

SERMON UPON PSALM LXXXIV. 10.

For a day in thy courts is better than a thousand. I had rather be a door-keeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness.—Ps. lxxxiv. 10.

IN these words is set forth David's esteem of the ordinances and means of grace.

Here is (1.) A general proposition, 'A day in thy courts is better than a thousand;' (2.) A particular application to the man of God's own judgment and sentiment in the case, 'I had rather be a door-keeper in the house of my God, than dwell in the tents of wickedness.' The one sets forth the excellency of the thing itself; the other David's, and, in his person, every godly man's, sense and opinion of it. Things may incomparably differ, yet every one hath not the eyes to see it. In the general proposition, the comparison is made with any earthly thing whatsoever; in the particular application to David, with the pleasures of sin. Both must be considered.

In the general proposition, 'A day in thy courts is better than a thousand;' *i.e.*, a day or hour spent in thy worship is better than a thousand spent among worldlings and about worldly business. Eternal things, and all things conducing thereunto, must be preferred before temporal, and communion with God above all the pomp and glory of the most splendid worldly condition.

But then, in the particular application, temporal things are considered as enjoyed with sin; as also Heb. xi. 25, 'Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season.' However, there you may observe—(1.) God's worst, 'I had rather be a door-keeper in the house of my God;' (2.) Sin's best, 'Than dwell in the tents of wickedness.' Where observe—

First, The terms, in which one condition is opposed to the other—

1. On the one side, the meanest, lowest office about God is mentioned, to be a door-keeper, or, as the Hebrew signifieth, to sit at the threshold; a phrase often used to express the office of the Levites, or sons of Korah, who were keepers of the gates or thresholds of the tabernacle, 1 Chron. ix. 19, and therefore called porters, ver. 17. And to these was this psalm committed; for the title saith, it was 'A psalm for the sons of Korah;' and to encourage them in their office, David useth such an expression. He had rather be in the meanest condition, wherein he might daily worship God.

2. On the other side, here was dwelling in the tents of wickedness; that is, in the stateliest habitations of the great ones of the world, wherein wickedness reigneth. Possibly he alludeth to the wild Arabians, who lived by prey, and lived in tents which were black without and rich within. Therefore the church is compared to tents of Kedar: Cant. i. 5, 'I am black, but comely, as the tents of Kedar;' as elsewhere he saith, God is 'more glorious and excellent than the mountains of prey,' Ps. lxxvi. 4; preferring God's strength above theirs that dwelt in the mountains, and lurked there for prey. And this suiteth with his condition, who, in his exile from the temple, was forced to live as a wild Kedarene or Ishmaelite: Ps. cxx. 5, 'Woe is me that I sojourn in Mesech, that I dwell in the tents of Kedar;' meaning the Arabian tents, the barbarous people of Arabia that were called Scenitæ; for their manner of living, he then resembled them.

Secondly, Observe how the terms are framed to suit the preference intended.

1. On the one side, here is sitting at the threshold; on the other side, dwelling in the tents. He had distinguished before the travellers to the house of God and the dwellers in the house of God, ver. 4, &c. Here a day in God's courts, and a perpetual service in God's house. The lowest degree and place about God is more honourable for one day, though they die the next, as Kimchi, than to have a perpetual abode in the tents of wickedness.

2. He calleth the one the house of God, the other but a tent, to show the stability of their estate who live in communion with God, and the uncertainty of their happiness who are strangers to him; they live but in a tent, a movable habitation.

3. He calleth the one the 'house of my God,' as challenging an interest in him; and so the place of his presence, power, and habitation, being the more dear to him, as everything that relateth to God is made precious for his sake. But he calleth the other 'tents of wickedness.' There was great wealth, but nothing but profaneness and corruption. Well, then, you see that David speaketh as a man that had a mind to prefer the one before the other. One day in God's courts; not *in atriis suis cœlestibus*, in his court of heaven, as some of the ancients would carry it; but here in his church. A few hours spent with God were more than the longest life without him.

Doct. 1. That God's people have a great value and an high esteem for his ordinances.

Doct. 2. They do not only value them, but value them and esteem them above other things.

1. The esteem and value they have for his ordinances simply considered. This is a reason of the context, why there was such longing desire on his own part, such earnest pressing forward on the people's part, who came up to worship at Jerusalem: 'For a day in thy courts,' &c.

Reasons of it.

