

SERMON UPON PSALM LXXXIV. 7.

They go from strength to strength ; every one of them in Zion appeareth before God.—Ps. lxxxiv. 7.

THIS psalm was penned by David in his exile, as is most probable ; for therein he professeth his longing after the courts of God, or his wonted access to the ark of the covenant and public ordinances. Being deprived of that benefit, he expresth his value of it. Such privileges are best understood *carendo magis quam fruendo*, by want rather than enjoyment. In which of his flights and persecutions it is not easy to determine, whether those by Saul or by Absalom ; rather those by Absalom, for then the ark was upon Zion hill, 2 Sam. vi. 12 ; but in Saul's time the ark was at Kirjath-jearim, 1 Sam. vii. 1 ; and when he fled from Absalom was his solemn parting from the ark : 2 Sam. xv. 25, 26, ' And the king said unto Zadok, Carry back the ark of God into the city : if I shall find favour in the eyes of God, he will bring me again, and show me both it and his habitation : but if he say thus, I have no delight in thee, behold here I am, let him do to me as seemeth good unto him.' In the psalm—

1. He professeth his value and esteem of the public worship, or enjoying God in the ordinances and means of grace : ' How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts ! ' ver. 1. Then his earnest desire of this privilege of free wonted access to the house of God : ver. 2, ' My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord ; my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God.' There was soul, and heart, and flesh in it, as to extension ; and crying out, longing, fainting, and all for the courts of God, as to intention.

2. He compareth his condition with the swallows and sparrows, that had liberty of flying and building their nests about the altars of God. It is a notable poetical strain, as passionate lovers are wont to express themselves upon like occasions : ver. 3, ' Yea, the sparrow hath found an house, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, even thine altars, O Lord of hosts, my king and my God.'

3. Then he compareth himself—

[1.] With the priests and Levites, whose constant residence was in the temple : ver. 4, ' Blessed are they that dwell in thy house ; they will be still praising thee, Selah.' Those that are always in God's house, constantly allowed the privilege of his solemn service or sacred assemblies, beholding the symbols of his presence, the ark of the cove-

nant, upon which God sat, and gave answers of grace, O blessed they indeed!

[2.] With the people, that went up to worship three times of the year at Jerusalem, to keep the solemn feasts, according to the ordinance of God: Exod. xxiii. 17, 'Three times in the year all thy males shall appear before the Lord God.' They were to journey afoot to the tabernacle, there to appear before the Lord. Their condition was blessed in comparison of David's, who was now debarred of all access to God's courts. These are described—(1.) By their earnest desire and resolution to take this journey, though they dwelt far off from the tabernacle: ver. 5, 'Blessed is the man whose strength is in thee, in whose heart are the ways of them.' Their hearts were set upon the ways that led to the courts of God. (2.) By their painful passage, and yet some refreshments by the way: ver. 6, 'Who passing through the valley of Baca make it a well; the rain also filleth the pools.' Their way to the tabernacle, now seated upon the hill of Zion, lay through dry and comfortless places, through the valley of Baca, or of mulberry-trees, as the margin readeth it; that is, through dry and sandy deserts, in which those trees grow. It may be the place mentioned 2 Sam. v. 23, 24, the valley of Rephaim, where mulberry-trees grew, and where David smote the Philistines—Sept. *εἰς τὴν κοιλιάδα του κλυθμῶνος*, the valley of tears. The want of water in those hot countries was very troublesome. Where great multitudes with store of cattle travelled towards Zion upon these solemn occasions, they had their difficulties and discouragements by the way, but their ardent zeal and strong affection overcame all. And as they had their difficulties, so they had their comforts; sometimes they met with a well, and sometimes with a pond filled with rain; sometimes with more, sometimes with less refreshments. (3.) They are described by their constant progress, till they came to the place they aimed at; that is, in the text, 'They go from strength to strength; every one of them in Zion appeareth before God;' that is, having found some refreshment and reparation of strength, they are encouraged to go on their way, till they appear before God in the holy feast, and have communion with him in his public worship; and then cheerful, joyful souls they!

In which words—(1.) Their progress is described; (2.) The term and end of their journey.

