

Fourthly, and lastly, If it were the very design and intention of God in not sparing his own Son, to open thereby a door for all mercies to be let in upon us, then it is not imaginable he should withhold them: he will not lose his design, nor lay so many stripes upon Christ in vain: some shall surely have the benefit of it, and none so capable as believers.

When God spared not his own Son, this was the design of it; and could you know the thoughts of his heart, they would appear to be such as these:

I will now manifest the fierceness of my heart to Christ, and the fulness of my love to believers. The pain shall be his, that the ease and rest may be theirs; the stripes his, and the healing balm issuing from them, theirs; the condemnation his, and the justification theirs; the reproach and shame his, and the honour and glory theirs; the curse his, and the blessing theirs; the death his, and the life theirs; the vinegar and gall his, the sweet of it theirs. He shall groan, and they shall triumph; he shall mourn, that they may rejoice; his heart shall be heavy for a time, that theirs may be light and glad for ever; he shall be forsaken, that they may never be forsaken; out of the worst of miseries to him, shall spring the sweetest of mercies to them. O grace! grace beyond conception of the largest mind, the expression of the tongues of angels!

THE SEVENTH
MEDITATION,

UPON MARK ix. 24.

And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief.

THE occasion of these words is to be gathered from the context: and briefly it was this: A tender father brings a possessed child to Christ to be cured; with *Si potes?* a doubting question, "If thou canst do any thing? have compassion upon us, and help us:" Words importing much natural affection and tender love to his child; "Have compassion [upon us,] and [help us.]" If the child be sick, the parent is not well; what touches the child, is felt by his father.

And as they import his natural affection to his child, so also his own spiritual disease, or the weakness of his faith. His child was

possessed with a dumb devil, and himself with unbelieving doubts and suspicions of Christ's ability to cure his child. The child had a sick body, and the father an infirm soul: Satan afflicted one by a possession, and the other by temptation, ver. 22.

Christ returns his doubtful language upon himself, ver. 23. "If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth:" q. d. Dost thou doubt of my ability to heal thy child? Question rather thy own ability to believe, for his cure. If he be not healed, the cause will not be in my inability, but in thine own infidelity: Which he speaks not, to insinuate that faith was in his own power, but to convince him of his weakness, and drive him to God for assistance: Which effect it obtained: for immediately he cried out, and said with tears, "Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief."

O how good it is for men to be brought into the straits of affliction sometimes! Had not this man fallen into this distress, it is not like that he had (at least not so soon) arrived either to the sense of his grace, or the weakness of it.

In the words we may note these three parts.

First, A profession of his faith; *Lord, I believe.*

Secondly, A sense of the weakness of his faith; *Help thou mine unbelief.*

Thirdly, The affection with which both were uttered; *He cried out and said with tears.* If these tears proceeded from the sense and feeling of divine power, enabling him to believe, as some think, then they were tears of joy, and would inform us of this great truth:

Doct. 1. *That the least and lowest measure of true faith, is matter of joy unspeakable to the possessor of it.*

If they proceeded from the sense of the weakness of his faith, they gave us this note:

Doct. 2. *That the remainders of unbelief in the people of God, do cost them many tears: They are the burdens and sorrows of gracious souls.*

Doct. 1. *That the least and lowest measure of true faith, is matter of joy unspeakable to the possessor of it.*

The apostle, in 2 Pet. i. 1. calls it *precious faith*; and it well deserves that epithet; for the least and lowest degree of saving faith, is of invaluable excellency; as will appear in these particulars:

First, The least degree of saving faith, truly unites the soul to Jesus Christ, and makes it as really a branch and member of him, as Moses, Abraham, or Paul were.

All saving faith receives Christ, John i. 12. Indeed, the strong believer receives him with a stronger and steadier hand than the weak one doth, who staggers, doubts, and trembles, but yet receives him; and consequently is as much interested in the blessed privileges flowing from union, as the greatest believer in the world. Such is Christ's complacency in our persons and duties, his sympathy with us in our troubles and afflictions, and our interest in his person and purchase. And is not this matter of exceeding joy? Is it not enough to melt,

yea, overwhelm the heart of a poor sinner, to discover and feel that in his own heart, which entitles him to such mercies?

