

## SERMON III.

### JACOB WRESTLING WITH THE ANGEL, OBTAINS THE BLESSING.

GEN. xxxii. 26.—“ And he said, Let me go, for the day breaketh: and he said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me.”

How mean are the exploits, how contemptible are the encounters of the most celebrated heroes, whom the world admires, in comparison with the mighty achievements of faith! Natural courage and valour have gained a reputation to some, as if they only were the men, and valour had died with them. But when the sum of all is heard, it amounts to no more, but worm man striving with his fellow worm, for a thing of nought, and gaining a victory which can never be more glorious than their party and cause; the one a worm, the other a thing that is not. But behold an encounter of faith; worm Jacob wrestling with the mighty God, and that for the divine blessing; the party and the cause great, and the victory falling to the weak side. “ And he said, Let me go, for the day breaketh: and he said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me.”

Jacob's life seems to be the most remarkable of any of the patriarchs, for the vast variety of incidents that were in it: so that he spoke true, when he said unto Pharaoh, “ Few and evil have the days of the years of my life been, and have not attained unto the days of the years of the life of my fathers, in the days of their pilgrimage,” Gen. xlvii. 9. There is, in his life, the most famous instance that is any where to be found, of people meeting with a

train of the heaviest trials, when they are going in the very way that God commands them.

The Lord had said to Jacob, "Return unto the land of thy fathers, and to thy kindred ; and I will be with thee," Gen. xxi. 3. Here is both a command and a promise. But what a variety of trials did the good man meet with, while he went away, in obedience to the command, and in the faith of the promise ?

One of these many trials was, that while he was left alone, there wrestled with him a man till the breaking of the day, and disjointed his thigh ; "And he said, let me go, for the day breaketh. And he said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me."

In these words, we have the beginning of the conference betwixt the combatants. And here you have, (1.) What the man said that wrestled with Jacob, and (2.) What Jacob said in answer thereto.

*First*, We must consider what the man said who wrestled with Jacob. "Let me go, for the day breaketh." And here several things may be enquired into ; particularly, 1st, Who he was that wrestled with Jacob ? *Ans.* That it was one in the form of a man, all parties seem to agree : but then, who he was that assumed this form, there are different opinions among interpreters, both Jewish and Christian, with which I shall not take up your time. I am of opinion, that it was God that wrestled with him, having assumed the form and shape of a man for that purpose. And what satisfies me therein is, that Jacob not only solicits him for the blessing, but expressly calls him God, saying, "I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved," ver. 30. I suppose likewise, that it was the second person, God the Son, who wrestled with him in the assumed form : for the Prophet Hosea, speaking of Jacob, says, "He had power over the angel and prevailed," Hos. xii. 4. This is one of the titles of the Messiah. He is called the *messenger* of the covenant, or the *angel* of the covenant, Mal. iii. 1. The Hebrew word is the same in both places.

Besides, from what Christ himself saith, "No man hath seen God at any time," John i. 18. it seems to follow, that all the appearances of God to the Old Testament saints, in which he assumed the figure and affections of a man, were not the appearances of God the Father, whom no man hath seen at any time, but the appearances of God the Son, as a prelude or introduction to his assuming our nature in his incarnation.

In these appearances he put on our nature, as it were, to try how it would suit him, and quickly put it off again. In his incarnation he put it on, so as never to put it off any more.

*2dly*, What sort of wrestling was it? and how could worm Jacob prevail over an uncreated angel?

Some make it visional, and in a dream; others, spiritual, consisting in the vigorous efforts of faith to hang by the word of promise, which Jacob had got, together with the command to return into his own country. But that it was real, and not visional, and that it was corporeal, and not spiritual only, appears from the effects of it; for the angel touched the hollow of his thigh, and put it out of joint.

But it seems more unaccountable how Jacob had strength, so as to prevail over the angel. The created angels are said to excel in strength. One of them, we are told, smote in the camp of the Assyrians one hundred fourscore and five thousand men. What an unequal match, then, would Jacob, a single man, have been to one of the created angels! yet he prevails over the uncreated angel. This is strange! but the Prophet Hosea accounts for it, saying of Jacob, "by his strength he prevailed with God," i. e. by God's strength, which was secretly communicated to Jacob, and became his by the justest title, being freely given him by God. Jacob, in wrestling, no doubt exerted all his strength; but God, in that body which he assumed, exerted only such a degree of strength as he knew Jacob would overcome.