I. Their progress, 'They go from strength to strength;' that is, they are always gathering new strength and courage, notwithstanding their difficulties. It is *ἀναδιπλωσις αὐξητικῆ*, that is, increasing their power and strength yet more and more; so far are they from being weary, faint, and discouraged; as Rom. i. 17, 'The righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith;' that is, our faith still increasing; and *ἀπὸ δόξης εἰς δόξαν*, 'from glory to glory,' 2 Cor. iii. 18; that is, our glory increasing more and more. So 'they go from strength to strength;' that is, they increase in strength and courage. Some read from company to company, or from troop to troop or squadron to squadron. As the word signifieth strength in the general, so sometimes a troop of men. It was their fashion to repair to these feasts in great troops. For David saith, 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 a

multitude that kept holy day ;' Luke ii. 44, 'They supposing him to be in the company, went a day's journey, and they sought him among their kinsfolk and acquaintance.' The crowd was so great that Christ was lost in the throng. So they go from troop to troop, from one of these companies to another, the later overtaking the foremost, which showeth their alacrity in this journey. But we may keep our reading, *ἐκ δυνάμεως εἰς δύναμιν*, 'from strength to strength.'

II. The term and end of the journey : 'Every one of them in Zion appeareth before God.' At length they come to the tabernacle, the type of Christ's promised incarnation, God's pitching his tent in human flesh ; and so these godly travellers reap the benefit of their long trouble, and enjoy the pleasure of God's public worship. The Sept. read *ὁφθήσεται ὁ Θεὸς τῶν θεῶν ἐν Σιών*, the God of gods shall be seen in Zion.

The words are opened. Now the use of them is double, as Zion was a figure of the church, or as it is a figure of heaven.

1. As Zion was a figure of the church, so it doth express the zeal of God's children to join themselves to his militant church in this world, and to make after the ordinances, there to enjoy Christ, notwithstanding all difficulties with which such a purpose is encumbered. Those that may have comfortable communion with God in his holy worship must expect troubles ; and yet they many times meet with a spring or a pool by the way, some mitigations of providence, and refreshments in their miseries ; at length they shall obtain their desire.

2. As Zion is a figure of heaven, of Jerusalem that is above, the city that hath foundations ; and so it doth notably express the condition of those that aspire after the triumphant church in heaven ; and all things in this psalm concerning these passengers are sweetly applicable to this. David compareth himself to two sort of Israelites : ver. 4, 'Blessed are they that dwell in thy house ; they shall be still praising thee.' Some saints are at home already, dwelling with God, and praising him is their perpetual exercise. These are *in patria*, in their country : others *in via*, in the way ; travellers home.

[1.] Their hearts are in the ways thereof ; their whole time, care, thoughts, and affections are set upon this, how they may get home : Phil. iii. 20, 'Our conversation is in heaven, from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ ;' Mat. vi. 20, 21, 'Lay up for yourselves treasure in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal ; for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.'

[2.] These have a wilderness to get through, and a comfortless valley full of discouragements ; for 'through manifold tribulations we must enter into the kingdom of God,' Acts xiv. 22. Only now and then God giveth them a little refreshing, a spring by the way, or a pool ; sometimes inward, sometimes outward comforts and supports, that they may not be afflicted above measure, and beyond what they are able to bear.

[3.] In this valley of tears, and in the midst of sorrows, they find strength renewed to them, and supports given, so that the further they go the more cheerful they are.

[4.] At length our troublesome pilgrimage in this world is rewarded with the beatifical vision of God in a better world ; and then we shall

find that all our pains, though never so great, are well bestowed, when the God of gods is seen in Zion.

First, Those whose hearts are set upon the ways of God, and do in the midst of all difficulties hope to come before him in Zion, that is above, it is their privilege and duty to go on from strength to strength.

Secondly, Those that go from strength to strength shall at length appear before God in a blessed and heavenly estate.

Doct. 1. Those whose hearts are set upon the ways of God, and do in the midst of all difficulties hope to come before him in Zion, it is their privilege and duty to go on from strength to strength.

