

SERMON XXXV.*

CHRIST'S PASTORAL CARE.

Feed thy people with thy rod, the flock of thine heritage, which dwell solitarily in the wood, in the midst of Carmel: let them feed in Bashan and Gilead, as in the days of old.—MICAH vii. 14.

IT is not much I shall offer unto you from these words; yet I cannot give you a right apprehension of the mind of God in them, and what I intend from them, without a little going over the chapter from the beginning. 'Woe is me, for I am as when they have gathered the summer fruits,' &c. ver. 1. When the prophet says, 'Woe is me,' he speaks in the name of the earth, say some, as it was the seat of the church of God: I rather take it to be in the name of the church of God, of those who were truly so, in the midst of a profane, but outwardly professing people. And this lamentation is with a prospect and view of the sin which was in the people, and of the misery which was coming upon them. They have both of them ever been matter of lamentation unto all that truly fear God. They cannot consider the sins and the miseries of an outwardly professing people, but every one of them ought to cry, Woe is me; sorrow is to me; sadness of heart is to me. In respect of sin David saith, Psal. cxix. 136. 'Rivers of waters run down mine eyes, because men keep not thy law.' And in respect of misery and judgments, Jeremiah expresses his sense thus, chap. ix. 1. 'O that mine head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people.' The prophet foreseeing both these, an overflowing of sin, and an overflowing of judgment, had reason to cry, 'Woe is me,' it is a lamentation unto me.

He gives an account of the state of the professing, visible church, which he looks upon to be like unto a field or a vineyard after the harvest is past, and the vintage over: 'I am as when they have gathered the summer fruits, as the grape-gleanings of the vintage:' there is no cluster to eat: my soul desireth the first ripe fruit. His prayer was, that

* This sermon was preached October 16, 1673.

they might be a fruitful vineyard unto God; but, saith he, we are just as when the vintage is over, there are some grapes, some clusters left under the leaves, but the principal are taken off: and not only so, but when a field is reaped, or a vineyard gathered, the owner leaves it for a season, takes down the fence, and the beasts come in and prey upon it, until the time of culture and tillage is come again. God never leaves a professing church to be a wilderness, unless upon the utmost apostacy; but he many times leaves them to be as a field after harvest, or a vineyard after the vintage. God will leave Babylon to be as a wilderness, that shall never be tilled any more, shall have no rain, no fences, no tillage: but he will not leave his church so, unless the utmost apostacy come. In like manner, when a man hath gathered in his corn out of the field, you would think he had thrown off all his care about it, the fence is broken down, and the beasts come in; it lies in common, men ride over it, and trample upon it, and he lets it alone: but when the time of culture is come again, the man makes up his fence, drives out the cattle, tills the ground again, and sows it with good seed, that it may bring forth good fruit. So God deals frequently with his church. He dealt so with them here. He takes down the hedge, he suffers the wild beasts to come in, lets persons spoil at their pleasure: but there will come a time of culture again, when he will have fruit brought forth unto his praise.

In ver. 2. the prophet refers the evil he complained of, unto two heads: First, That those who were good were very few; and, Secondly, That those who were evil were very bad. 'The good man is perished out of the earth, and there is none upright among men; they all lie in wait for blood; they hunt every man his brother with a net.' This phrase, 'The good man is perished out of the earth,' is not that the good man perisheth, but that he is taken away, and the earth hath lost the benefit and advantage which it had by him. The same expression is used, Isa. lvii. 1. 'The righteous perisheth, and no man layeth it to heart; and the merciful men are taken away.' And, Psal. xii. 1. 'The godly man ceaseth, the faithful fail from among the children of men.'

From hence therefore we may observe, that when the good are very few, and the bad are very bad, inevitable de-

struction lies at the door of that place or nation. If either of these be otherwise, there is yet hope. If there had been but ten good men in Sodom, it had been spared. If the sin of the Amorites had not been come to the full, they had not been ruined. If the good therefore are not very few, or the bad very bad, there is yet hope; but where both concur in a professing nation, as in this, which was the visible church of God, unavoidable destruction is at the door, there is neither hope nor recovery: and therefore, they that endeavour to make men good, to increase the number of the good, they do not only endeavour to save their own souls, but they endeavour to save the nation from ruin. And we will place our plea and our cause there, wherein we are engaged in this world, against the world, and those that do reproach us, that our design is to save the nation as far as we are able; for it is to increase the number of the good, to convert men unto God, the consequence of which is to preserve the nation: and it will at last be found, that they who are useful herein, do more for the preservation of the nation, than armies or navies can do. But when the prophet says, 'The good man perisheth, and there is none upright among men,' it is an hyperbolical expression, intimating, that there are but few that are either good or upright.