Secondly, From the least degree of saving faith, we may infer as plenary a remission of sin, as from the strongest. The weakest believer is as completely pardoned, as the strongest; Acts x. 43. 'By him all that believe are justified from all things.' *All that believe*, without difference of sizes, strength, or degrees; the least as well as the greatest; the believer of a day old, as well as the fathers and worthies of greatest name, and longest standing.

Lo then, the least measure of faith entitles thee as really to the greatest blessing, as the highest acts of faith can do. It is true, the stronger the acting of faith is, the clearer the evidence usually is: but interest in the privilege is the same in both. If then thou canst discern but the weakest act and smallest measure of faith in thy soul, hast thou not reason, with him in the text, to cry out, and say with tears, *Lord, I believe?* Canst thou receive and read this pardon, the pardon of such, and so many sins, and not wet it with thy tears? O, it is matter of joy unspeakable!

Thirdly, The least degree of saving faith infers thy election of God; and if that be not matter of melting and transporting consideration, nothing is. O, it is matter of more joy, that our names *are written in the book of life*, than that the devils are subject to us, Luke x. 20. From hence it may be inferred, that we are chosen of God; Acts xiii. 48. 'As many as were ordained to eternal life, believed.'

Fourthly, The least measure of saving faith, is a mercy greater than most men ever partake of.

It is true, God is rich and bountiful in the gifts of providence to others; they have the good things of this life, many of them more than their hearts can wish, Psal. lxxiii. 7. He enricheth many of them also with endowments of the mind, natural and moral knowledge and wisdom; yea, and adorns them with homilical virtues, that render them very desirable and lovely in their converses with men; but there are but few to whom he gives saving faith, Isa. liii. 1. Believers are but a small remnant among men.

Fifthly, and *lastly*, He that hath any, the least degree of saving faith, hath that which will never be taken from him: All other excellencies go away at death, Job iv. 21. but this is a spring that never fails, 'it springs up into everlasting life,' John iv. 14. A man may outlive his friends and familiars, his estate and health, his gifts and natural parts, but not his faith. How great matter of joy and comfort is wrapt up in the least degree of faith!

Use 1. Of trial.

It concerns us then to examine ourselves, whether our faith be true, be it more or less, stronger or weaker; and, until we discern its truth, it will yield but little comfort.

I confess, weak believers are under great disadvantages as to comfort; small and weak things being usually very inevident and undiscernible. But yet, in this example before us, we find weak faith was made evident, though much unbelief was mixed with it. *Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief.* In which words, many very useful signs of true, though weak, faith did appear; and they are very relieving to weak believers, to consider them. O that we might find the like in us!

First, His faith gave him a tender, melting heart. *He cried out, and said with tears.* Doth your faith melt your hearts, either in a sense of your own vileness, or the riches of free grace to such vile creatures?

Secondly, His faith gave him a deep sense of his remaining unbelief, and burdened his heart with it: *Help my unbelief.* And sure so will yours, if it be but as a grain of mustard-seed in you.

Thirdly, His weak faith carried him to Christ, in fervent prayers and cries, for his help to subdue unbelief in him; and so will yours, if your faith be right. O how often do the people of God go to the throne of grace upon that errand! Help, Lord, my heart is dead, vain, and very unbelieving; there is no dealing with it in my own strength: Father, help me!

Fourthly, His weak faith made him hunger and thirst after greater measures of it: *Help my unbelief;* i. e. Lord, cure it, that I may believe with more strong and steady acts of faith; that I may not question thy power any more, or say, *If thou canst do any thing?* Why thus it will be with you, if you be true believers; Luke xvii. 5. 'Lord, (said the disciples) increase our faith.'

Fifthly, There was a conflict in his soul betwixt faith and infidelity, grace and corruption; and this is very sensible to him; faith inclining him one way, and unbelief carrying him another: And hence he speaks like a man greatly distressed, betwixt the working of contrary principles in his own soul (and so you will also find it in yourselves) Gal. v. 17. 'The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.'

Use 2. Of consolation.