1. It is their privilege as they grow older to grow better, wiser, and stronger: Isa. xl. 31, 'They that wait on the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; they shall walk, and not faint.' They that wait on the Lord, that do with patience expect the performance of his promises, shall still have a new supply of strength, enabling them to bear up when they seem to be clean spent, so as to mount as on eagles' wings, which are fowls that fly strongly and swiftly, and renew their youth: Ps. ciii. 5, 'Thy youth is renewed like the eagles.' Whether as those fowls are famous for long life, vigorous and healthful, as if always young, or it respects some particular qualities of the eagle. Some say the eagle by casting her feathers reneweth her youth; as Micah i. 16, 'Enlarge thy baldness as the eagle.' Some by casting her bill, when the upper beak groweth crooked with age, and shutteth up the lower. Well, then, this is the privilege of God's servants; so Ps. xcii. 13, 14, 'Those that be planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God; they shall bring forth fruit in old age; they shall be fat and flourishing.' Those plants which our heavenly Father hath planted, in the midst of all their troubles and difficulties, they flourish, as trees stand all weathers, and are helped by them; yea, the courts of God are such a kindly soil, that they bring forth fruit in old age, so moistened by the dews of heaven and fountain of the gardens, which is the Spirit. The decay of the outward man shall not hinder the renewing of the inward man, but the last work is better than the first. Their bodies, when ruinous, are yet the temples of the Holy Ghost; then are they kept fresh and lively, and shall have great delight in God, and be fertile to the last. So Prov. x. 29, 'The way of the Lord is strength to the upright.' A man that is sincere and upright with God, the more he walketh with God the more encouragement he hath, more peace of conscience, more freedom from sin, greater readiness and ability for God's service; there is a power that increaseth with every duty; as the more a man swimmeth, or writeth, or playeth on an instrument, the facility is increased. Many are ready to faint, and think they shall never hold out in the midst of the difficulties they meet with in the valley of Baca, but every new difficulty bringeth new strength with it. These promises serve to encourage us to continue with patience in well-doing; there shall constantly be a renewed supply of grace and strength.

2. It is their duty to go on from strength to strength; that, as a river, the farther it runneth the broader and deeper it groweth; it doth not lose, but get, by a further accession of waters; the fountain is

small, as to the head and first rise, in comparison of the stream; so a christian is to go on from one degree of righteousness unto another, and still grow stronger in the graces of the Spirit: John iv. 14, 'Who-soever shall drink of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.' And abound more in all holy actions. Paul's instance: Phil. iii. 13, 14, 'Forgetting the things that are behind, and reaching forth to the things that are before, I press towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.' As a runner in a race doth not say, There is so much of the way already past, now I may slacken my pace; but there is so much yet to come, and therefore run still; so a christian says, There are so many sins to be mortified, so many graces to be attained, such difficulties to be encountered, still I must hold on my course, or else I shall come short of the goal.

Reasons why we must go on.

1. That we may recover what we have lost. We have lost in Adam complete and perfect innocency, and surely we should not cease till it be made up in Christ. He is more able to save than Adam to destroy: Rom. v. 17, 'For if by one man's offence death reigned by one, much more they which receive abundance of grace, and of the gift of righteousness, shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ.' Adam was a public person by institution; Christ was not only instituted, but had an intrinsic value; he was God-man.

2. To preserve what we have. If we do not grow better, we grow worse: Heb. vi. 1, 'Let us go on to perfection;' and then presently he treateth of apostasy, ver. 4, &c. So 2 Peter iii. 17, 18, 'Seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being lead away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness; but grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.' We cannot keep that which we have received if we do not labour to increase it: Mat. xxv. 29, 'Unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance; but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath.' They that row against the stream, or he that goeth up a sandy hill, if they do not go forward they go backward. We are either ascending or descending, continually in motion. When a tree leaveth off to grow, it decayeth. Man goeth backward in his estate if he have constant expenses and no gettings. If we would maintain that measure of grace which we have, we must go forward.

