

SERMON UPON JEREMIAH XLV. 5.

And seekest thou great things for thyself? seek them not.—JER. XLV. 5.

JEREMIAH'S former prophecies were concerning whole nations or public persons, but this passage concerneth a private man—Baruch, the prophet's scribe. What was the matter? Jeremiah had used Baruch's help for writing in a book, or gathering together in one roll or volume, what God had prophesied concerning the destruction of Jerusalem, as you may see, Jer. xxxvi. After he had written it, he was to pronounce it in the hearing of the people in the house of God on the fast-day; which he doth boldly. Some of the nobles being affected, carry the roll to the king Jechoniah, who was enraged at it, and burned the roll, and gave order to apprehend Jeremiah and Baruch; but the Lord hid them. Now because *contumacia accumulât pœnam*, God biddeth Jeremiah and Baruch write another roll, wherein were written the same things, and many more like words. But now he began to be discouraged, by considering what things were likely to befall him by the writing and publishing of this second roll. Seeing the storm arise, his heart faileth; and though before he acted valiantly, and seemed to stand out like an oak, yet now his heart shaketh like a leaf; his complaint was bitter: 'The Lord hath added grief to my sorrow.' So his lamentation is expressed, ver. 3. Upon this, the Lord telleth him he was about to pluck up all, to make desolate the Jewish state and people—as he himself knew, for he had written the roll—and should he be troubled for his own peace and safety, and desire to live at quiet and ease when all was going to wreck and ruin? never dream of any such matter; suffice it thee well that thou escapest with thy life. God would promise to spare his life; nothing else, 'and seekest thou great things,' &c.

In the words we have—

1. A reproof of Baruch, 'And seekest thou great things for thyself?'

2. A dissuasive or dehortation, 'Seek them not.'

What were these great things which he might be supposed to seek for himself? Rabbi David Kimchi and other Jewish writers think it was the gift of prophecy, or the prophetic office; that he might not only write out the prophecies of another, but be a prophet himself. Vatablus followeth them. But this is but a foolish conceit. The true reason is, when he saw the prophet but newly escaped one trouble, he was ready to fall into another; and the Jews so wedded to their sins

that they would rather tear in pieces their reprovers than be admonished by them ; and expected daily new troubles and torments if apprehended and imprisoned. It was a hot business to be assistant to a prophet so distasted : ‘The Lord hath added grief to my sorrow.’ So that these great things were a prosperous and peaceable estate for his own particular, or quiet, ease, and safety in the midst of so great calamity. Are thy concerns more precious than the temple or salvation of my people? Leave off this dream of a pleasant life in this world. Men are mightily addicted to self-love, and when God calleth them to endure great things, they seek great things for themselves ; and when they should prepare for sufferings, dream of honour, and credit, and a quiet state in the world.

Doct. That seeking great things for ourselves is a sin very unbecoming the people of God, especially in a time of common calamity.

Shouldst thou, an holy man—it is spoken with indignation—thou that hast written the prophecy, and believest, be so troublously careful for thine own safety?

I shall first state the sin in these considerations.

First, When man fell from God, he set up himself in the place of God. Self is the great idol of the world. Lay aside God, and self interposeth as the next heir to the crown. As Reuben went up unto his father's bed ; so when man had done what he could to cast God out of the throne, self usurped divine honours. It is the end of all our desires, inclinations, and endeavours, and the dominating principle in the soul ; the principle, rule, and end of all their actions. They live from self, in self, and to self, Phil. ii. 21. All men seek their own things, and none the things of Christ. Adam would be as God, provide for himself, shift for himself : ‘The man is become as one of us.’ His own personal contentment is his highest aim. Therefore Christ, when he came to restore the world as a prophet, establisheth self-denial as the first lesson : Mat. xvi. 24, ‘If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me.’ Man would be his own god, sufficient to himself, live according to his own will and for his own ends ; and there is no rectifying the nature of man till this self-love and self-will and self-seeking be unravelled. As a redeemer, he would discover such wonders of love in our recovery that self-love may be checked and quitted by the obligation of an higher love : 2 Cor. v. 14, 15, ‘If he died for all, then were all dead. And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them.’

