

SERMON UPON 2 CORINTHIANS IV. 17.

For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.—2 COR. iv. 17.

THESE words give us a reason why we should not faint under trouble, or when we are exercised with things unpleasing and distasteful to the flesh. He had urged one reason before, ver. 16, the increase of spiritual blessings. The inward man, *ἀνακαινοῦται*, is invigorated by afflictions, they tend to promote the spiritual life; but because we are more affected with outward comforts than inward benefits, though never so choice and necessary, therefore he addeth another reason, that afflictions do not only promote the spiritual life, but also life eternal, which, if it were more thought of by us, would very much mitigate and allay the bitterness of our grief. The afflictions and troubles of the godly have not such bitterness in them if compared with the infinite good of eternal glory. We are altogether filled with the sense of short evils, and do not lift up our minds to that blessed eternity which is at the back of them. If this were well looked to, we should find that light which we thought heavy, that short which seemed long and tedious, 'For our light affliction,' &c.

In the words there is an elegant antithesis, or opposing of our future estate to our present. Here is 'affliction,' there 'glory;' here a 'light affliction,' there a 'weight of glory;' here 'momentary affliction,' there 'eternal glory.' In our affliction there is both brevity and levity; it is a light affliction, and it is but for a moment; in our future glory there is solidity and eternity.

1. Solidity and excellency, 'a far more exceeding weight of glory,' *καθ' ὑπερβολὴν εἰς ὑπερβολὴν βάρως δόξης*, a weight of glory according to excellency unto excellency. Glory is called a weight, because the same word, *chaḡod*, which signifieth a weight, signifieth also glory; and weight addeth to the value of gold and precious things; as the more massy and weighty a crown is, the more it is worth. And it is said to be 'a far more exceeding,' &c. All words are too weak to express heaven's happiness, and therefore he heapeth expression upon expression. The expression single is used, Rom. vii. 13, *καθ' ὑπερβολὴν*, 'That sin might become out of measure or 'exceeding sinful;' but here it is doubled, 'a far more exceeding.'

2. Eternity, *αἰώνιον βάρως δόξης*; this is opposed to the momentariness of our affliction. Both properties suit with God's infiniteness and

eternity. In the other world God will give like himself, becoming an infinite and eternal power.

Doct. That the hope of eternal life, which shall follow upon our present afflictions, should make them seem as nothing to us, or as matters not much to be accounted of.

For see here how the apostle doth—(1.) Lessen the afflictions of our present condition; (2.) Greaten heavenly things; (3.) Showeth how the one is the fruit of the other, in the word ‘worketh;’ (4.) Who are the persons.

I. He taketh off the tediousness of our present afflictions, that we may not faint under them: ‘Our light affliction, which is but for a moment.’ There is the evil expressed, ‘our affliction;’ the evil lessened, it is ‘light’ and ‘but for a moment.’

1. The evil expressed, ‘our affliction.’ Mine and my brethren’s in the ministry, and all christians’, for there is a like reason of all. God will have all tried and exercised one way or another; and the most eminent most tried: Rev. vii. 14, ‘These are they who are come out of great tribulation.’ Tribulations, and great tribulations, are the way to glory to them whom God loveth most. Jesus Christ himself ‘drank of the brook in the way,’ Ps. cx. 7, and was made low before he was exalted. And the members follow the head by a conformity of suffering: ‘And we must all through many tribulations enter into the kingdom of heaven,’ Acts xiv. 22. We are all obnoxious to the hatred of the world, which will vent itself in reproaches, calumnies, and persecutions; this is the will of God. His only-begotten Son, whom he so dearly loved, was not free. By this hard and rough way will he lead us to glory and immortality. Our business is not to alter God’s decrees by seeking an exemption from crosses, but to consider how we may be supported under them. Neither let any think the worse of glory, or that the happiness of God’s people is less worth, because tribulation is the way to it. Surely the way to heaven, with all the tribulations which accompany it, is far better than an easy life in this world with God’s curse.

2. The evil is lessened. Our afflictions are *leves et breves*, light and short. The highest way of comforting the afflicted which philosophy could aspire unto was this, that if afflictions were great, they were short; if long, light; meaning thereby, that if their afflictions were grievous, they would shorten their lives; if of long continuance, by bearing they learned the better to bear. But here both light and short too in respect of our glorious reward, which being infinite, maketh them light, and being eternal, makes them short.