From the description of the other part of men, you may observe two things: First, The instance of their sin; Secondly, The manner of the prosecution of it. The instance of their sin was blood; which word comprises all violence, oppression, cruelty, and persecution: and the way of prosecuting this evil is with much diligence and great endeavours: 'They lie in wait for blood; and they hunt every man his brother.' Or, as it is expressed, ver. 3. 'They do evil with both hands earnestly.' And where men do lay out all their wisdom, and all their industry and strength in the pursuit of sin, there also destruction lies at the door. When men are slothful, careless, negligent, sensual in all other things; but industrious only in doing evil, this is another thing the prophet lays down, as a certain sign of approaching destruction.

Having spoken this of the body of the people, he divides them into two parts; the rulers, and the residue of the people: and the rulers he also distributes into three sorts;

the prince, the judge, and the great man. Thus saith he, 'The prince asketh, and the judge asketh for a reward, and the great man uttereth his mischievous desire;' ver. 3. I shall not particularly open these words, but this is what the prophet would teach us: that when there is, as it were, a conspiracy in all sorts of rulers to commit the same iniquity, and to wrap up the whole business by agreement among themselves; so that there is none to intercede, none to stand in the gap, none to do otherwise; that lies in a tendency to those judgments which he will afterward declare. And this was the state of affairs at that time: for this prophecy was given in the days of Ahaz; and there was a great agreement and conspiracy among all in power then to oppress, and to carry on their own covetous and mischievous desires, as they could: they agreed together, and so wrapt it up.

In ver. 4. he speaks as to the residue of the people: 'The best of them,' saith he, 'is as a brier; the most upright is sharper than a thorn-hedge.' The prophet, after he had laid so great a charge upon them, seems to reflect upon some that made a great pretence of friendliness to the church of God, pretending they would be a hedge, a fence unto it; but, saith he, they prove 'briers and a thorn-hedge.' This hypocritical part of the nation, who speak so fair, and make such a mighty appearance of friendship, yet when a man presses upon them, tear and rend him, and give him nothing but trouble and vexation; whatever pretences they make, there is nothing to be expected from them but what you would look for from briers and thorns. And I observe that the prophet, upon this occasion of dealing with this hypocritical part of the people, doth insert a threatening as though the judgment should fall more upon them, than those whose open wickedness he had before described. Therefore, 'the day of thy watchmen, and thy visitation cometh:' that is, the day which the watchmen had so often declared would come upon them, for their false and hypocritical dealing with God: 'now shall be their perplexity.' When false professors make a specious pretence to relieve the church, but really neither design nor effect any thing for them, but farther vexation and rending; the day of the watchmen is then at hand.

In the 5th and 6th verses, he sheweth that this universal

corruption that was among the people had extended itself to all sorts of relations, that there was nothing of confidence left even among relations. 'Trust ye not in a friend, put ye not confidence in a guide; keep the doors of thy mouth from her that lieth in thy bosom. For the son dishonoureth the father, the daughter riseth up against her mother, the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; a man's enemies are the men of his own house.' It is a sign of extreme confusion when disorder breaks in among relations, and all grounds of confidence between them are taken away. But this place is applied by our Saviour particularly unto the time of persecution for the gospel, Luke xii. 53. Matt. x. 35, 36. There is no wilderness doth so debauch the nature of man, and break off all confidence in the nearest and strongest relations, as an enmity to godliness and persecution thereon. When once they are engaged in this, then, saith our Saviour, it shall be so and so.

This being the state and condition of the people of the land, the prophet makes in the name of the church a three-fold application of himself; first to God, ver. 7. secondly, to her enemies, ver. 8. 10. and thirdly, to himself, ver. 9.

First, Upon the prospect of this state and condition, he makes application to God: 'Therefore, I will look unto the Lord,' saith he, 'I will wait for the God of my salvation: my God will hear me;' ver. 7. When all things are in confusion, and at a loss, the people of God are not discouraged from looking unto God; yea, they are encouraged thereunto; and it is made necessary for them so to do. And in such a season not to be looking peculiarly unto God, is an evidence of a heart insensible of the state and condition of the church of God.

Secondly, The prophet, in the name of the church, applies himself unto her enemies; 'Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy; when I fall I shall arise; when I sit in darkness, the Lord shall be a light unto me. Then she that is mine enemy shall see it, and shame shall cover her, which said unto me, Where is the Lord thy God? Mine eyes shall behold her; now shall she be trodden down as the mire of the streets;' ver. 8. 10.