Point 1. Nature, or a spiritual instinct. All creatures naturally desire to preserve that life which they have; and therefore, by a natural propension, run thither from whence they received it. Mere instinct without instruction carrieth the brute creatures to the teats of their

dams; and every effect looketh to the cause, to receive from it its last perfection. Trees, that receive life from the earth and the sun, send forth their branches to receive the sun, and spread their roots into the earth, which brought them forth. Fishes will not live out of the water that breedeth them. Chickens are no sooner out of the shell but they shroud themselves under the feathers of the hen by whom they were at first hatched. The little lamb runneth to the dam's teat, though there be a thousand sheep of the same wool and colour; as if it said, Here I received that which I have, and here will I seek that which I want. By such a native inbred desire do the saints run to God, to seek a supply of strength and nourishment: 1 Peter ii. 2, *ὡς ἀρτυρένητα βρέφη*, 'As new-born babes desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby.' Young children are not taught to suck; the young-born child runneth to the dug, not by instruction, but instinct: James i. 18, 19, 'Of his own will begat he us, by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first-fruits of his creatures. Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear.' The same thing that teacheth the young lambs to suck, or new-born babes to draw the dug, or the chicken to seek a cherishing under the dam's wing, the same thing teacheth the children of God to prize the ordinances. The cause is inbred appetite, not persuasion and discourse, but inclination. Grace is called a new nature, which hath an appetite joined with it after its proper supplies.

2. The next cause of this value and esteem is experience. They find it so sweet that they long for more: 1 Peter ii. 2, 3, 'As new-born babes desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby; if so be that ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious.' Certainly a man that hath had any taste of communion with God will desire a fuller measure; as by tasting of excellent meats our appetite to them is not cloyed, but the more provoked. Carnal men do not know what it is to enjoy God in his ordinances, and therefore they do not long for them; they never tasted the sweetness of the word, nor of God's love in Christ. David says, Ps. xix. 10, 'The statutes of the Lord are more to be desired than gold, yea, than much fine gold; sweeter also than the honey or the honey-comb.' The children of God find more true pleasure in the ordinances of God than in all things in the world. What is the reason that to carnal men they are but as dry chips, burdensome exercises, melancholy interruptions, but to the other nothing so sweet, more pleasurable than the richest and choicest sensualities, that are most eagerly pursued and gustfully enjoyed by us? The reason is given in the 11th verse, 'Moreover by them is thy servant warned, and in keeping them there is great reward.' There we come to learn wisdom against our spiritual dangers, and there we learn the way of godliness and obedience, which, besides its own sweetness, heapeth upon us the richest rewards, as having the promises of this life and that which is to come. He commendeth the word from his own experience. He had felt the effects and good use of it in his own heart; he had his broken heart bound up. They find that Christ doth heal their souls, remove their anguish, sanctify their natures, give them the promised help in temptations, warn them of sins and snares, relieve them in distress, bridle their corruptions. 'So Ps. lxxiii. 1, 2, 'O God,

thou art my God ; early will I seek thee : my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee ; in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is : to see thy power and thy glory, so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary.' He that once hath had a sight of God, and a taste of God, would not be long out of his company. He compareth his desire of communion with God with hunger and thirst, and maketh it greater than the hunger and thirst which men suffer in a dry wilderness, where there is no refreshment to be had. He had seen God, and would fain see him again ; the remembrance of the pleasures of the sanctuary revived his desires ; so that besides nature there is experience.

3. There is yet a third cause, and that is necessity. We should take delight in the means of grace and ordinances of God, though we stood in no need of them, because they carry such a suitableness with the new nature, and because they are means to exhibit more of God to us. But our imperfection is great, and this is the only way to get it supplied. Decays are very incident to us, and how else shall they be prevented ? 1 Thes. v. 19, 20, 'Quench not the Spirit ; despise not prophesying.' Our spiritual vigour is soon quenched, our spiritual strength soon abated, our spiritual gust and delight soon lost, if once we despise ordinances. Every grace, when it is wrought, needeth support and increase. There is something lacking to faith, and something lacking to love, and something lacking to knowledge ; and if that which is lacking be not supplied, we shall lose what is wrought in us. For it fareth with a man going to heaven as it doth with a man rowing against the stream ; if he doth not go forward, he goeth backward. Surely they that are acquainted with the spiritual life cannot live without ordinances. Painted fire needeth no fuel, but true fire will go out unless it be fed and maintained. Wherever there is life, because of the depastion of the natural heat upon the natural moisture, though the stomach be never so full for the present, yet anon they will be hungry again. So because of the constant combat between the flesh and the spirit, divine love and carnal concupiscence ; wherever there is spiritual life, there is a necessity it should be fed with new supplies of grace, ministered by the ordinances. An hungry conscience must have satisfaction.