[1.] Our affliction is light. There are degrees in our troubles; some are more grievous, others more light and easy; some escape and get to heaven at a cheaper rate than others; but the afflictions of all are light. The Holy Ghost doth here assure us of it; for at first view they seem hard and burdensome, but if you consider them more intimately, they are soft and easy. The afflictions of the godly are not light in themselves, but either—

(1.) Comparatively, in respect of the excellency and infiniteness of the heavenly glory. So Rom. viii. 18, ‘I reckon that the sufferings of the present world are not worthy to be compared with the glory which

shall be revealed in us.' The trouble is nothing to the recompense, nor the cross to the crown; no more than a feather to a talent of lead. The good and evil of the other world are truly great, but the good and evil of the present world are slight and inconsiderable. This is evident, because we are ignorant and incredulous of falling by the beginnings of either. A wounded spirit or the comfort of a good conscience, these are things we have experience of; we know not exactly what our future condition will be, but the hopes and fears of that estate are very affective. The fears of eternal torment which are found in a guilty conscience show that all the sufferings of the world are but a flea-biting to that woe and anguish which abideth for the impenitent: Prov. xviii. 14, 'The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity, but a wounded spirit who can bear?' The salve for this sore must come from heaven; so the joys of a good conscience, which are 'unspeakable and glorious,' 1 Peter i. 8, show the happiness of the other world to be exceeding great; for if the foretaste be so sweet, the hope and expectation so ravishing, what will the enjoyment be? All the pleasures of sense are but a May-game to it. Now turn the tables, and compare the troubles of obedience with the pleasure and glory of our reward, or, on the other side, the pleasures of sin with the pains of hell, and then you will conclude that all the evil that can seize upon us here for our faithfulness to God is light and easy.

(2.) Copulatively. Though affliction be not light in itself, yet by the strong support and comfort of the Spirit, God maketh it light and easy to us. To a strong back a burden is light which crusheth the weak and faint, and causeth them to sink under it; a man well clad may without great annoyance bear the cold of winter, which pincheth the naked; so by the support of the comforting Spirit, that which is grievous is made light and easy; because, 'as our afflictions abound, so do our consolations by Christ,' 2 Cor. i. 5; and so we do not only prevail above the evil, but are 'more than conquerors through him that loveth us,' Rom. viii. 37. Now there is a more liberal allowance of these comforts and supports to God's suffering servants than to those who live at ease, and are not exposed to such difficulties and hardships: 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.' The gift of the Holy Ghost is in a peculiar manner dispensed to them, and by this oil his wrestlers are anointed.

Well, then, it is some support to consider that it is the will of God that for well-doing we should be hated of evil men. But it is a greater help that we can, by the hope of heavenly glory and immortality, counterbalance present infelicities. But the greatest help is, that by the gift of the Holy Ghost we are fortified against all impressions of sense. And holy sufferers are encouraged in the ways of obedience. All which things considered, suffering cannot look so grim and terrible to a mortified soul, who hath learned to contemn earthly things, and to make heavenly things his great end and scope.

[2.] They are short, as well as light. He saith, 'This light affliction, which is but for a moment.' No question but the afflictions of God's children, as they are some more easy, some more grievous, so they are

some shorter, some of a longer continuance; yet they are all but for a moment. If they should last for our whole lives, they are but momentary if compared with eternity that shall ensue. But it is not credible that our lives should be altogether calamitous; there is no instance of that, either in scripture or the records of time. There are intervals of rest; and our enemies cannot trouble us but when it is permitted of God. But if there were no intermission, this life itself is but a moment. If you consider that which in those afflictions we most dread, and beyond which the power of the most cruel adversary cannot reach, death itself, it is but for a moment. In the twinkling of an eye we are in eternity. Death cometh in a moment, and it is gone in a moment; after that, we enjoy eternal rest and peace. Therefore though in our way to heaven we should endure most grievous calamities, yet, since they are but momentary, they are to be endured, that we may enjoy so great a good as the vision and fruition of God.

To make this more evident to you, let us a little consider how the afflictions of God's people are long and short.

(1.) Concerning their length.

