “ Seek ye the Lord, all ye meek of the earth ;” and Isa. i. 17, “ Seek judgment.” The people, they should be careful of seeking God, and they ought to seek the image of God, which is true sanctification. And this is the main and essential way of seeking God. Again—

Third : We have lost the kingdom of heaven and paradise ; and therefore that would² be sought. Matt. vi. 33 : “ Seek first the kingdom of heaven, and the righteousness thereof, and then all other things shall be casten² unto you.” They who profess to seek, and seek not this, they fail in their seeking, and walk not with them of whom it is said, Rom. ii. 7, “ who by well-doing ” purchased a good report unto themselves ; nor follow the example of Abraham, Heb. xi. 10 : “ He sought a city which hath a foundation, whose builder and maker is God.” And then—

Lastly : To seek the means of salvation ; that is, to seek God. Psa. cxix. 45 : “ I will walk at liberty, for I seek Thy precepts ;” that is, “ the thing that I make search for is Thy precepts,” which is the way to salvation ; and ver. 155, “ Salvation is far from the wicked, for they seek not Thy statutes.” It is a note of them who seek not the way to heaven that they seek not the Lord’s statutes.

¹ Should.

² Given.

Now the *use* of this is, to condemn a multitude of seekers in the world, who albeit they seek God yet they seek not God nor His face, seek not His image, nor are they about the seeking of heaven, nor seek they after His precepts and the means of salvation. There are a number condemned, Phil. ii. 21 : " All seek their own things, but seek not the things of Christ." How many are there in the world who in their callings seek nothing but to get gold for their god, but cannot say as Christ says, and clears Himself from being guilty of such wickedness : " I serve not Mine own honour, but the honour of Him that sent Me" ? The most part seek their own honour and glory, and seek the world, but they seek not God. They seek corn, wine, and oil, but seek not to have the light of the Lord's countenance lifted upon them. And whoever seeks after these things, they shall not find what they seek, or if they find them they shall lose better. It were better to obey that, Isa. lv. : " Seek ye the Lord while He may be found ; call upon Him while He is near," &c. ; and certainly whoever has their task to seek the world and the things thereof, they seek not the Lord nor His face, and image, or heaven, or salvation. Oh ! if we knew what we have lost, and that we could leave our care of seeking things in the world, and set to to seek God and His face, His image, and heaven, and the precepts and testimonies of the Lord ! And, out of all doubt, that is the best seeking in the world, and there is no man but he is seeking, and every man is seeking some good thing. But O ! how many are there who come short of that which they should seek, who are seeking lying vanities, and forsaking their own mercy.

This is the world's conquest and their search; "Lord, save us from it."

Second: We have set down unto us, what the people shall seek—"They shall seek the Lord their God." The thing that is called seeking the way to Zion, it is expounded to seek the Lord.

And here we have this *doctrine* arising clearly unto us, that in the means of the worship of God, God Himself is to be sought, and not the means themselves. They are now coming from their captivity, and in their coming, they seek not the dry hill of Zion, or the temple, or the external means of God's worship, but they seek the Lord in these; for that is the fairest flower that grows there. The Lord Himself is better than preaching, or sacraments, or prayer, &c., and all the means of His worship; for all of them serve but only for leading to Him. And therefore none should content themselves in the worship of God until they get God Himself. Look unto Psalm xlii. 1, 4, and it will show this. The first verse says, "As the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so my soul panteth after Thee, O God;" and in the fourth verse, "When I remember these things, I pour out my soul in me: for I had gone with the multitude, I went with them to the house of God." At this time David was banished from the means of God's worship, and that is his heart-break, and the only thing that he misses at this time was God Himself, and so he missed the means for God. So, also, Psa. lxxxiv. 2: "My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth, for the courts of the Lord." Now was that no more but to have

* Acquisition.

a rowme ¹ where the sparrows bigged ² their nests, and the swallows kept their young ones? No. He expones it in the other part of the verse: "My soul crieth out for the living God." So also in Psalm lxiii., where David was banished into the wilderness—his heart was seeking the Lord, and so was longing for Him as thirsty land does for a shower, and then adds: "That I may see Thy power and glory so as I have seen Thee in Thy sanctuary."

Use. In all the means of the worship of God, whether ye have the use of them or want the use of them, seek ever God rather nor ³ the means, whether it be in preaching, praying, hearing, reading, &c. Strive to be in at God Himself. And this is the difference between an hypocrite and a true seeker of God, for the hypocrite he seeks after the means, and no more. That is enough for him if he hear the word, and get the communion, or if he be a preacher, that he preach the same and no more, that he put his hand to a covenant. That contents these who are not true seekers of God. But the true seeker of God he learns to miss Him in the means of His service, and he thinks he has not things well at that time, when he finds not Himself; and, therefore, let us remember that praying, preaching, praising, reading, hearing, even all the means, they are as chariots and torches to carry us to God. But if so be that the Lord Himself be not sought for in the means, then we speer ⁴ not the way to Zion rightly, and there are thousands in the world who mistake this way, for they seek only Zion and the outward means; and thus they miscarry in the worship of God.