3. That we may attain to what is promised. God hath promised absolute holiness: 1 Thes. v. 23, 24, 'The very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is he that calleth you, who will also do it.' When he had prayed, he groundeth his confidence on God's faithfulness: Eph. v. 27, 'That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing, but that it should be holy, and without blemish.' Christ died to bring us to a state of perfection; and being told so, we expect it. We do not put off all our filthy garments at once, but there is a body of sin cleaveth to the best; and therefore

this work is done by degrees. So Col. i. 22, 'To present you holy, and unblamable, and unreprouable in his sight;' Jude 24, 'Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory,' &c. This work is undertaken by Christ, and he is to carry it on from one degree to another, till it be completed at death. These expressions would be in vain if there were not a going on from strength to strength and a constant increase. Corn doth not grow in the barn, but in the field.

4. That we may perform what is required. The law of God is perfect, and alloweth no sin or sinful weakness, therefore we should allow none. The perfection of the law is so far still in force—(1.) As that we should be ashamed of our defects in holiness, and mourn over them: Rom. vii. 14, 'The law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold unders in.' Alas! poor captive! I cannot do what I would. (2.) We should be unsatisfied with our present measure of holiness, and still be longing and striving after more: Phil. iii. 12, 'Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect, but I follow after it, that I may apprehend that for which I am apprehended of Christ Jesus.' The perfection of the law is of this use, that we may be kept humble, and aspire after further growth, and make further progress every day. Perfection in holiness is not attainable in this life, yet we are to aim at no less. Christ took hold of us in effectual calling for this end; and we are not sincere with God, if it be not so.

5. That we may answer the patterns set before us. The saints in scripture are all set forth for an example; Abraham in faith, Rom. iv. 20; Job in patience, James v. 11; Timothy in sobriety; Paul in zeal and diligence. We are to take the prophets for an example; and Paul biddeth us follow him, as he followed Christ: 1 Cor. xi. 1, 'Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ.' These holy men had the same nature, the same interests and concernments; we have the same helps and encouragements, the same God, and Christ, and Spirit, and rule, and hopes, and comfort, and glory, which should shame us to come short of them. Therefore you must be agoing from strength to strength. Yea, the angels: Mat. vi. 10, 'Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.' It is but reason that they that would be like them for privileges should be like them for service and duty. If the angels, that are out of gunshot and harm's way, hold on in God's service, much more should we. Wicked men think everything in religion enough, and that we make more ado than needeth, but Christ referreth us to the angels: yea, to God himself: 1 Peter i. 15, 'Be ye holy, as he that has called you is holy;' Mat. v. 48, 'Be ye perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.' Now therefore we must by degrees be growing up unto this estate. The holiest upon earth are not a sufficient copy to us. God is essentially holy, infinitely holy, originally holy. Now wherein must we imitate him? We must be immutably holy; we should aim at that state, when we shall be in some sort so. God is universally holy in all his ways and works; we should get nearer and nearer to this pattern.

6. That we may answer our many experiences. There is no man of any long standing in the profession of godliness but he hath many experiences of the bitterness of sin, when he hath been meddling with

forbidden fruit; and of the vanity of the creature, when he hath doted upon it, and at length he findeth that there is a lie in his right hand: Eccles. i. 14, 'I have seen all the works that are done under the sun, and behold all is vanity and vexation of spirit.' Of the comfort of duty; when done all things for God, there is a sweetness accompanieth it: Micah ii. 7, 'Do not my words do good to him that walketh uprightly?' Of the help of God in his difficulties and straits: Ps. xlvi. 1, 'God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.' Of the truth of his promises: Ps. xviii. 30, 'As for God, his way is perfect; the word of the Lord is tried; he is a buckler to all those that trust in him.' Of answer of prayers: Ps. cxvi. 1, 2, 'I love the Lord because he hath heard my voice and my supplication; because he hath inclined his ear unto me, therefore will I call upon him as long as I live.' Of the enterprises of Satan: 2 Cor. ii. 11, 'Lest Satan should get an advantage of us, for we are not ignorant of his devices.' Now to have all these experiences, and to be nothing improved and bettered, is very sad: Deut. xxix. 4, 'Yet the Lord hath not given them an heart to perceive, nor eyes to see, nor ears to hear, unto this day.' To be nothing better, nothing wiser, is an argument of spiritual stupidity and folly.