Secondly, As self is misplaced and set in the throne of God, so self is mistaken. The soul is not counted self, but the flesh or the body ; and they value the interests of the bodily life before God and the true proper interests of the soul. The body of man is the worst half, *vilissima pars hominis*, the shell, the sheath, as it is called in Daniel. ‘That which is man is within.’ To get the soul beautified by grace is the chief thing. We never read of any man that hated his own flesh, but there are many that wrong their souls : Prov. viii. 36, ‘He that sinneth against me wrongeth his own soul.’ To please their body they neglect their souls ; yea, to please the body with sensual and worldly

things they forfeit their souls: Mat. xvi. 26, 'What is a man profited if he gain the whole world, and lose his soul?' It is in Luke, 'He loseth himself:' Luke ix. 25, 'And lose himself and be cast away.' And so a man properly loseth himself while he loveth himself sinfully. And while they seek themselves and their carnal pleasure when they live, they lose themselves when they die. The soul is not extinguished, but forfeited; not in a natural, but legal sense. While they seek the good of the body to the hurt of the soul, they do not seek their happiness, but the destruction both of body and soul. The merchant that overloadeth his ship, to the drowning both of the ship and himself, doth not seek his good, but hurt. So the man that is all for self, that is, his body, that he may live in ease, and honour, and pomp, doth not seek himself, but ruin himself; and whilst he spendeth all his time and care that he may live delectably and comfortably in this world, he maketh himself miserable for ever in the other world; his soul is snatched away of a sudden, and in time it will draw the body after it: Luke xii. 21, 'Such a fool is he that heapeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich towards God.' He only seeketh the good of his body; he accounteth that himself, and he seeks it to the prejudice of his soul; bestoweth all his time, care, endeavours in providing for his perishing carcass, and neglects to provide for his immortal soul, and so ruineth both body and soul. In short, all sin and disorder cometh from this self-love, mistaken and misplaced: 2 Tim. iii. 2, 'In the latter days men shall be lovers of themselves, proud, covetous, boasters,' &c. A long train of sin followeth. If men be lovers of themselves, they will be covetous, proud, neglecters and blasphemers of God, haters of those that are good; for this lordly idol of carnal self can neither endure superior nor equal man nor God.

Thirdly, The body being taken for self, the interests of the body and bodily life are the main things sought after. Then they must have great things for themselves here in this life, and so the world cometh in as the food and supply of the flesh, and that is set up above God as another idol. And therefore men are said to love pleasure more than God, 2 Tim. iii. 4, and the praise of men more than the praise of God, John xii. 42, and the profits of the world more than God, 1 John ii. 15; the creature more than the Creator. Present things, that are grateful to sense, are the only great things. 'Seekest thou great things for thyself?'

Great things are of two sorts; either—(1.) In reality; or, (2.) In appearance.

1. Great things in reality are God and Christ, the law of grace, the promises of pardon of sin, and eternal life: Hosea v. 12, 'I have written to them the great things of my law.' There are great things indeed discovered in the word, as a great God, a precious Saviour, the way of salvation: these are great things indeed. So 2 Peter i. 4, 'To us are given exceeding great and precious promises,' τὰ μέγιστα ἐπαγγελματα; they contain spiritual and eternal riches. These are worthy and dear-bought blessings. It argueth a low, base spirit not to seek these spiritual and heavenly things. But these suit not with carnal self, because they are only valued and esteemed by faith.

2. Great things in appearance. Those are worldly things which in reality are the smallest matters, 2 Cor. vi. 2; but the flesh counts them great because of the suitability they carry to our fancies and appetites. Great affections make the things of the world seem great; these are only great in our own conceit: Prov. xviii. 11, 'The rich man's wealth is a strong tower, and an high wall in his own conceit.' We promise ourselves much happiness from the enjoyment of these outward things, and therefore our hearts run after them. Well, then, these are the great things here spoken of.

Fourthly, When men seek earthly things, they seek them in an over-great proportion, as much of the world as they can possibly get into their hands. But you will say, How can this be applied to Baruch, when he only sought his safety and the preservation of his life, which was in danger by reason of his zeal and activity for God? I answer—

1. In troublesome times, he that would be at ease and security seeketh great things, and to be unwilling to undergo difficulties and dangers for God's sake is to seek great things for ourselves, for it argueth a spirit wedded to its own worldly felicity.