4. Utility and profit. That maketh the children of God value the ordinances. They get more here in one day than they get in the world in a thousand. A man may moil in the world all the days of his life, and what gets he ? Many times his labour for his pains : Ps. cxxvii. 2, 'It is in vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows.' The Lord doth justly punish the painfulness of some, who toil like infidels in the use of means, with a sad disappointment. They work their hearts out, and nothing cometh of it. Whereas those who have God's blessing thrive insensibly, and are very prosperous. But in case they have the world at will, what will it profit them when they come to die ? Job xxvii. 8, 'What is the hope of the hypocrite, though he hath gained, when God taketh away his soul ?' They have a sad bargain of it who have spent all their days in heaping up wealth, and have hunted for that which they shall never roast. Or if they wallow in sensual felicity, yet it must be left at length. But now by the ordinances men get God for their portion ;

and he is an everlasting portion. They are a means to help us to the fruition of God : Prov. viii. 34, 35, 'Blessed is the man that heareth me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of my doors ; for whose findeth me findeth life, and shall obtain favour of the Lord.' Spiritual wisdom is more than all worldly riches, and to find Christ is to find life. Now this is obtained by waiting at his gates, and at the posts of his doors ; that is, by a daily attendance upon the means of grace.

Point 2. That God's people do not only value and esteem his ordinances, but they value and esteem them above all worldly things. We have given you some reasons of their respect to ordinances simply considered, now comparatively. For it is not enough to constitute us religious, that we have some respect for God, his ways, and ordinances, when we have a greater respect for other things ; to be a little for God and more for the world. No ; it must be your great business to wait upon God, and to redeem time for spiritual uses, counting an hour spent with him to be your sweetest time, and the meanest service about him to be your greatest preferment, and to enjoy his love more than to enjoy the greatest treasures in the world.

Reason 1. Worldly things cannot give out so much of God to us as the ordinances do, and therefore they are incomparably better than any earthly things whatsoever.

1. They give out more of God for the present than any earthly thing can. We taste God in the creatures ; they are sanctified to the heirs of promise : 1 Tim. iv. 4, 5, 'Every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving ; for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.' They are a glass wherein to see our creator's goodness and wisdom and power. But the creatures, besides their spiritual use, have a natural use ; to maintain the present life. But the ordinances have wholly a spiritual use. The creatures, and earthly comforts which we enjoy, do not so immediately tend to the glory of God ; their immediate use is to comfort man during his pilgrimage, and to enable him to serve God ; but ultimately and terminatively they tend to the glory of God. Though man be not to use them merely for himself, and to sacrifice them to his own will and pleasure, or to satisfy his own fleshly mind, yet their natural use is for his comfort, and to enable him to serve God. But there is more of God discovered in the ordinances than in the creatures, and they do more immediately tend to God.

2. These are the means of our eternal felicity. Earthly things are given us as an invitation ; spiritual things as an evidence. Earthly things are not given us in the first place, but as an additional supply : Mat. vi. 33, 'Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you ;' Eccles. vii. 11, 'Wisdom is good with an inheritance.' Well, then, surely ordinances, if we have the effect of them, are a more blessed evidence of God's favour : Ps. lxxv. 4, 'Blessed is the man whom thou chooseth, and causeth to approach unto thee, that he may dwell in thy court ; we shall be satisfied with the goodness of thy house, even of thy holy temple.' By this means God pursueth his eternal love, and bringeth us to eternal glory and blessedness. One beam of the light of God's countenance is more worth

than all the world, what then is the eternal enjoyment of God? Now the ordinances are a means to this end, to bring us to the everlasting fruition of God: Ps. lxxiii. 25, 'Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee.'