We may (as one \* observes) consider God here as bear-

\* Pococke's Commentary on Hosea, ch. xii. ver. 4. p. 643.

ing two persons; the one of a combatant with Jacob, and the other of an assistant to him; showing in the last greater strength than in the first; fighting, as it were, against him with his left hand, and defending him with his right, and to that putting greater force. And in the meantime, we are not so much to look on Jacob's bodily strength, as his spiritual strength of the inward man.

*3dly*, Wherefore doth the angel say, "Let me go, for the day breaketh?" If he was an uncreated angel, what force was there in this argument to tell him that the day breaketh? Surely day and night, light and darkness, all are alike unto God.

*Ans.* The Jewish doctors, who make the wrestler here a created angel, tell us, that the angels sing morning hymns before the throne of God: and therefore, when the day brake, the angel desired to be dismissed. But this is a fable. It may rather be said,

1. That the uncreated angel speaks this after the manner of men, whose shape he had assumed, as if he hasted to be gone.

2. The uncreated angel might speak this to put Jacob in mind of his affairs; that now, when the day was breaking, he should look after his wives, children and cattle, that they might not fall a prey to his enraged brother, and the four hundred men that were coming forth against him. Jacob had been absent from his family all the night, while he wrestled with the angel, and now, that day-light was coming in, it was proper for him to go and inquire into their welfare. Or,

3. He might speak thus for Jacob's own sake, that he might not be overwhelmed with his glorious appearance, by coming in of the light. There was something of terror attended all the appearances of God in a visible shape to the Old Testament saints; therefore Jacob makes a world's wonder of it that he had seen God face to face, and got away with his life. When the angel of the Lord appeared unto Manoah's wife, Manoah said unto her, "We shall surely die, because we have seen God," Judg. xiii. 32.

It was, perhaps, something of kindness to Jacob, that the angel wrestled with him in the night time, when the darkness would somewhat vail the lustre and glory of the angel's appearance, so that Jacob would be able to look upon him; and therefore, when the day breaks, the angel says, "Let me go." But,

*4thly*, He spoke this to try the faith and patience of Jacob, if he would part with him, or let him go without the blessing. Thus the Lord sometimes tries his people, by offering, as it were, to go away from them; not that he designs so to do, but that he may draw out the desires of their souls after him, and cause them cling to him with the greatest earnestness. God knew that Jacob would not let him go; but he spoke thus, that he might make Jacob's faith and patience conspicuous and famous through all ages.

*Secondly*, We come now to consider what Jacob said in answer to the angel desiring to be dismissed; "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me."

Can a man (says one) hold God when he has a mind to be gone? No; but Jacob by this time knew his party, and perceived that he tried him if he would part without a blessing. Nay, says Jacob, if thou ask my leave and consent to part so, I will never give it: Let the day break, and the next night come, the great blesser, and lame halting Jacob, shall never part, with Jacob's consent, without a blessing.

Here two things are observable, 1. What it was that Jacob wanted, viz. the blessing. And, 2. His resoluteness and peremptoriness that he would have it. "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me."

What the blessing was which he wanted, may be easily understood from the circumstances he was in at that time.

He was now greatly distressed and alarmed, upon the report of his enraged brother's coming against him with four hundred armed men, to revenge, as he thought, an old quarrel he had with him. What shall he do in these circumstances? He dares not engage his brother with a

few servants, the women and the young children, that were scarce able to flee: but if the Lord would give him his blessing he is not afraid to meet with his brother. This would make him safe and easy, and nothing but this would do it.

He wanted, at this time, to have the old blessing he had got from his father ratified and confirmed, which his brother had despised: and then he wanted a new blessing, suited to his present circumstances, viz. That the Lord would either enable him to encounter the rage of his brother, or that he would turn the heart of his brother towards him. And behold how it turns out! when the two brothers met, instead of threatenings, blood and slaughter, there is nothing but mutual embraces, caresses, and exchange of compliments.

Let the spiritual seed of Jacob wrestle with the Lord, as he did for the blessing, and they shall obtain the heritage of Jacob their father.

In discoursing farther upon these words, I will,

1. Show how God blesses his people.
2. What is implied in this holy resoluteness and peremptoriness of soul.
3. That this holy resoluteness and peremptoriness of soul, is the only way to obtain the blessing.