¹ Place.² Built.³ Than.⁴ Ask.

“*They shall seek the Lord their God.*” He is their God, and yet for all that they are put to seek Him. If He be their God, how is it that they want Him, or what necessity is there of seeking Him, for they have Him already, if He be theirs? Yes; He may be lost, and yet for all that be their God, because they are not in possession of Him, nor have they the sense of His presence, and that being their God is only by covenant, but He is not presently theirs in possession. Even as a man who has a number of houses, and yet he is so confined to such a house to dwell there all his lifetime for some crime committed by him. All the rest of the houses they are his in heritage. He has only lost the possession of them for a time, but he has right to them. Even so is the Kirk of God here tyning¹ access to God, and losing the comfort and joy of the Holy Ghost by sin; and yet for all that, the charter it stands still unviolated anent the decree of election, albeit for the present they dare not take possession thereof.

And this answers a case wherein many of the weak children of God are oftentimes, that they dare not apply the promise of God to themselves, or say Thomas’s word, “My Lord and my God!” and yet for all that, for the world they dare not say the contrary. This is in effect to brangle² their own right, for He is the Lord and He is the portion of His children, albeit they dare not say, “The Lord is the portion of my inheritance.” He is their rock and their strong tower, albeit they see it not; He is their Lord and their God, albeit they have not still assurance of the same.

¹ Losing.

² Shake to pieces.

“*With their faces thitherwards.*” This says that they had a mind to be there. And their asking of the way tells us that they knew not the gate¹ to it.

Here we may learn, that Christian souls and seekers of God, they will have a great desire and a great affection to be at Him, and yet, for all that, be ignorant of the means and of the way how to win to Him. And we may see that a true heart and honest intention in seeking the Lord, and weakness also, both these may stand together, as Nicodemus—he has a good mind to be at Christ, and yet, for all that, he is ignorant of the point of regeneration. And Mary Magdalene, she sought dead Jesus at the grave. That was weakness in her, and shows her affection to Him. But she should have sought living Jesus. And the apostles they dare not leave Jesus when the Capernaïtes left Him; and Peter says, in the name of the rest, “Whither shall we go if we leave Thee? for Thou hast the words of eternal life.” And yet, for all that, they were not well grounded in the art of Christ’s suffering and of Christ’s resurrection, as we may see John xx.

This tells us that many of the children of God who have their faces towards heaven, they have their own ignorance, and know not where to gang.² And this should teach all of us to put a difference between weakness and wickedness. God knows the one by the other well enough. These who have an honest purpose to be at God, and know not the way how to win to Him, He will fley³ none away from Him for that. But He is angry at wickedness, and dow⁴ not abide it. But those

¹ Way.² Go.³ Frighten.⁴ Can.

who would fain be home over at the Lord, although they be weak and know not the way well, those who waken with that thought in the morning, and fall asleep with it at night, who mind the honour and glory of God, albeit otherways there be slips and falls in the way, the Lord He will give mercy, providing there be a habitual intention to seek God. Woe is the man that has his back to heaven, and has a habitual intention to seek the world; for his disease is not weakness, but wickedness. When a man's whole practices are how to get the world, if a man only mind this, and have his back upon Zion, God will not lift such a man when he falls. But if a man have his face towards heaven, albeit his legs be so weak that they will not follow him, yet He who leads the blind by a way that they know not, that breaks not the bruised reed, nor quenches the smoking flax, who deserts not any who minds after Him in truth, He will eye such and not let them fall, but when they fall He will raise them again.

Now in their resolution there are two words to be looked to. First, they say "*Come.*" Second, the words of their resolution are set down: "*Let us join ourselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant, never to be forgotten.*" The first word, "*Come,*" is a word of many men, every one of them encouraging another. "*Come, and let us all have one purse,*" as it is in the Proverbs (i. 11, 14). Ilk¹ one puts at another and strengthens the hands of one another in the work. As we have the word, Isa. ii. 2: "*Many people and nations shall say in the last days, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to*

¹ Each.