Reason 2. God is not loved unless he be loved with a transcendent, superlative love; and this must proportionably descend upon other things as they relate to God, for everything is good according to its vicinity and nearness to the chiefest good and last end. There is a fourfold rank of good things. The first is of that which is loved and desired only for itself and for no other, and all other things for its sake; so God only is good. The second rank is of those things that are desired for themselves and the sake of some other thing also; as knowledge, grace, and virtue. The third rank is of those good things which are merely desired for some other good's sake; as the supplies of the outward life, estate, and the like; in order to service, these may be desired. The fourth rank is of those things which are evil in themselves, and good only by accident, in order to some greater good which may be procured by them; as war, to make way for a lasting quiet and peace; the cutting off an arm or leg, to preserve the rest of the body; burning the harvest to starve an enemy. In a theological consideration, afflictions have this use, which are not things to be desired and chosen, but endured and suffered when sent by the wise God for our good. Well, now, a christian should love all things according to their value, and as they approach nearer to his last end and chief good. He valueth all things as they more or less let out God to him; the nearer means more than the remote subservient helps. Thus he delighteth in the ordinances more than the creatures, because the ordinances discover more of God and exhibit more of God to him. He valueth graces more than ordinances, because by the graces of the Spirit he is brought into more conformity to God, and communion with him, than by the bare formality of a duty. And he delighteth in Jesus Christ more than in created graces, as being by him nearer to God, and God nearer to us. Here is the method and order of our value and esteem then: first God, next Christ as mediator, next the graces of the Spirit, next the ordinances, next the creatures and comforts of this life.

3. A godly man's judgment is rectified about the difference between things spiritual and temporal: Prov. xxiii. 4, 'Labour not to be rich; cease from thine own wisdom;' 1 Cor. ii. 12, 'We have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God, that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God;' Ps. xvi. 7, 'I will bless the Lord, who hath given me counsel; my reins also instruct me in the night season.' He counteth that condition best wherein he may be most serviceable to God, and best helped to heaven. The natural understanding valueth all things by the interest of the flesh, for it looketh only to present things; it is the spirit of the world. But one to whom God hath given counsel, he is of another temper, seeth things by another light, and liveth to another end and scope. His end enlighteneth him, and the Spirit of God enlighteneth him. The Spirit showeth him the reality and worth of heavenly things: Eph. i. 17, 18, 'That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give

unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened, that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints.' There is no prospect of the other world by the light of a natural spirit, but by faith: 2 Peter i. 9, 'He that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off.' A mere natural man acteth at little higher rate than a beast. A beast seeth things before him, tastes what is comfortable to his senses, is guided by fancy and appetite; but the spirit of faith maketh a man live as in the sight of God, and under a sense of another world. His end enlighteneth him; for, Mat. vi. 22, 'The light of the body is the eye; if thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light.' When a man hath fixed his end, he will the sooner understand his way. *Finis est mensura mediorum*—The end is the measure of the means. A good end and scope enlighteneth and governeth a man in his whole course. As a man's end is, so he judgeth of happiness and misery. If a man's end be to live well in the world, then 'happy are the people that are in such a case.' If his end be to enjoy God, then 'happy is the people whose God is the Lord,' Ps. cxliv. 15. It is a blessed opportunity to be waiting upon him. So he judgeth of liberty and bondage. If his end be to please God, then corruption is his yoke; if to please the flesh, duty is his yoke. So he judgeth of wisdom and folly. A carnal man counteth himself wise when he has made a good bargain; then he applaudeth himself: Ps. x. 3, 'The wicked boasteth of his heart's desire, and blesseth the covetous, whom the Lord abhorreth.' The godly man then counteth himself wise, when he has redeemed time for spiritual uses: Eph. v. 15, 16, 'Not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil.' And the eunuch, when he was instructed by Philip, 'went on his way rejoicing,' Acts viii. 39.

Use 1. If these things be so, then it informeth us how cheerfully we should pass through our sabbath duties: Isa. lviii. 13, 'If thou turn away thy foot from the sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day, and call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honourable, and shalt honour him, not doing thine own work, not finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words,' &c. It followeth naturally from the point in hand; for if a day in God's house be better than a thousand elsewhere, then a christian should be in his element when he is wholly at leisure for God. His sabbath time should not hang upon his hands, nor should he count this day as a melancholy interruption. Few are of this spirit; they are out of their course: Amos viii. 5, 'When will the sabbath be gone, that we may set forth wheat?' They are weary of sacred meetings, and long to have them over, that they might follow their gain, and satisfy their worldly humour. They make the world and their gain their great errand, and look upon attendance upon God as a matter by the by, and therefore are soon weary of it.