(1st.) They seem long to those that reckon by time, and not by eternity. If we look to present time, 'Summer and winter is past, and we are not saved,' Jer. viii. 20. They had a long time looked for deliverance; the year was gone, but none appeared; yea, not one year, but many. So Zech. i. 12, 'How long wilt thou not have mercy on Jerusalem and the cities of Judah, against which thou hast had indignation for many years?' So long may be the measure and continuance of the church's trouble, not only for days and months, but many years; yet these afflictions are but momentary if we go by a right count. We must not compute things by time, but by eternity. The longest time to eternity is nothing: Ps. xc. 4, 'A thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday, when it is past.' Compared with God's infinite and eternal duration, a thousand years are but as a drop lost and spilt in the ocean.

(2d.) They seem long because of the impatience of the flesh. We love our own ease, and therefore affliction soon groweth irksome and tedious. Men in a fever reckon minutes and quarters and hours, and an hour seemeth a day, and a day a week, and a week a month, and a month a year. Winter nights seem long in the passing. Our times are always present with us, when God's time is not come. A hungry stomach cannot stay till the meat be roasted, and impatient longings must be satisfied with green fruit.

(2.) For their shortness; they seem short, partly because they are not so long as they might be in regard of the enemies' rage: Zech. i. 15, 'I was but a little displeased, and they helped forward the affliction.' God intendeth to correct and reform his children, but they intend to destroy and root them out. Satan and wicked men know no bounds. Partly they are not so long as we deserve. The evil of one sin cannot be expiated in a thousand years; but God stoppeth, and 'in the midst of judgment remembereth mercy,' Hab. iii. 2. Partly they are not so long as they might be in regard of second causes and probabilities: Hab. iii. 2, 'Revive thy work in the midst of the years.' Partly because faith will not count it long; for to the eye of faith things

future and afar off are as present : Heb. xi. 1, 'Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.' Partly because love will not count it long : Gen. xxix. 20, 'Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed to him but a few days for the love he had to her.' If we had any love to Christ, we would be willing to suffer a little while for his sake. But chiefly in regard of our eternal reward and blessedness ; so it is a light affliction, that is but for a moment, like a rainy day to an everlasting sunshine. God will not always chide, but his mercy is for ever and ever.

II. Come we now to the other part of the comparison, our reward, and let us see how he greateneth heavenly things. They are set forth by unwonted forms of speech, but such as argue the super-excellency of what is propounded ; and there you may observe an exact opposition of our happiness to our misery ; there 'affliction,' here 'glory ;' there 'light affliction,' here a 'far more exceeding weight of glory ;' there 'momentary affliction,' here 'eternal glory.' Let us illustrate all these circumstances.

1. There affliction, here glory ; very fitly. In our calamities we are depressed and put to shame, but whatever honour we lose in this mortal life shall be abundantly supplied and recompensed to us in heaven. Indeed, we do but prattle when we presume to describe the other world, for 'it doth not appear what we shall be,' 1 John iii. 2 ; and again, 1 Cor. ii. 9, 'It hath not entered into the heart of man to conceive the great things which he hath prepared for them that love him.' Only our ear has received a little thereof, and somewhat I shall speak by and by ; only, in the general, there shall be great honour done to us, both by the Father and the Son. By the Father : John xii. 26, 'If any man serve me, let him follow me ; and where I am, there shall my servant be : if any man serve me, him shall my Father honour.' He that will suffer as Christ hath done shall fare as Christ hath done ; for he came, as to teach an afflicted persecuted people that it is no new and strange thing to be misrepresented and slandered in the world, and suffer for the hopes of a better life, so to assure and give them a visible demonstration that there is a life of glory prepared for us ; and he is in heaven, in possession of this glory, to convey it to us, and his Father will put all marks of honour upon us. And he himself, Luke xii. 37, 'He will gird himself, and make them to sit down, and come forth and serve them at the heavenly feast.' These general expressions intimate great glory which shall be put upon us ; there is enough discovered to counterbalance all the afflictions of the present world, of what nature soever they be. Are you pained with sickness, and roll to and fro in your bed like a door on the hinges, through the restless weariness of the flesh ? In heaven we shall have everlasting ease, for that is a state of rest, Heb. iv. 9. Are you cast out by man as unworthy to live in any civil society ? There you are received by the Lord into an everlasting abode with him : 1 Thes. iv. 17, 'Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air, and so shall we ever be with the Lord.' Have you lost the love of all men for your sincerity and faithfulness ? You shall everlastingly enjoy the love of God : Rom. viii. 39, 'Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to

separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.' Are you reproached, calumniated in the world? Then your faith shall be 'found to praise, glory, and honour,' 1 Peter i. 7. Are you cast into prison? You will shortly be in your Father's house, 'where there are many mansions,' John xiv. 2. Are you reduced to sordid poverty? There you read of the 'riches of the glory of the inheritance of the saints in light,' Eph. ii. 18. Have you lost children for Christ? They shall not come to you, but you shall go to them. Your temptations will be over, and your enemies will all have done; you go from hard taskmasters to your gracious and righteous Lord; your fears and sorrows will be at an end, your desires accomplished, and your expectations satisfied. Must you die, and the guest be turned out of the old house? You have 'a building of God eternal in the heavens.' You do but leave a shed to live in a palace: 2 Cor. v. 1, 'For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.' If you are forced out by the violence of man, the sword is but the key to open heaven's doors for you.

2. Here is 'a far more exceeding weight of glory' opposed to 'light affliction.' Things excellent we count weighty; small, light. What is better than that heavenly good which is offered to the faithful followers of Christ? It is good to consider a little what it is.

[1.] All evil will be then removed. There is no sighing, no sorrowing there: Rev. vii. 17, 'God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.' Three things do trouble the saints, and none of them will be in heaven. One is sin, and the frequent interruption of God's service; but there will neither be sin nor temptation, neither devils nor corrupt nature. We are all pure and holy there, the glorious church is without spot and wrinkle, Eph. v. 27. A second is the frequent interruption of a sense of God's favour. We have both clouds and sunshine here, now God lifts up the light of his countenance, and we are cheered; but then he hides his face from us, and we are troubled. But there the communion is constant, the day is without night, and an everlasting sunshine without clouds: Rev. vii. 15, 'They are before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple.' There is perpetual service and perpetual enjoyment; neither is our work interrupted, nor our blessedness. The third thing which troubleth the saints is outward persecutions, wants and straits. None of these do follow the saints into heaven. Oh what a happy time will this be, when there will be no crying out of the body of death, no complaint of violence and oppression, no mourning after a withdrawn God!

[2.] All good will be then enjoyed. The great object of our eternal blessedness is God. We enjoy him fully, familiarly, and constantly. Our nearness to God is greater, our communion more full. To our felicity three things are necessary, a prepared faculty, a suitable object, the conjunction of both these. In the state of glory all these concur. The faculty is more prepared as we are purified and clarified from the dregs of carnal sense; the object is manifested and dispensed in the greatest latitude, for there God is all in all; the conjunction is more intimate between this object and faculty. Our conjunction here is by faith and imperfect love, there by clear vision and perfect love: 'He

that is joined to the Lord' by faith and love 'is made one spirit,' 1 Cor. vi. 17. Oh, but what a conjunction will this be, when we shall be joined to the Lord by sight and perfect love! Our sight clear, 1 Cor. xiii. 12, vision shall then succeed to faith, and possession to hope. Surely then our fruition must needs be greater, and the soul be filled with all the fulness of God. It is hard to speak of the state of heaven till the great voice call upon us to come up and see what God has provided for us. But in short, vision makes way for assimilation: 1 John iii. 2, 'We shall see him as he is, and be like him;' as iron, by lying in fire, becomes as it were all fire. Assimilation makes way for satisfaction: Ps. xvii. 15, 'I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness.' The soul is then at rest; it hath enough in having God, and seeing, and loving, and being made like to him.

3. This glory is eternal, in opposition to our momentary affliction. If we desire to prolong this life, which is obnoxious to divers calamities, how much more should that life affect us, which shall be fully happy, and never have end? Surely an immortal spirit must look after an eternal happiness. All the honours of the world, which dazzle men's eyes, are vain and slippery. The riches which captivate their hearts are uncertain and perishing; and the pleasures which enchant them pass away as a wind, or, if they should continue, the relish of them will be gone. Death will put an end to them, though they often fail most men before. But this happiness will be extended throughout millions of ages. Alas! if wicked men did consider the shortness of their pleasures and the length of their sorrows, they would not be so besotted as they are. So, on the other side, if godly men did but consider the shortness of their afflictions and the length of their glory and joy, it would animate and encourage them to go on cheerfully in all their tribulations. Our glory must needs be eternal, because it depends upon the will of an immutable God, and the everlasting merit of a glorious redeemer. When either of these foundations fail, your blessedness will be at an end; but these can never fail, and therefore our glory will be everlasting.