the house of the God of Jacob," &c. Such a word as is used Cant. vi. 1 : "Whither is thy beloved gone, O thou fairest among women, that we may seek Him with thee?" There ilk¹ one of them says they will help another in seeking Him. And I am sure this is a better fellowship nor² other "Comes" that are set down in the Word of God. "Come ye," say they (Isa. lvi. 12), "I will fetch wine, and we will fill ourselves with strong drink; and to-morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant." There the drunkard encouraging the drunkard to drunkenness. And (Gen. xxxvii. 19, 20) when Joseph's brethren see him coming, they say, "Behold, this dreamer cometh. Come now therefore, let us slay him, and cast him into some pit." And every one of them gives wicked counsel to another for taking his life. Such a "Come" as that which is Isa. xli. 7 : "The carpenter encourageth the goldsmith, and he that smootheth with the hammer him that smote the anvil, and every one of them helps another to set up a golden image, and to fasten it that it should not be moved." There is over meikle of this good fellowship used in the world, and this is a woful and miserable pit to catch many souls in when ilk¹ sinner encourages another in ill. O! if the world would take notice of this, that ilk¹ one of them has their "Come" and their fellowship together this way: the drunkard and the worldling have their come. But "Come, and let us join ourselves in a perpetual covenant with the Lord." There is no blessed Brotherhood and fellowship of this kind. Where is this sort of "Come," where ilk¹ one encourages another to set God upon high?

¹ Each.² Than.

Now what is their resolution? They come not home to Zion to take the play, but when they are come home, they do it that they may be "joined in a perpetual covenant with the Lord, never to be forgotten." That is the end of all deliverances the Lord bestows upon us, that we may serve Him and be joined in a covenant with Him. That is a blessed cross that the end of it is to draw us nearer to God. "Before I was afflicted I went astray, but I have learned to keep thy statutes;" and Luke i. 74, 75: "That He would grant us, that we being redeemed from all our enemies might serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness all the days of our life." Then the end of deliverance from enemies is that we might serve the Lord in holiness and righteousness all the days of our life. And certainly such a deliverance as this is blessed, and there is no man that is lawfully delivered from a cross but he who does so.

Wherefore are afflictions called visitations. O! but that is a kindly word, and crosses are so when they are blessed of the Lord. They are visitations. And such crosses and visitations leave drinksilver¹ behind them where they come. When the Lord stells² a cannon foranent³ their pride or worldly-mindedness, &c., and then they are amoving and purposing by His grace to set against it. When the Lord does this to make them deny themselves, and become humble in their own eyes, O but that is sweet. There is a word that expresses this well—Ezek. xvi. 63: "That thou mayest be confounded and remember, and never open thy mouth any more because of thy shame, when I am

¹ A vale given to servants.

² Places.

³ Right against.

pacified towards thee." The shame of the cross and the confusion come upon them by their captivity, shall work this in them when they are reconciled to Him. And the like of this word is used Ezek. xx. 42, 43: "And ye shall know that I am the Lord, when I shall bring you into the land of Israel. And there shall ye remember your ways, and all your doings, wherein ye have been defiled. And ye shall loathe yourselves in your own sight for all your evils that ye hath committed." And therefore every man speer¹ at his own soul when he has been under any cross what good he gat of them. God brought you unto poverty, and art thou still as proud as ever thou wast? That is a stinking-tailed cross. Has the Lord delivered you from sickness and the gates of death? And art thou delivered therefra² and yet art as worldly-minded and as irreligious as ever thou wast? That is a cursed cross that is sealed with the feid³ of God. And, by the contrary, a soul that is delivered from any cross, and speaks out of the dust and is humbled thereby, that is a blessed and sanctified cross.

"And let us join ourselves in a perpetual covenant with the Lord."

This tells us that all that are joined in covenant with God He and they are made one. And if ye will look to three things ye will find it to be so.

First: A covenant is a band of friendship, and so they are made one. And certainly that is no small favour that the Potter and the clay should thus enter into covenant; for when the sinner is thus entered in a

¹ Ask.

² From.

³ Enmity.

covenant indeed with the Lord, then they get forgiveness of sins, and getting it makes the Lord and them to be of one spirit.

Second: Being in covenant with God, they have one heart, a heart like God. Ezek. xxxvi. 26: "A new heart also will I give unto you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh." The Lord is there speaking of the promises of the new covenant, and the word that is used Ezek. xi. 19 is not unlike this same: "And I will give them one heart." It is meant that He will give them a single heart. And it may have this meaning also, that they shall have one heart with the Lord. These who speak of the understanding, they say when one understands a thing, the understanding and the object are knit together; even so is it here. The Lord's spirit and the heart meet, and thus they are made one.

Lastly: They are made one with the Lord because the tenor of the covenant it runs so: "I will be your God, and ye shall be My people," and Cant. ii. 16 the spouse says, "My well-beloved is mine, and I am His." There is a mutual claim and a mutual union between two things here; for the one of them is the possession, and the other is the thing possessed even of them both.