7. To answer all the means, and the care and cost that God hath been at with us and for us. God expecteth growth where he has afforded the means of growth in great plenty: Luke xiii. 7, 'He said to the dresser of his vineyard, Behold, these three years I came seeking fruit on this fig-tree, and find none; cut it down, why cumbereth it the ground?' It must be understood *de jure*, not *de facto*, of what God might expect, for God cannot be disappointed: 'Have I been thus long with you, and hast thou not known me?' John xiv. 9. It was a grief to Christ when they were not grown under the means of grace: Luke xii. 48, 'Where much is given, much is required.' It is grievous to the Spirit of God when we are no better for all that is done to us.

Application.

1. As it is a privilege of the sincere christian whose heart is set heavenward, so it is for his encouragement: 'They go from strength to strength.' If there be new troubles, there is new strength. Many are ready to faint in the valley of Baca, and think they shall never hold out. There is a continual supply: Rom. ii. 7, 'To them who, by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, and honour, and immortality, eternal life;' Luke viii. 15, 'The good ground bringeth forth fruit with patience.' They have present support, and shall have final deliverance: Ps. cxxxviii. 3, 'In the day when I cried thou answeredst me, and strengthenedst me with strength in my soul.' God gives a power to bear up your spirit in all your burdens. God is no Pharaoh; you shall have strength with your work, strength with your trials, strength with your difficulties. A good man will not overburden his beast; and God will give final deliverance; your troublesome journey will not last long; it will be over in a little time, and then you shall appear before God in Zion. There is rest: Rev. xiv. 13, 'That they may rest from their labours, and their works follow them.' In heaven you have nothing to do but to bless God, and praise God, and admire God to all eternity. Therefore be encouraged;

go in the strength of your present refreshings, and God will find new grace for you, while you continue upright with him.

2. As it is a duty.

Use 1. It showeth the folly of them who count an earnest pursuance of eternal life to be more than needs, and that a little holiness will serve the turn. Oh no! A christian should always be growing and always improving, still pressing nearer and nearer towards the mark, going on from strength to strength. There is no *nimum* in holiness; you cannot have too much holiness, or too much of the love of God, nor of the fear of God, nor of faith in him. There are many that come near and never enter: Luke xiii. 24, 'Strive to enter in at the strait gate; for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.' Certainly he that knoweth what was lost in Adam, and must be recovered in Christ, cannot think he can do enough or too much. How hard a matter is it to keep what we have! Such is the vanity, lightness, and inconstancy of our hearts in good, and so furious are the assaults of sundry temptations, and so great is our impotency to resist them; our proneness to turn from the ways of God so great; so strong, subtle and assiduous are our spiritual adversaries; so many are those difficulties, discouragements, diversions, and hindrances which we have to wrestle with and overcome in the way to heaven, that it concerneth us to give all diligence to advance in our christian course. Once more, there is so much promised, that certainly a man knoweth not what christianity meaneth if he striveth not to be more holy. So exact is our rule, and strict, so holy is our God, so great are our obligations from all the means and providences of God, that such a vain conceit cannot possess the soul of a serious christian.

Use 2. It reproveth those who, if they have gotten such a measure of grace, whereby they think they may be assured they are in a state of grace, they never look further, but set up their rest, and think hereafter Christ will make them perfect when they die. Consider—

1. They hazard their claim of sincerity that do not aim at perfection; for where there is true grace, there will be a desire of the greatest perfection; as a small seed will seek to grow up into a tree. He that is truly good will be growing from good to better, and so is best at last; the more his light and love is increased, the more he is troubled about the relics of sin, and grieved at his heart that he can serve God no more perfectly.

2. All promises are accomplished by degrees; and so far as we hope for anything, we will be endeavouring it: 1 John iii. 3, 'Every man that hath this hope in him, purifieth himself even as he is pure.'

3. According to the degrees of grace so will our glory be. The vessel is filled according to its capacity. They that are growing here have more in heaven. He that improved ten talents hath a reward proportionable, and so he that improved five, Mat. xxv. As our measures of grace are, so will our measures of glory be, all according to their size and receptivity. As there are degrees of punishments in hell, so of rewards in heaven. He that loved God more on earth has more of his love in heaven.