Well then, bless the Lord for the least degree of saving faith; and be not so discouraged at its imperfections, as to overlook and slight the smallest working of faith in your souls. This poor man was deeply sensible of his unbelief, and yet at the same instant truly thankful for a small measure of faith; and so should you, For,

First, the least measure of saving faith, is more than all the creatures power could produce: It is the *faith of the operation of God*, Col. ii. 12. It is *the work of God, that ye believe*, John vi. 29. Yea, it is the *exceeding greatness of his power*, Eph. i. 19, 20. No ministers of Christ, how excellent soever their gifts are, no duties or ordinances, no la-

bour or diligence of your own, without this mighty power of God, can ever bring you to faith.

Secondly, It is the just matter of wonder and astonishment, that ever one spark of faith was kindled in such an heart as thine is; an heart which had no predisposition or inclination in the least to believe: Yea, it was not *Rasa Tabula*, like clean paper, void of any impression of faith, but filled with contrary impressions to it; so that it is marvellous that ever your hearts received the stamp or impression of faith on them.

It was wonderful, that fire should fall from heaven and burn upon the altar, when Elijah had laid the wood in order upon it; but much more when he poured so much water upon it, as not only wet all the wood, but filled the trenches, 1 Kings xviii. 33. Just so was the case of thy soul, reader, when God came to kindle faith there: Thy heart was dark and ignorant, neither acquainted with God, or thy own condition; yea, thy heart was a proud heart, full of self-righteousness, and self-conceitedness, Rev. iii. 17. Rom. x. 3. A heart, that would rather venture eternal damnation, than deny self, and submit to Christ: And yet the light of the Lord must shine into this darkness, and the pride and stiffness of thy heart must be broken, and brought to yield, or there is no believing.

Beside, How many and mighty enemies did oppose the work of faith in thy soul? Among which Satan and thy own carnal reasonings were the principal, 2 Cor. x. 4. By them, what strong-holds and fortifications were raised, to secure thee from the strokes of conviction that make way for faith. Let but the state of thine own heart, as it was by nature, be considered, and thou wilt say, it was the wonderful work of God, that ever thou wast brought in any degree to believe.

Thirdly, Though thy faith be weak, yet it is growing, if it be saving faith. The largest tree was once but a kernel, or acorn; the most famous believer, at first but a weak and doubting one: Be not discouraged therefore, God will fulfil all the good pleasure of his goodness in you, and the work of faith with power. It were certainly much better for you to be blessing God for a little faith, praying for the increase of faith, and diligently attending those means by which it may be improved and made flourishing in your souls, than, by a sinful, ungrateful, and prejudicial despondency, at once to dishonour God, and thus wrong yourselves.

Doct. 2. *That the remains of unbelief in gracious hearts do cost them many tears and sorrows.*

There are many things that afflict and grieve the people of God from without; but all their outward troubles are nothing to these troubles that come from within.

There are many inward troubles that make them groan, but none more than this, the unbelief they find in their own hearts. This sin justly costs them more trouble than other sins, because it is the root

from which other sins do spring; a root of bitterness, bearing worm-wood and gall, to the imbittering of their souls. For,

First, The remains of unbelief in the saints, greatly dishonour God; and what is a great dishonour to God, cannot but be a great grief and burden to them: For look, as faith gives God special honour above all other graces, so unbelief, in a special manner, both wrongs and grieves him above all other sins. Unbelief in dominion makes God a liar, 1 John v. 10. And even the relicts thereof in believers, do shake their assent to his truths and promises, and nourish a vile suspicion of them in the heart. And how do those base jealousies reflect upon his honour? Certainly it cannot but be a grief to a gracious heart to see God dishonoured by others. Psal. cxix. 36. and a much greater to dishonour him ourselves. *Hic illac lachrymæ*: Upon this ground, we may justly cry out, and say with tears, *Lord, help our unbelief!*

Secondly, The remains of unbelief in the saints, doth not only dishonour God, but deface and spoil their best duties, in which they at any time approach unto God. Is the face of God clouded from us in prayer, hearing or receiving? Examine the cause and reason, and you will find that cloud raised from your own unbelieving hearts. Are your affections cold, flat, and dead in duty? Dig but to the root, and you will find this sin to lie there. If the word do not work upon you as you desire and pray it might, it is because it is not mingled with faith, Heb. iv. 2. No duties, nor ordinances, no promises, can give down their sweet influences upon your souls, because of this sin. Now communion with the Lord in duties is the life of our life: These things are dearer to the saints, than their eyes. Justly therefore do they bewail and mourn over that sin, which obstructs and intercepts their sweetest enjoyments in this world.