2. The same disposition, allowed without check, would carry us further. Every man, as far as he can reach, seeketh his own things. The flesh is wise in its own matters; at first it aimeth only to things which are within our grasp and reach; but then still it enlargeth itself, and would have more, and when that is obtained, we would fain be built a story higher in the world in honour and greatness. Now God can interpret the disposition of our hearts. He judgeth of the sin not according to the actual intendment of the sinner, but the intent of the sin. There is *finis operis*, and *finis operantis*. He seeth how far this disposition would carry us. Every one aspireth as high as he can, and then he would be higher. Consider Elisha's speech to Gehazi: 2 Kings v. 26, 'Is it a time to receive money, and to receive garments, and oliveyards, and vineyards, and sheep and oxen, and men-servants and maid-servants?' Why, he asked no such matter of Naaman; he asked but a talent of silver and two changes of raiment, 1 Kings v. 22. But the same covetousness and self-seeking would carry him further. The prophet dilateth on the full end of the sin: he that was weary of being the prophet's man, and must set up for himself, he must then enlarge himself into a family, and then purchase vintages, and be a great man in Israel. So Baruch seeks great things when troubled at the danger he was in for God's sake.

Fifthly, When these great things are affected, then they are sought after primarily and earnestly; their most serious and continual endeavours are after earthly things, the pleasure, honour, and profits of the world. There is an innocent regular self-love, even to the body, which sets the world a-work: Eccles. vi. 7, 'All a man's labour is for the mouth;' the support of the body and the bodily state first; a metonymy of the subject, the mouth, for the nourishment put into it; then a synecdoche, a part for the whole; food and raiment, the sum of all that he needeth. Now this is put for whole. So Prov. xvi. 20, 'He that laboureth, laboureth for himself; for his mouth craveth it of

him.' The husbandman laboureth in the earth, the mariner at sea, the shepherd in the field, the carpenter in the wood, the tradesman in the shop, the scholar at his books; they all labour for the mouth. There is apparel, lodging necessary; yet this is the most urgent necessity: a man will sell lodging, clothing, house, land, and all that he hath for his mouth: Gen. xlvii. 15-19, 'Give us bread, for why should we die?' And Joseph said, 'Give your cattle,' &c.

But then there presently cometh the faulty self-love, which showeth itself in three things—(1.) Immoderate desires; (2.) Immoderate endeavours; (3.) An ill ranking of means and ends.

1. An inordinate desire. In that place quoted, Eccles. vi. 7, 'All a man's labour is for the mouth; yet the appetite is not filled.' The covetous desire of the worldling remaineth still insatiable; though he hath abundant provision for his necessary wants, yet he toileth still as if he had nothing. The mouth is a narrow portal, the stomach not very large, the whole man not above five foot long; yet his mind not satisfied, no satisfaction nor contentment in his present state: Phil. iv. 11, 'I have learned in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. But godliness with contentment is great gain;' ver. 8, 'Having food and raiment, let us be therewith content;' Heb. xiii. 5, 'Let your conversation be without covetousness, and be content with such things as ye have,' &c. If it were so, we would comply with providence without distraction, or complaining that God hath added grief to our sorrow. But when our wandering desires still covet and crave more, we cannot so well trust ourselves with God, and refer all issues and events to his good providence; and would not grudge and repine against God, and give way to heartless dejection. But when we set our thoughts on great things, we would be maintained at such a rate, and have us and ours thus provided for, then Baruch's complaint will be ours. And therefore Baruch's reproof must be ours also. We cannot go about our duty with cheerfulness, but are full of fears and troubles; for it is lusts that breed our disquiet.

2. Immoderate endeavours. Carnal self-love will so wholly engross our endeavours, that better cares will be jostled out, and God and heaven will be neglected, the stream of our most industrious thoughts and cares run in another channel. We are bidden to labour for the meat that perisheth not; and 1 Cor. xv. 58, 'Be steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord.' We cannot do too much there. But alas! the lean kine devour the fat; the only great things are little sought after, but the fancied great things do continually set us a-work, and there appeareth not half that care, not the hundredth-part of care for heaven and the grace of Christ as there is for the pleasures, honours, and profits of the world.