Use 2. Let us reflect the light of this truth upon our own hearts. Have we this love and affection to the means of grace? If we profess it, the truth of it is best known to God; but in some measure it should be known to ourselves also, if we would take comfort in it. Therefore let us a little state it.

1. This affection and respect to ordinances is to them as pure; to those meetings where God is sincerely and purely worshipped, 'As new-born babes desire λογικὸν ἄδολον γάλα, the sincere milk of the word,' 1 Peter ii. 2. The new nature is suited to God's institutions. As the puking infant, when he sucketh a stranger, doth in effect say, This is not my mother's milk. Christ is there where he is worshipped in his own way: Mat. xxviii. 20, 'Teaching them all things whatsoever I have commanded you, and lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.' The church hath nothing to do about ordaining or instituting, but only about ordering the natural circumstances of worship.

2. It is not the empty formality which the saints prize, but meeting with God: Ps. lxxxiv. 1, 2, 'How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts! my soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God.' The profane blind world neither careth for the duty, nor for God in the duty; the formal hypocritical part of the world is for the outward duty, and rests satisfied with the bare ordinance, but the sincere christian would meet with God there. They do not only serve him, but seek him, to find God in the means, and his lively operation upon their hearts; and therefore they would not go from him without him: Gen. xxxii. 26, 'I will not let thee go except thou bless me.' They must have somewhat of God; this is what they long for, some new warmth, and comfort, and quickening.

3. Those ordinances are prized where many of the servants of God meet together. It is comfortable to enjoy God in secret, such duties are rewarded with an open blessing: Mat. vi. 6, 'But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and shut thy door, and pray unto thy Father which is in secret, and thy Father, which seeth in secret, will reward thee openly.' But here it is God's court. David could thus enjoy God in the wilderness: Ps. xlii. 4, 'I had gone with the multitude; I went with them to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise, with the multitude that kept holy-day.' It is a comfort certainly to meet with our everlasting companions, joining in concert with them, and beginning our everlasting work. God's people have but one spirit, one divine nature; are led by the same principles, rules, and ends; have the same hopes, desires, and joys: to have multitudes of these joining with us in lifting up the same God, in the same solemn worship, praying together, hearing together, sitting down at the same table, and glorifying the same God and Father with the same heart and mouth: Acts i. 14, 'These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication;' Ps. xxii. 22, 'In the midst of the congregation will I praise thee;' and ver. 25, 'My praise shall be of thee in the great congregation; I will pay my vows before them that fear him.'

4. It must be to the ordinances, though under reproach, disgrace, persecution: Heb. xi. 26, 'Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt.' Though the service of God expose us to the lowest and most painful condition of life, as a door-keeper, if joined with any measure of communion with God: 2 Sam. vi. 22, 'I will be yet more vile than thus.' It is better to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the most easy, sumptuous,

and plentiful condition of life with wicked men. Few are content to serve a poor Christ.

5. It is a constant affection, not for a pang. Herod ἠδέως ἤκουσε 'Heard John Baptist gladly,' Mark vi. 20; and John v. 35, 'He was a burning and a shining light, and ye were willing for a season to rejoice in his light;' for a season, while ordinances are novel things, or during some qualm of conscience; but it is from a constant inbred appetite, common to all the saints.

6. This value and esteem must vent itself by a strong desire: Ps. xlii. 1, 2, 'As the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?' The lively believer doth earnestly, and above all other things, seek after communion with God: Ps. xxvii. 4, 'One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple.' There were other things which David might desire, but this one thing was his heart set upon, that he might live in constant communion with God. Not to be settled in his regal throne, which he sought not yet to be, but to enjoy that transcendant pleasure of conversing daily and frequently with God; and the spirit worketh uniformly in the saints.

7. The end of our attendance on ordinances must be God's glory and our own profit. God's glory: Ps. xxvii. 4, 'To behold the beauty of God.' God is infinitely worthy of all honour and praise from his creatures; love to God hath an influence on it: Ps. xxvi. 8, 'Lord, I have loved the habitation of thy house, and the place where thine honour dwelleth.' Our profit: 1 Peter ii. 2, 'As new-born babes desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby;' that we may have some increase of light and life: Ps. lxxxiv. 7, 'They go from strength to strength; every one in Sion appeareth before God.'