Use 3. It showeth the miserable estate of them that do not go from strength to strength, but from weakness to weakness; that waste

their strength by sin, that are fallen back, and have lost the savouriness of their spirits, and their delight in communion with God, and grow more careless and neglectful of holy things, weak in faith, impatient under the cross, formal in holy duties; their heart is not watched, their tongue is not bridled, their conversation is more vain, they wax worse and worse. Oh! take heed of such a declining estate. When men fall from their first love: Rev. ii. 4, 'I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.' First faith: 1 Tim. v. 12, 'Having damnation, because they have cast off their first faith.' Or first obedience: 2 Chron. xvii. 3, 'The Lord was with Jehoshaphat, because he walked in the first ways of his father David.' David in his later time fell into scandalous crimes.

Use 4. Is to persuade you to go on from strength to strength. It is the gift of God's free grace, and the work of the Spirit: Eph. iii. 16, 'That he would grant you to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man.' By maintaining and actuating grace, notwithstanding all difficulties.

Motives.

1. What a monstrous thing is it to be always babes and infants in grace! Heb. v. 12, 13, 'For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God, and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness; for he is a babe.' After many years of growing, to be a babe still, an infant still, is monstrous.

2. Besides your entrance into christianity, there must be a progress. There is the gate and the way: Mat. vii. 14, 'Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, that leadeth unto life.' Will you always keep at the door and entrance? It is not enough to begin, but you must finish what you have begun, in the way of mortification, heavenly-mindedness, and self-denial.

3. All the ordinances promote your growth; it is the work of the Spirit, but the Spirit doth it by the means of grace. We must not be idle and negligent, but use the means; as the word: 1 Peter ii. 2, 'As new-born babes desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby.' Every duty giveth Christ a more hearty welcome into your souls, but especially the Lord's supper. At the table of the Lord we have our spiritual refreshings. Our initiation was by baptism, but our growth by this ordinance. How doth this do it? Partly as it increaseth our assurance of God's love, and so encourageth us in his service; partly as we do more solemnly make use of Christ, who is our sanctification, 1 Cor. i. 30; partly as it doth excite unto more fruitfulness, we being planted in the courts of God, and feasted at his table, and taking our meal and *viaticum* to encourage us in our journey to heaven.

4. How many have thriven by less means! Twice Christ marvelled; at the faith of the centurion: Mat. viii. 10, 'He marvelled and said, I have not found so great faith, no not in Israel;' and at the unbelief of his own countrymen: Mark vi. 6, 'He marvelled because of their unbelief.' One had so great a faith, and so little means; the other so little faith, and so great means.

5. You might more convert the world if you had more grace and holiness in your hearts, and did discover it more in your conversations. By your purity: Mat. v. 16, 'Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.' The more we live holily, the more we commend our profession. So by your constancy and courage: 1 Peter iv. 14, 'If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the Spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you.' On their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified. By your deadness to the pleasures of the flesh: 1 Peter iv. 4, 5, 'Wherein they think it strange that you run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you. Who shall give account to him that is ready to judge the quick and the dead.' By your fidelity in your relations. The apostle, speaking of the faithful behaviour of servants, saith, Titus ii. 10, 'Showing all good fidelity, that ye may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things.' What is the reason that the hearts of men are not more freely drawn out to the doctrine of Christ? Doubtless one reason is it wanteth adorning and beautifying by the carriage of its professors. They that carry themselves holily in their relations, they make religion a beautiful lovely thing in the eyes of the world: 1 Peter iii. 1, 'Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands, that if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives;' that is, preparatively induced, prejudices vanish at least.

6. You harden the wicked while you continue in your weaknesses, and are so like them, so feeble in the resistance of sin, and the governing of your own passions, appetites, and desires. You should condemn the world; as Noah: Heb. xi. 7, 'By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house, by which he condemned the world.' But you justify the world, as Israel is said to justify Sodom: Ezek. xvi. 51, 'Neither hath Samaria committed half of thy sins, but thou hast multiplied thine abominations more than they, and hast justified thy sisters in all thine abominations which thou hast done.' You differ more in your pretences than in your conversations whilst you are weak and not thoroughly moulded and commanded by religion. If you are overcome by sensuality, pride, worldliness, envy, and malice, wherein do you differ from the ungodly world but only in the name, and some little grace, which is buried under an heap of sin?