And lastly, Apply.

- I. It is proposed to show how the Lord blesses his people.

And here I might take notice, that there are three sorts of blessings mentioned in Scripture. 1. *Paternal blessings*. Those, among men who first took upon them to bless others, were in the relation of fathers, and those whom they blessed were their children. Thus Isaac blessed Jacob his son, Gen. xxvii. 27. And Jacob blessed both the sons of Joseph in a very solemn manner, Gen. xlviii. 15, 16. And when he was lying an old man, upon a death bed, he gathered all his sons before him, and blessed them, each according to his blessing. Now, these blessings were sometimes prophetic and extraordinary, declaring what should

be the fate of their posterity: sometimes they were common and ordinary, expressing the piety of the parents, and their good wishes for their children.

2. *Sacerdotal or ministerial blessings.* It was the office of the priests under the law, not only to offer up sacrifices for the people, but likewise to bless them in the name of the Lord; and this they did, not by a mere wishing blessings unto them, but by an office-power and authority granted them for that effect. The form of the blessing, as God delivered it to Moses, and he unto Aaron, is recorded, Numb. vi. 23, and downwards. "On this wise ye shall bless the children of Israel, saying unto them, The Lord bless thee, and keep thee. The Lord make his face to shine upon thee. The Lord lift up his countenance upon thee." This was the Old Testament blessing.

3. *Charitative blessings,* Psal. cxxix. 8. "The blessing of the Lord be upon you: we bless you in the name of the Lord." Men pronounced these blessings, neither in the relation of fathers, nor in the office of priests or prophets; but all the Jews were to bless one another in the same manner. And after this manner should Christians bless one another. They should wish and pray each for the good of another. "Bless them which persecute you, bless and curse not," Rom. xii. 14. Howbeit, this gives no countenance to the common, careless way of saying to your neighbour or friend, "God bless you, God be with you." This is often in the mouths of those who have no regard either for God or his blessing. But tender and serious persons, who know the weight of the curse, and the worth of the blessing, will endeavour to be religiously disposed in asking the blessing, either for themselves or others.

Thus you see how men bless, even good men; but the good God blesses after another way and manner.

1. God blesses *in his own name.* The patriarchs blessed their children, the priests the congregation, and the people one another, not in their own names, but in the name and by the authority of another, viz. the great God. But God blesses in his own name, and by his own underived au-

thority. Thus we find both the oath and the blessing joined in the promise made to Abraham, Gen. xxii. 17. "In blessing I will bless thee." Here God speaks like himself, and as never man spoke. Men bless others in the second person, as, "Blessed be thou of the Lord:" or in the third person, "The Lord bless thee and keep thee;" but God blesses in the first person, saying, "I will bless thee."

2. God blesses *efficiently*. Those whom he blesses are blessed indeed; he actually makes them blessed. Men may bless ministerially; people may wish and pray for a blessing upon another; but it is the prerogative royal of the ever blessed God to command the blessing, as the Holy Ghost very emphatically expresses it, Lev. xxv. 21. Hence we learn, what a silly and empty compliment it was which Balak gave Balaam when he would have him to curse Israel, "I wot," says he, "that he whom thou blessest is blessed," Numb. xxii. 6. The profane prince had great expectations from the profane prophet; but they were vain and ridiculous: for those whom God blesses shall be blessed; and if man should curse them, our God can turn their curse into a blessing, Neh. xiii. 2.

3. God blesses *spiritually*. So speaks the Apostle, Eph. i. 3, "who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings." Nay, he communicates himself, and makes over himself unto his people. And he is the great spiritual and eternal good, Jehovah all-sufficient. He gives them his Christ, whom he promised to the church of old, as the greatest blessing; and in him they have wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption; so that they are complete in him. He gives them his Spirit to abide in them and with them for ever, as their counsellor, their remembrancer, their guide, and comforter in every event; and, together with him, they have all his graces, his faith, his love, his peace, and his joy; and at last they get the eternal inheritance, the crown of glory.

But who can reckon them up? who can make a full inventory of all the spiritual blessings conferred upon the



people of God? We may as soon count the stars in the heavens, or the sand on the sea shore.