Thirdly, The remains of unbelief give advantage and success to Satan's temptations upon us. Doth he at any time affright and scare us from our duty, or draw and entice us to the commission of sin, or darken and cloud our condition, and fill us with inward fears and horror, without cause? All this he doth, by the meditation of our unbelief. The apostle, in Eph. vi. 16. calls faith the soul's shield against temptation: And 1 John v. 4. it is called *the victory by which we overcome*; i. e. the sword, or weapon, by which we achieve our victories. And if so, then unbelief disarms us both of sword and shield, and leaves us naked of defence in the day of battle, a prey to the next temptation that befalls us.

Fourthly, The remains of unbelief hinder the thriving of all graces; it is a worm at their root: a plant of such malignant quality, that nothing which is spiritual can thrive under the droppings and shadow of it. It is said, Heb. iv. 2. that the gospel was preached to the Israelites, but it did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it. No ordinances, nor duties, be they never so excellent, will make that soul to thrive, where unbelief prevails: You pray, you hear, you fast, you meditate; and yet you do not thrive; your spi-

ritual food doth no good: You come from ordinances as dead, careless, and vain, as you went to them. And why is it thus, but because of remaining unbelief?

Use I. Let all the people of God bewail and tenderly mourn over the remainders of infidelity in their own hearts: There, there is the root of the disease. And surely, reader, thy heart is not free of such symptoms of it, as appear in other men's hearts. For do but consider,

Symp. 1. What is our impatience to wait for mercy, and despondency of spirit, if deliverance come not quickly in the outward, or inward straits of soul or body, but a plain symptom of unbelief in our hearts? "He that believes, will not make haste," Isa. xxviii. 16. He that can believe, can also wait God's time, Psalm xxvii. 14.

Symp. 2. And what means our readiness to use sinful mediums, to prevent, or extricate ourselves out of trouble, but a great deal of infidelity, lurking still in our hearts? Might but faith be heard to speak, it would say in thy heart, let me rather die ten deaths, than commit one sin. It is sweeter and easier, to die in my integrity, than to live with a defiled, or wounded conscience. It is nothing but our unbelief, that makes us so ready to put forth our hands to iniquity, when the rod of the wicked rests long upon us, or any imminent danger threatens us, Psalm cxxv. 3.

Symp. 3. Doth not the unbelief of your hearts shew itself in your deeper thoughtfulness, and great anxieties about earthly things; Mat. vi. 30. We pretend, we have trusted God with our souls to all eternity, and yet cannot trust him for our daily bread. We bring the evils of to-morrow upon us to-day; and all because we cannot believe more.

O reader! how much better were it to hear such questions as these from thee. How shall I get an heart suitable to the mercies I do enjoy? How shall I duly improve them for God? "What shall I render to the Lord, for all his goodness?" This would better become thee, than to afflict thyself with, "What shall I eat? What shall I drink? Or wherewithal shall I be clothed?"

Symp. 4. What doth the slavish fear of death speak, but remains of unbelief still in our hearts? Are there not many faintings, tremblings, despondencies of mind, under the thoughts of death? Oh! if faith were high, thy spirit could not be so low, 2 Cor. v. 1, 2, 3. The more bondage of fear, the more infidelity.

Symp. 5. To conclude; What is the voice of all those distractions of thy heart in religious duties, but want of faith, weakness in faith, and the actual prevalence of unbelief? You come to God in prayer; and there a thousand vanities beset you: Your heart is carried away: it roves, it wanders to the ends of the earth. Conscience smites for this, and saith, Thou dost but mock God: thy soul will smart for this: Thou feelest neither strength nor sweetness arising out of such duties. You enquire for remedies, and fill the ears of friends with your com-

plaints; and, it may be, see not the root of all this to be in your own unbelief. But there it is; and till that be cured, it will not be better with you.