7. Your hearts will never serve you to do any excellent things for God, but you will betray his honour upon all occasions by your weaknesses and infirmities, either by foolish opinions, vain desires, carnal projects, or turbulent practices. These are only mastered by growth in grace, and God hath most honour from the strong and fruitful christian: John xv. 8, 'Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit.' Produce the genuine fruits of godliness, and produce them in plenty, and you will mightily honour God in the world. A man acts most zealously and self-denyingly when the love of God beareth rule in his heart: 2 Cor. v. 13, 14, 'For whether we be beside ourselves, it is for God; or whether we be sober, it is for your sakes; for the love of Christ constraineth us.' There is none of us but might have acted much better and wiser, and carried on our profession more to the

honour of God, if we had yielded more to the sovereign power and empire of grace.

Use 5. Try whether God's grace be decayed or increased in you ; if according to our years and standing we are advanced in the way to heaven ; if for every year of our lives we have passed a station of the wilderness to Canaan ; if with the decaying of the natural life there hath been a growth of the life of God in us : 2 Cor. iv. 16, 'Though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day.' Thus do God's people do, go on from strength to strength : 1 Thes. iv. 1, 'Furthermore we beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus Christ, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more.' As you are nearer to the grave, are you a step nearer to heaven ? Are we every day more careless than another or more serious ? What hath been our proficiency ? A man may be long at sea, yet make a short voyage ; so it is with most men ; they live long in the world, but they make little progress. Are we stronger in resisting temptations to sin, from the devil, the world, and the flesh ? 1 John ii. 14, 'Ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one.' In bearing afflictions and molestations of the flesh, upon the hopes of another world : Prov. xxiv. 10, 'If thou faint in the day of adversity, thy strength is small.' In promptitude and readiness of obedience. Do you serve God with that readiness of mind that will become love to God and faith in his promises ? Heb. xiii. 21, 'The Lord make you perfect in every good work, to do his will, working in you that which is well-pleasing in his sight through Jesus Christ.'

Doct. 2. From the term of this motion : 'Those that go on from strength to strength shall at length appear before God in Zion.' Here observe—

1. The place, Zion, that is, heaven, in this accommodative sense wherein I handle it : Heb. xii. 22, 'But ye are come unto Mount Zion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and unto an innumerable company of angels,' &c. Now this is a glorious place. Jerusalem below was a beautiful city, but much more Jerusalem that is above. This world is a valley of tears, wherein rueful spectacles are presented to our eyes, woful news possess our ears ; here is sorrowing and sinning ; but no such thing there, all is quiet, beautiful, and glorious ; no woful sound, or sad spectacle, no dismal rumours nor evil tidings. Sense will tell you what the outside is ; this spangled roof over our heads is but the pavement of that palace.

2. The company, 'Every one.' They were travelling to Zion in distinct troops, but they all meet in one assembly and congregation. So here ; we have but little company by the way, a strait gate and a narrow way, and but few that find it ; but when all meet together, there is 'an innumerable company of angels, and the spirits of just men made perfect,' Heb. xii. 22, 23 ; all joining as in one choir to laud and bless God in a concert of voices.

3. Their blessedness, 'There they appear before God ;' that is, their happiness. They appear not in order to doom, but fruition. Not only before God as a judge, but as a gracious father : 1 John iii. 2, 'When we shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is ;'

1 Cor. xiii. 12, 'For now we see through a glass darkly, but then face to face: now I know in part, but then I shall know even also as I am known.' Here we know God by hearsay, but see him not. The fulness of our joy is from the vision and sight of God. All sight of God transforming here: 2 Cor. iii. 18, 'We all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord;' but there much more. Here we are like him in holiness, and there in happiness. There is in God τὸ μακάριον καὶ τὸ ἄγαθον, &c., something happy, something good; and we shall be there like him in both.

Use. Let this beget patience: Rom. viii. 18, 'I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.' Heaven will pay for all. And let it also beget diligence: 1 Cor. xv. 58, 'Be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.' Be always pressing on, because of the high price of your calling. The thought of the prize should excite us to diligence.