4. God blesses *universally*. Not that he blesses every individual; for shoals of the sons of men lie under the curse. But whomsoever he blesses, they abound with blessings. As the curse is manifold, so is the blessing; and for every curse that is upon the wicked, there is a double blessing upon the righteous, as we see in Deut. xxviii. 3, 4, 5, 6. compared with 16, 17, 18, 19.

He blesses their persons. Blessings are upon the head of the just, says Solomon, Prov. x. 6. Blessings and curses are said, in Scripture, to fall on men's heads, *i. e.* on their persons, the head being put figuratively for the whole man. Now God blesses their persons, by putting them into a blessed state, reconciling them to himself, and renewing them after his image.

He blesses their sacrifices, prayers, and praises, by delighting in them, accepting of them, and sending them an answer of peace, Prov. xv. 8.

He blesses their substance, Deut. xxviii. 3. and downwards. Oftentimes it is very small: but a little that a righteous man hath, is better than the riches of many wicked, Psal. xxxvii. 16. And this was said by one who had not the temptation to despise riches because he wanted them, for he was a king. And oh, my brethren, how wonderful is the effect of this blessing! it multiplies the righteous man's little like the widow's oil, whilst the curse consumes and wastes the revenues of the wicked like a moth, and melts them down like snow before the sun.

The righteous man, having a divine blessing upon his small pittance, has peace and contentment in his own mind, and sometimes can do much good to others by it; while the wicked man, with all his riches, is obliged to borrow, and what is worse, cannot pay again. It is an observation of the wise man, "There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth; and there is that withholdeth, and yet it tendeth to poverty."

He blesses their seed, Psal. xxxvii. 26. Isa. xlv. 3. As

it goes ill with them that are left in the tabernacle of the wicked, so it goes well with them that are left in the tabernacle of the righteous.

God remembers his covenant with their fathers; so that the seed of the godly have this argument, among others, to urge for the blessing, that the Lord blessed their fathers.

He blesses their habitation, Prov. iii. 33. Houses are blessed, not according to their goodness or badness, but according to the state of the inhabitants before the Lord. The curse of the Lord enters into the most stately dwellings of the wicked; but his blessing rests in the meanest cottage of the righteous. He blesses the house for the sake of the inhabitants, and he blesses the inhabitants for the sake of Christ.

He blesses all the ordinances of the gospel to them, the word, sacraments and prayer. He teacheth them to profit, and to sow beside all waters; so that like the bee, they suck honey out of every flower, while the wicked, like the wasp, suck poison out of every thing, Tit. i. 15.

He blesses all providences to them, whether prosperous or adverse, Rom. viii. 28. "All things work together for their good."

5. God blesses *eternally* and *unchangeably*. His blessing is like his calling, without repentance, Rom. xi. 29. As Isaac would not reverse the blessing of Jacob, for all the cries, and tears, and entreaties of Esau, so neither will God reverse the blessing of the righteous. Though Satan, the accuser of the brethren, bring against them many accusations, though their own consciences condemn them, though they fall into many transgressions which might justly forfeit the blessing, yet their God changeth not; he saith of them, as Isaac of Jacob, "I have blessed them, yea, and they shall be blessed;" blessed here, blessed hereafter, and blessed through all the days of eternity.

*Lastly*, God blesses *in Christ*. So speaks Paul, Eph. i. 3. God blesses his people, first, as the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and then, as the Father in and through him. As Jacob obtained the blessing in his brother's

garments, so we must be clothed with the righteousness of Christ, which is the fine linen of the saints, and the garment of our elder brother, in order to obtain the blessing of our heavenly Father.

II. I shall now show what is implied in this holy resoluteness and peremptoriness of soul; "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me." As if he had said, I am peremptorily and firmly resolved not to part with thee, except thou bless me.

1. It speaks felt need of the blessing. It was this that made the prodigal first think of returning to his father's house, Luke xv. 17. "And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's house have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger; I will arise and go to my father." My brethren, what is the reason that the multitude lying under the curse, instead of holding God for the blessing, as Jacob did, will not so much as come near him for it? how is it, that, instead of saying unto God with the holy patriarch, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me," they say unto him, with those in Job xxi. 14. "Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways?" what is the reason hereof? It is plainly this; they have never to this day been duly sensible, what a weighty, wasting and consuming thing the curse is, under which they lie, therefore they find no need of the blessing.