Use II. Yet let not poor Christians so mourn, as those that have no hope, or ground of comfort, even in this case. For,

First, Though there be remains of unbelief in you, yet you have infinite cause to bless God that they are but remains. You once were in unbelief; 1 Tim. i. 13. i. e. under the full power and dominion of it. Had God cut you off in that state, you must certainly have perished. This is the disease, but that was the death of your souls.

Secondly, Though unbelief be in you, yet it is not in you *per modum quietis*, by way of rest, as it is in all unbelievers: but by way of daily conflict, and as a burden too heavy to be borne. Now though the sin be sad, yet the sorrow for it is sweet; and your conflicts with it bring you under a very comfortable sign of grace, Rom. vii. 12.

Thirdly, This is a disease, under which all Christians do labour more or less. There is not a heart so holy in all the world, but is in some degree tainted and infected with this disease. And this hath been evident, not only in all Christians, of all sizes, but in all the acts of their faith. Job's faith triumphed in chap. xiii. 15. yet had its eclipse and fainting-fit in chap. xix. 20. Abraham was a most renowned believer, a great pattern and example of faith: O how high a pitch did his faith amount to in Gen. xxii. 3. And yet there was a time when it fainted, and failed him, as at Gerar, Gen. xx. 2, 10, 11. David in Psal. xxvii. 1, 23. was not like David in 1 Sam. xxvii. 1. The faith of Peter shone out like the sun, in a glorious confession, Matth. xvi. 16. and yet was not only beclouded, but seemed to be gone down, and quite set, in Matth. xxvi. 69. though it afterwards recovered itself.

Fourthly, It is not this, or that degree of unbelief, that damns a man, but the power and dominion of it, that damns him. Indeed, your comfort depends much upon the strength of your faith; but your salvation depends upon the truth of it. Most Christians come to heaven with a weak and doubting faith; but few, with their sails filled with a direct and fresh wind of assurance.

Fifthly, There is enough in Christ to help thy unbelief; *Lord,* said this poor man, *help my unbelief.* He is an excellent physician, and knows how to relieve and cure thee: Go to him and groan out thy complaint; tell him, thy heart is pained and troubled with this disease; thou shalt find him a faithful, skilful, and merciful Saviour.

Sixthly, It is but a little while, before this, with all other diseases bred by it in thy soul, shall be perfectly healed; sanctification is a cure begun; glorification is a cure performed and completed: The former hath destroyed the dominion, the latter will destroy the existence of it in thy soul: When you come to heaven, and never till then, will you find yourselves well, and at ease in every part.

And thus much of the second point.

There are some general observations arising from both parts of my text considered together, viz. the thankful acknowledgment of his faith, and the sorrowful sense of his unbelief. It shall suffice, for a conclusion to this meditation, only to note them; and they are these;

First, That the deepest sense of sin must not exclude an humble and thankful acknowledgment of the grace of God in his people. It is the fault of most, to hide their sins; and the fault of some to hide their graces.

Secondly, Acceptance of our persons and duties, is a pure act of grace: There is no duty performed in a perfect act of faith; all is mixed with unbelief in some degree, the honey and the comb are mixed together, Cant. ii. 8. No duty as it comes from us is pure.

Thirdly, Justly may we suspect that faith for a false faith, which boasts of its own strength, but never mourns in the sense of unbelief. Where there are no conflicts with sin, there can be no sound evidence of sincerity.

Fourthly, Believers must not wonder to find strange vicissitudes and alterations in the state of their souls: Sometimes a clear, and sometimes a cloudy day: Sometimes they have their songs in the night, and sometimes their bitter lamentations. If you ask, why is it thus? the answer is, there are within you contrary principles struggling in your souls; and it is no wonder at all to find peace and trouble, hope and fear, light and darkness taking their turns, and sharing your time betwixt them.



THE EIGHTH

MEDITATION,

UPON PSALM xl. 8.

I delight to do thy will, O my God; yea, thy law is within my heart.

CASTING my eye upon this precious text, I find it perplexed and darkened with variety, yea, contrariety of expositions. The Jews and Socinians generally refer all to David, denying Christ to be the person here spoken of. Others refer the whole Psalm to Christ; but the best expositors refer it partly to David, and partly to Christ. That this paragraph in which my text lies, refers to Christ, is plain from the apostle's allegation of it in Heb. x. 5, 6, 7. In this