3. A disorderly ranking of means and ends. There should be a subordination of all our labours to higher ends. Baruch was not to consider of life and livelihood, but to discharge his duty; but he looketh to life and safety, and subordinateth the command of God to that end: Mat. vi. 33, 'Seek first the kingdom of God.' All christians should first seek to honour God, and please God, and enjoy God. But we prefer our own ease, quiet, profit, before the glory of God, and our pre-

sent good before our future; and, to get the world, lose ourselves, sell the soul, break our peace, part with better things for these things' sake, sell our birthright for a mess of pottage, dig for iron with mattocks of gold and silver, and so grossly seek after great things for ourselves.

Sixthly, That God's people have not wholly divested themselves of this evil frame of heart. Self-love is not extinguished in them, but only mortified. They do not so grossly, heinously, and principally gratify carnal self; yet ease is good; they would have the world friendly; and when they cannot reconcile God's dispensations and their selfish and fleshly inclinations, their hearts are disquieted.

Reasons—(1.) Self is dear; (2.) The world is near; (3.) Faith is weak; (4.) Love to God is not so fervent as it should be.

1. Self is dear. A man is not wholly dispossessed of carnal self till he come to heaven. Flesh dwelleth in them, as well as the Spirit: Gal. v. 17, 'The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh.' As long as flesh dwelleth in them, they would have things grateful to sense; and sometimes in such an inordinacy that they cannot so sweetly trust God when dangers assault them, or submit to God when his providence is past; but they bewray, before the event, some diffidence; after the event, some impatience.

2. The world is near. While the soul dwelleth in flesh, and looketh out by the senses, present things will work upon us: 'Demas hath forsaken us, having loved this present world,' 2 Tim. iv. 10. Partial defection, forsaking Paul's company, loath to undergo the hazards of the gospel; so Baruch here.

3. Faith is weak, which should carry us to the world to come: 2 Cor. iv. 18, 'While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.' It is not easy to shut the eye of sense or open that of faith.

4. Love to God is not so fervent but that it suffereth some abatement by carnal self-love: 2 Tim. i. 7, 8, 'I put thee in remembrance, that thou stir up the gift of God which is in thee. For God hath not given us the spirit of fear, but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind. Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord,' &c. Timothy needed to be put in remembrance. It is hard to deny all for an unseen God.

Seventhly, The children of God may have too great desires of their own peace, safety, and welfare before some imminent calamity; as Zebedee's children: Mat. xx. 19-21, 'Then came the mother of Zebedee's children, with her sons, worshipping him, and desiring a certain thing of him. And he said unto her, What wilt thou? She saith unto him, Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand, and the other on the left in thy kingdom.' Christ had but newly foretold his passion. Oh, how hard a thing is it to get rid of the love of the world, and pleasant dreams about it! The apostles and their friends dream of an earthly kingdom, and worldly honour to Christ's servants, notwithstanding he did so often tell them the contrary, and did study to prepare them for the cross. Oh, how necessary

is it that all should watch their hearts, that the love of the world may not creep upon them! Once more, the disciples quarrelled at Christ's last supper who should be greatest, Luke xxii. 24, which should be looked upon as the worthiest, and so be preferred before the rest. So Baruch here, who had written the roll, and believed it, and so must know that God was about to pluck up and cast down; yet he seeketh his own personal welfare, loath to hazard his interests for God. The best men are too much apt to be taken up with a care of their own safety, and so neglect their duty.

Reasons.

1. That it is a sin misbecoming the people of God.

[1.] They have chosen God for their portion, and so seek all their happiness and comfort in him, and not delight in anything apart from God. If they lose all, they have enough in God: 1 Sam. xxx. 6, 'The people spake of stoning him, but David encouraged himself in the Lord his God;' Hab. iii. 18, 'Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, &c., yet I will rejoice in the Lord; I will joy in the God of my salvation.' On the contrary, Saul comforted himself in the creature when he had lost God's favour: 1 Sam. xv. 29, 30, 'Then he said, I have sinned: yet honour me now, I pray thee, before the elders of my people, and before Israel, and turn again with me, that I may worship the Lord thy God.' The Lord hath rejected thee; yet honour me before the people. He should have mourned to get God's favour again. To rejoice in anything besides God, that is, apart from God, and not in order to him, is adultery. Covetousness, which is but another word for seeking great things for ourselves, is sometimes called idolatry, Eph. v. 3, because it is a setting up another chief good, and so another God. And sometimes adultery: James iv. 4, 'Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world, is the enemy of God.' If God hath given thee the creatures as servants, they must not come into the master's bed.