The everlasting curse of the Lord, or his everlasting blessing, shall be the portion of every soul among us. There is no middle, no third thing to cast the balance one of the ways, but one of the two must inevitably be our portion; and what an amazing difference is there betwixt the two? The one is all happiness, the other all misery; the one is heaven in all its glory, the other is hell and all its horror. And yet the multitude of mankind live, as if they were quite indifferent which of the two fell to their share in the end. But when the Spirit of the Lord touches the sinner's heart in a powerful manner, as he did the prodigal and the jailer, then the man is convinced that the blessing is

indispensably necessary, and that he cannot be happy without it. Hence follow,

2. Vigorous desires and outgoings of the whole soul after the blessing, and the author of it. Formerly the desires of the soul were like so many streams in rivulets, one running this way, and another running that way; but now they are like one great river running with a continued course unto the ocean; all the scattered desires, affections and appetites, are contracted into, and united in this one point, even the blessing of the covenant, purchased by the Redeemer's blood, which only maketh rich, and addeth no sorrow.

In this case, the soul thinks within itself, and says to itself, "O how happy would I be with this blessing! Would God command his favour and loving-kindness to rest and remain with me, I should be little solicitous about any thing else; I should have an abundant balance and compensation for all the crosses, losses and disappointments I might meet with in an evil world: for his loving-kindness is better than life, and all the comforts and enjoyments of it. Let the carnal noisy world be sending up that unhallowed cry to heaven, 'Who will shew us any good?' It is, and ever shall be the desire of my soul, that the Lord would bless me indeed, and lift up his countenance upon me, and I shall have a far more solid joy and gladness than the men of the world have in the midst of their abundance," Psal. iv. 6, 7.

3. Frequent and fervent addresses to the throne of grace for the blessing. In this way Jacob obtained it: he wept and made supplication to the angel, and so prevailed, as the prophet informs us, Hos. xi. 4. From this patriarch's story, it appears, that he was a man abundantly brave and courageous; and it is no impeachment of it, that he burst into tears when he was supplicating the blessing. This showed the tenderness and piety of his soul; all which are very consistent with true honour and bravery. Who doubts of David's bravery? Yet, when wrestling with God for his blessing, he could weep so plentifully, as to

water his couch, and make his bed to swim. But why do I speak of men; did not the Lion of the tribe of Judah, in the days of his flesh, offer up prayers and supplications, with strong crying and tears, Heb. v. 7.

When the Spirit of grace and supplication is poured out upon a person or people, they are enabled, with holy Hannah, to pour out their soul before the Lord. The Spirit (as Paul says) maketh intercession for them with groanings that cannot be uttered, Rom. viii. 26. Not that the Holy Spirit groans, but he makes the saints to emit such groans and sighs, as the Lord very well understands, though they be not able to speak or utter the case in words before him. At other times, he allows them great freedom and liberty of speech in pleading for the blessing. He fills their mouths with arguments, and such arguments as no natural invention or gift could suggest. It would quite surprise any body that is unacquainted with the spirit of prayer, to hear what powerful rhetoric will flow from those who have otherwise very mean talents, when they are helped with the Spirit to wrestle in prayer for the blessing.

They will plead upon his name as Joshua did; "What wilt thou do unto thy great name?" They will plead upon his word; "Remember the word unto thy servant, upon which thou hast caused me to hope," Psal. cxix. 49. They will bring in all his attributes; "Is his mercy clean gone for ever?" Upon his faithfulness; "Doth his promise fail for evermore?" Psal. lxxvii. 8. They will plead upon his relations; "Is he a father, and will he suffer his children to starve?" or when they ask bread, will he give them a stone? is he a husband, and will he be regardless of his spouse?

Moses was such a powerful pleader with God for others, as well as himself, that the Lord speaks as if his hands were holden by him; "Let me alone," says God, "that my wrath may wax hot against this people."

4. A close and resolute holding by the word of promise, like holy Job, who says, "Though he should slay me, yet will I trust in him," Job xiii. 15. We speak of holding a

man by his word; and indeed, if he is an upright and honest man, it is the strongest hold you can have of him, and the best security. Now, God is faithful who hath promised; he is not a man, that he should lie, nor the son of man, that he should repent. There is not a man upon earth, nor a devil in hell, that shall ever be able to say, "Here is a word of God that he never made good." Which of you convinceth him of unfaithfulness to his promise. Since, then, he has promised the blessing, and exhibited it to you in the gospel, let faith grip resolutely to the promise; and in so doing, you will get hold of the great Promiser, who will not refuse to be held by his own promise till he make it good.