Now the *use* of this is: To speak against many covenanters in the land who indeed are anti-covenanters. That soul who is not one with God, and he who makes not God's foes to be his foes, and His friends to be his friends, is not in covenant with Him. He who can hear His name blasphemed, and will not join with them

who serve the Lord, but is against them, that man has not truly subscribed the covenant. He has sworn away ceremonies, but he has not sworn away that ceremony of drinking healths ; and those who dare ordinarily take the name of God in their mouth, such are anti-covenanters in God's account, and He will reckon them for His foes. And therefore let every one try who has putten^r his hand to the paper, and sworn and subscribed, that he shall mend his life among other things, and yet his life is so scandalous that it gives offence to others. Remember that he is a heart opposer of the covenant, and so is an enemy to God.

Now a word of the perpetuity of the covenant : " Let us be joined in a perpetual covenant with the Lord, never to be forgotten." That is, let us be joined in a covenant that cannot be broken. Is there none of this people who are in covenant with God that can sin against the covenant? and is not a sin against the covenant a breach of it? It is one thing to sin against the covenant, and the mercy of a Mediator, and another thing to break the covenant. All the elect and all believers, they sin against the covenant, but the elect and believers break not the covenant. The breach of the covenant is only proper to godless and wicked men, who are within the compass thereof outwardly. But for these who are within the covenant, they break it not. And the reason of this is—

First : Because of the Lord's eternal election of them, and then because of that habitual grace that is in the child of God. Even as every wrong look that the spouse

^r Put.

gives breaks not the band of marriage that is between the husband and her, and puts her not away from any right to her husband's goods and to be partaker of his honour ; even so those who are within the covenant of grace, their slips and their faults break not the covenant with God, because of God's eternal election and because of the habit of grace that is in them, that are the bands of the covenant, and that which makes the believer a formal covenanter. Again—

Secondly : If we will look to both the parts of the covenant, it is eternal ; for as God is the one part of the covenant, so God-Man and Man-God is cautioner for the other part thereof. The Mediator Christ being on our side of the covenant, and cautioner for us, it is sure ; and there was no doubt of breaking the other side of the covenant. But Christ, He is on both sides of the covenant, for all the promises of the covenant they are made to Christ as He is Mediator. And in Him they are Yea and Amen, and made over to us as it is (2 Cor. i. 20). Now among all the rest of the promises of the covenant this is one, Jer. xxxii. 40 : “ And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them, to do them good ; and I will put My fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from Me.” And our Lord says, “ My sheep hear My voice and I know them, and they follow Me ; and I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand.” These promises they are not fastened upon our free-will, for that indeed is a rotten pin, but they are fastened on

¹ These.

Christ Jesus as Mediator of the covenant, and He is also the Principal in the covenant. He is cautioner, undertaking for our part, and it is He who has undertaken: "I will put My fear in their hearts, yet they shall not depart from Me." A

Third reason of the perpetuity of the covenant is because the party in covenant with God is not man and man's free-will, but man graced of God and man standing under the decree of election, and as he is a new creature in Christ and in God. If so be that free-will were our tutor, and we had our heaven in our own keeping, then we would lose all. But because we have Christ for our tutor, and He has our heaven in His hand, therefore the covenant it must be perpetual.

The *use* of this is, to show us the misery of all those who are not within this covenant, for they are in another covenant, even in a covenant which may be broken. Jer. xxxi. 31, 32; there are two covenants mentioned there; the one whereof is broken, that covenant that He made with them when He brought them out of the land of Egypt; and then there is the covenant of grace called the new covenant that cannot be broken. They that are under the first covenant they are worldly men and reprobates, and strangers from God, and what grip has such of heaven, or of salvation, or what assurance of remission of sins? There is no more, but if they can win it¹ have it. But there is no promise made for it, not from the first to the last of the Revelation.

O! but that be a miserable case, He has nothing for salvation but such a word as Israel had, and lost the

¹ Succeed in reaching to.

good of it; and Adam also. But O! how fair is the state of the children of God who have such a strong Lord to be our staff, and such a guide to lead us in the way, [and who] have him to be a Lord to work in us to will and to do of His good pleasure. If ye knew what this were, there would be more pains taen¹ to be in covenant this way.

Learn, not only to be under God as Lawgiver and supreme Judge of the world, for so are the devils and reprobates in the world, but learn to be so in covenant with God as that ye may be assured of your election and of true grace wrought in you. That is an anchor that will not break, but will carry you through in all storms, gloom² at you who will. Thou wilt be able then to ride out against all their glooming, and in the strength of the Lord thou shalt be a conqueror, and more than a conqueror through Him that has loved you. To this God, Christ's Father, and our Father, to Himself and the Holy Spirit be ascribed all glory, praise, and honour, for ever and ever. So be it.

¹ Taken.

² Frown.