III. That the one is the fruit of the other; for the apostle saith *κατεργάζεται*—(1.) Negatively; certainly not by way of merit, but by God's mere grace for Christ's sake. Our title is by adoption: Rom. viii. 17, 'If children, then heirs, heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.' (2.) Positively; so two ways—(1st.) By giving a right; (2d.) Preparing us for it.

1. Though our patience doth not merit, yet it giveth us a right, so as we may certainly expect it from the mercy of God: Mat. v. 12, 'Rejoice and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven.' Our transitory light sufferings are so accepted by God that they are sure to be rewarded by him with an eternal weighty crown of bliss and glory. If we have done and suffered never so much for God, yet eternal life is a gift to be taken out of the hands of grace: Rev. ii. 10, 'I will give thee the crown of life.' It is the mercy of our Redeemer, which encourageth us to hope: Jude 21, 'Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.'

2. It prepareth us for it. Afflictions are a means of mortification and holiness, as they deaden the gust of the flesh in us, draw us off from the love and esteem of this world, and awaken in us desires after heavenly things, and conduce to the reviving of the inward man day by day. So that by patient enduring these light afflictions, your title is more assured, your hearts are more prepared.

IV. Who are the parties interested? *Ἡμῶν* in the text; and they are described, ver. 18, 'Those that look not to things seen,' &c. It doth not so in all, but those that mind heavenly things, who make them the scope and end of their lives, and acquiesce in them as their supreme happiness, do not look for great things in a vain world, but are set upon getting home to God. If this be your scope, and you be true to it, you will not miss of what you do in the first place seek after. Alas! many would fain go to heaven, but give no diligence to clear up their right and interest in it, nor back their longings with those endeavours which the weight of the business requireth.

Use 1. To inform us how little cause believers have to murmur under their afflictions. (1.) They are supported in this life by the comforts of the Spirit; (2.) Rewarded with unspeakable glory in the world to come: (3.) Sufferings are necessary.

1. In this life their trials are not insupportable, but light and momentary: 1 Cor. x. 13, 'There hath no temptation taken you, but such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able to bear, but will with the temptation also make a way to escape.' All things considered, here you have more cause of joy than sorrow. A few only are called to suffer for Christ, and those in our days suffer but a little, a few mocks and scorns of foolish men, and will you begrudge this? The experience occasioned by patience should recompense it: Rom. v. 3, 4, 'We glory in tribulation also, knowing that tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience, and experience hope.' But then—

2. In the world to come you shall have recompense enough; it is a great reward, and a sure reward. Though you have it not in possession, you have it in promise; and will you grudge to pass through suffering into glory, and to sow in tears that you may reap in joy?

3. And these sufferings are so far from infringing, that they promote this glory. Christ seeth this is most for his glory and your good. It is necessary: 1 Peter i. 6, 'Ye are in tribulation if need be.' Oh, how many have miscarried by living in wealth, honour, and power! If God will take away the fuel of our lusts, and opportunities of sinning, shall we grudge at that necessary moderate affliction which saves us from hell, and promotes our eternal happiness?

Use 2. To persuade us—

1. To be in a condition to make use of this cordial. We must endeavour to be 'heirs of promise, that have fled for refuge, to take hold of the hope set before us,' Heb. vi. 18. You must be such that give all diligence to clear up your title by a fruitful self-denying obedience.

2. To be often meditating upon it; for a double end—

[1.] To wean yourselves from the vanities of the world, 1 Peter i. 13. What petty trifles are all things when laid in the balance against this

happiness ! Alas ! that our minds should be so apt to surfeit upon the luscious happiness of this vain world, when there are so many sweetening circumstances to endear heaven to us !

[2.] That you may be comforting and confirming your souls in the hopes of this happiness in all your troubles and afflictions : 1 Thes. iv. 18. 'Comfort one another with these words.' In heaven none are poor, destitute, afflicted, but all supplied. It is a great matter when we fetch our solace hence.