5. The diligent use of all means which God has appointed for obtaining the blessing. Jacob wrestles for the blessing; he prays for it; he weeps for it; and at length he obtains it. The spouse, Cant. iii. 1. sought Christ by night on her bed, and found him not. But did she desist, as if better could not be made of it? By no means: she says, "I will rise now, and go about the city in the streets, and in the broad ways; I will seek him whom my soul loveth:" and at last she found him.

They that seek the blessing must not lie down or sit still, waiting till it should fall into their lap; but they must up and be doing. They must address God through Christ, by the Spirit; "For the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." They must peruse the word of God, the blessed Bible, the great charter of their salvation sealed by the blood of their Saviour. They must wait on the preaching of the word, and the dispensing of the sacraments, particularly the sacrament of the supper, forasmuch as the Lord hath frequently made himself known to his people in the breaking of bread.

*Lastly*, Repeated disappointments and discouragements must not cause them to give over, but they must peremptorily and resolutely hang on about the Lord's hand, until they obtain the blessing. Jacob, in wrestling with the angel, gets the hollow of his thigh put out of joint, so

that he went halting. And now, we would think Jacob had got enough of it; he had wrestled his bones out of joint, and it is high time to yield to his antagonist. But it is quite otherwise; this discouraging event quickened the desires of the holy man for the blessing instead of blunting them; and therefore he stiffly holds his party, and tells him peremptorily, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me."

The spouse sought Christ upon her bed; but she does not find him there. Then she goes about the city in the streets, and in the broad ways; but cannot find him there neither. Then she goes to the watchmen, and says, "Saw ye him whom my soul loveth?" They, it seems, could not satisfy her neither. But she still goes on in spite of all these disappointments. And behold, the unwearied diligence, and courage of faith prevails at last. "She found him, and would not let him go."

How many repulses and discouragements did the woman of Canaan meet with in seeking the blessing; but she continued her importunity, and prevailed at last. When the messenger of Satan was sent to buffet Paul, Paul tells us, that for this thing he besought the Lord thrice. Perhaps the first and second time he besought the Lord, the Lord gave him no answer. But he continued his addresses, and at length this encouraging sentence came forth from the divine presence, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my strength is made perfect in your weakness."

III. I proceed, in the third place, to show, that this holy resoluteness and peremptoriness of soul is the only way to obtain the blessing.

1. It is the footsteps of the flock. We have several precedents and examples of this in scripture. That in the text is one; the spouse, Cant. iii. 1. is another. But the most famous example hereof, perhaps in the whole Bible, is the woman of Canaan, Mat. xv. She comes to Christ, and cries, "O Lord, thou Son of David, have mercy on me, for my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil." But she meets with great discouragement; Christ takes no

notice of her; "he answered not a word." Then it seems she addressed his disciples, and she meets with a second repulse; for they besought their Master, "saying, send her away, for she crieth after us." This is a clamorous and noisy woman, pray dismiss her, set her off. But she still insists, and Christ speaks; but behold the speech is more discouraging than his former silence; for he seems to cast her out of his commission, by telling her, that "he was not sent but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel;" whereas she was of the accursed race of the Canaanites. But she is resolved not to quit it so yet. The devil was in her house, the devil was in her daughter, and she cannot think to go back and fight with him again: therefore she comes and worships him, saying, "Lord, help me." And behold she meets with a fourth repulse; for he calls her by the reproachful name of a dog. "It is not meet to take the children's bread and cast it to dogs. Truth, Lord," (says she) "but the dogs eat of the crumbs that fall from their master's table." Naaman the Syrian was such a dog as I, yet he obtained the blessing; Rahab the harlot was such a dog as I, yet she obtained the blessing; and why may not I obtain it also. Our Lord carries the trial no further, but grants her request; professing his admiration of her faith; ".O woman, great is thy faith."

2. For confirmation hereof, we may consider the overflowing goodness and benignity of the divine nature, Luke xviii. 7, 8. "And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them. I tell you he will avenge them speedily."