[2.] They have resigned themselves to God, are not their own, and have nothing their own, but in order to God: 1 Cor. vi. 19, 20, 'Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost, which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's;' Rom. xiv. 18, 'He that in these things serveth Christ, is acceptable to God, and approved of men.'

[3.] You cannot seek great things for yourselves, but you must make light of Christ; when a man seeks things, but doth not seek the things of Christ also: Phil. ii. 2, 'All seek their own, and not the things which are Jesus Christ's.' They are propounded as *ἑωυστάτα*, that is, his own things chiefly and principally. If he be thus addicted to his own things, he will seek them before and more than the things of Christ; his own profit and preferment, his own praise and glory, more than the profit, praise, and honour of Christ and his gospel. The Gadarenes preferred hogs before Christ, the merchants their merchandise, the farmers their farms, Mat. xxii. 3. At least it will be a blot upon your service; you cannot act with such a pure spirit when you seek your

own ease, safety, profit, not caring what becometh of Christ and his interest in the world.

[4.] Self-seeking is very dishonourable to religion. The world is very sensible of it : Job i. 9, 'Doth Job serve God for nought?' The world, which is upheld by a combination of interests, judge of others by themselves, think religion is but a cleaner way of self-seeking. Therefore if we seek great things for ourselves, we lie open to their reproach.

[5.] Our Redeemer pleased not himself, Rom. xv. 3; therefore he taught us not his religion that we might make an advantage of it to scramble for worldly things.

[6.] It is not only an evil thing, but an evil sign, to be carried out to temporal things for self-ends. Some sins are evil, but not evil signs; as sudden passions, fainting in great troubles, vain thoughts. But this is an evil sign : James iv. 4, 'Know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world, is the enemy of God;' and 1 John ii. 15, 'Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world; if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.'

2. Especially in the calamities of the church and people of God. The time maketh sins more odious : 'Is this a time to receive money,' &c., 2 Kings v. 26. It is to lay a stumbling-block in the way of new converts. Christ was angry with the pharisees for not discerning the signs of the times. It is noted as a great shame in the enemies that they gave themselves to jollity when the people of God were devoted to destruction : Esther iii. 15, 'And the king and Haman sat down to drink, but the city Shushan was perplexed.' That jollity is noted when the ruin of God's people was determined, and that they used carnal jollity when it was a time of mourning. It is too soft and delicate a thing for one's self to desire security and safety when the whole is in danger. It is as if we were building our own nests when the tree is cutting down, or mending our cabin when the ship is likely to be torn in pieces or sinking. Is it a time to drive a trade for ourselves when we should drive it for heaven? We will not be diverted from the creature when God seemeth ready to snatch it out of our hands. The holy men of God would take their share and lot with God's people. Joseph was high, yet made no provision for his children in Egypt; they went with their brethren into Canaan. Moses chose rather affliction with the people of God, &c., Heb. xi. 25. God maketh him his minister to disinherite the seed of Moloch, and people of God come out of Moses' loins : 'Blot me out of thy book.' Joshua thought of no inheritance for himself, till by lot he had given inheritance to all the tribes.

Use. To dissuade us from seeking great things for ourselves. To this end—

1. Take down self. What greatness is in this self that thou shouldst be of such account with God, or that thou dost so project for it? What a low conceit of themselves have the best saints had? 'I am a worm, and no man,' saith Christ. The least of saints, the greatest of sinners, saith Paul. The best of God's children have abhorred themselves, like the spire of a steeple, *minus in summo*, the least at the highest. David a king, yet like a weaned child.

2. What are these great things which carnal sense craveth? The world, *οἰκῆμα*, 1 Cor. vii. 31, an empty pageantry, a fair outside, not skin-deep. Broken cisterns hold but a little; if God shall fill them up, they cannot hold, but leak out our comfort if not filled again. God hath written a book on purpose to take off men's hearts from the creatures, and employed Solomon about it, who took not only a sensual but a critical delight in them, and he found them all vanity and vexation of spirit.

END OF VOL. XXI.