If it be natural for parents to love their children, and to assist them to the utmost of their power, how much more will our heavenly father hear the cries of his children, and give them what they ask? To this purpose our Lord says, "If ye then being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?" Luke xi. 13. Now, the comparison here is not betwixt the gifts which earthly parents give their children, and those which our



heavenly Father gives unto his children; but the comparison is instituted betwixt the kindness and good will of the givers towards their respective children. All that love and affection which is naturally in parents towards their children, is implanted in them by God; and therefore it must be in a far more eminent manner in God towards those that are his children. "He that planted the ear, shall he not hear? he that formed the eye, shall he not see?" He that put all the affection and love in fathers towards their children, shall he not love his children? In fine, what Christ intends is plainly this, that the most tender and affectionate parents on earth, never gave any thing to their dearest children with so much heart, love and kindness, as God gives the blessing, even life for evermore, to his children.

3. The Lord allows his people to use this holy importunity and resoluteness with him for the blessing; and therefore, that method shall certainly prevail.

This appears in the parable of him who came at midnight to borrow three loaves from his friend, for the use of a friend that came to visit him, Luke ix. 8. "I say unto you, though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity, he will rise and give him as many as he needeth."

The design of this parable is, plainly, to encourage Christians, in a holy importunity and resoluteness in asking and hanging about a throne of grace. So our Lord applies it: "And I say unto you, ask and it shall be given you: seek and ye shall find: knock and it shall be opened. For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened." Observe the gradation here. First, ask, and if that does not succeed, seek, which implies more pains and diligence. And if you cannot prevail by seeking, then knock, which implies still greater vigour and resoluteness.

From the parable itself, we may observe, to our present purpose, 1. That God's people may come to him at any time, though it were at midnight. 2. That he allows them

to ask very largely, three loaves, when perhaps fewer might have served. 3. That they may borrow of him without speaking a word of paying again. 4. Faith is not ashamed to tell the soul's straitened condition to the Lord. I have nothing to set before him.

USE. Let me exhort you to imitate the famous example in the text. Be earnest and importunate for the blessing; go to the Angel of the covenant for it, and put on a holy peremptoriness not to go without it.

1. Without the blessing you lie under the curse, which is a wasting, weakening, and consuming thing. "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things written in the book of the law to do them," Gal. iii. 20. Your persons are cursed. The soul, with all its powers and faculties, and the body, with all its members, lie under the dead weight of this curse, and how can they prosper. It is impossible for the soul to prosper in that case: and if the body be in health, it is but as the ox, fed for the slaughter. Your substance is cursed; there is a curse on all you possess and enjoy. Your ploughing, sowing, reaping, &c. are cursed. Your table is cursed; the meat and drink you take are cursed for your sakes. All your duties are cursed; your praying, reading, &c. are all put in the roll of sins. Oh, then, be convinced of the necessity of the New Covenant blessing to remove the curse, and to entitle you to eternal life.

2. Consider the extent of the blessing. It will reach to your persons, your souls, and your bodies; to your substance, your seed; to your sacred services, and to every thing of yours. Surely, then, blessed is the person, and blessed are the people whom God blesseth. What was very profanely said by Balak to Balaam, may be very justly and very devoutly said unto God, namely, "I wot that he whom thou blessest is blessed, and he whom thou cursest is cursed," Num. xxii. 6.

3. God is willing to bless you all in Christ Jesus. "Unto you first, God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you

from his iniquities," Acts iii. 26. The blessing is purchased at the expense of Christ's blood; ye cannot buy it, but ye may beg it earnestly, and receive it humbly, by the hand of faith. Know then, that this day, the blessing and the curse, life and death, are set before you.

And now, as for those that are the spiritual seed of Jacob, believers in Christ, I would have you to seek more of his spirit and temper, and you shall be fed with the heritage of Jacob your father, as the prophet speaks, Isa. lviii. 14.

When you have any particular suit at a throne of grace, any special blessing in view, do not limit the Lord to your times and seasons; neither faint and give over; but wrestle with him, and wait on him continually, and you shall obtain it. For this purpose consider,

1. How the great ones of the world expect to be waited on by those, who have any request to ask of them.

2. He is a God of judgment, and knows the times and the seasons both for giving and withholding.

2. Blessings long waited for and expected, have so much the greater sweetness about them, when at last we obtain them.