We may observe here,

1. Who this enemy is; 'She that is mine enemy.' Some

say one thing, some another. Certainly it is some false church, it may be Babylon, or Samaria, or the false professors among themselves. But as Samaria was not yet carried captive, I take it most probably to be the false worshippers of Dan and Bethel, the false church that dwelt in the same land with them. There is no enemy to the true church of God like the false church.

2. Wherein this her enemy did shew her enmity. He doth not speak of those enemies that outwardly wasted and destroyed them, but of that enemy which said unto her, 'Where is now the Lord thy God?' That enemy which reproached them with their profession of faith in God, their nearness unto God, and of God's accepting of them, which is the reproach of the false church continually. Others that are open heathens do not think so much of it; but the false church's reproach usually is, 'Where is the Lord your God?' Where are your prayers and waitings upon God? Where is your confidence in him?

3. She intimates that there was some countenance in her present state and condition, through the providence of God, given to the enemy, thus to reproach her; 'Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy, when I fall.' There is a fall that gives countenance to this enemy so to reproach her. But to all these reproaches she opposes her confidence in God; 'My God will save me.' And she comforts herself, that the time was coming, when God would certainly destroy this enemy of his church; this enemy, that is, any church of false worshippers, who reproach the church of God under their straits and difficulties with former trusting and confidence in God.

Thirdly, He applies to himself, personating the church, ver. 9. 'I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him,' &c. Here is a very becoming frame under the present state of affliction; a deep humiliation for sin, and a quiet submission to the corrections of God's hand; but at the same time here is expressed the firm resolution of faith, to wait till God should plead her cause, and execute judgment on her enemies; there seems to be the utmost confidence in this case; 'He will bring me forth to the light, and I shall behold his righteousness.'

The issue of the whole of this prophecy, is the deliverance

of the church, and that restoration which was accomplished in part in the deliverance of this people a long while after out of captivity. 'In the day that thy walls are to be built, in that day shall the decree be far removed. In that day also he shall come even to thee from Assyria,' &c. All the people that have been scattered about shall be gathered to Zion, to worship God in his temple; ver. 11, 12. But when he had said this, he doth, as it were, correct himself. Ay, but stay, that is not yet to come, ver. 13. 'Notwithstanding,' saith he, 'the land shall be desolate, because of them which dwell therein, for the fruit of their doings.' As if he had said, Notwithstanding all this, though God hath thoughts and a purpose of mercy for his own, hidden, secret people; yet there is a time when he will by no means turn away the judgments that are due unto the provocations of the generality of professors. God will indeed do all these things for his church in the appointed time; but 'notwithstanding the land shall be desolate,' there is no avoiding that. The description of things given before is such, that there is no issuing of it but in the desolation of the land; because of the wickedness of them that dwell therein, and for the fruit of their doings.

I have made these short observations upon this part of the chapter to give you the state of things here represented. The land was full of sin, and of horrible provocations of God amongst all sorts of people, from the highest to the lowest. The people of God secretly complain hereof, and bear it as their burden, and tremble at the thoughts of judgments approaching. God had irrevocably, irrecoverably decreed desolation upon the whole land. Things were so stated, that whatever might be the mercy and goodness of God and his thoughts towards his people, notwithstanding, the land was to be desolate.

In this state and condition, the prophet puts up this request; 'Feed thy people with thy rod, the flock of thine heritage which dwell solitarily in the wood, in the midst of Carmel; let them feed in Bashan and Gilead, as in the days of old.'

The observation I shall make from the words is this:

Observation. In the most calamitous season, in the greatest inundation of sin and judgment, under the unavoidable-

ness of public judgments, there is yet ground for faith to plead with God for the preservation, safety, and deliverance of his people.

All these things are here laid down: a calamitous season; an inundation of sin and judgment; and an irrecoverable purpose of God to destroy the land: yet faith, I say, hath ground in this state and condition to plead with God for the preservation and protection of his own secret people. You will say, This is no great matter. It may be we have heard arguments that God will preserve them, and deliver them; and have heard the time computed, when God will deliver them, and could say amen to it. But it is to no purpose to go farther in teaching, than in endeavours to raise up our faith and believing. I confess I can go no farther than this, that I have ground for duty; and to leave all the rest to God's sovereignty. If God should inevitably decree to destroy this nation, yet we have ground for faith to plead with God for the preservation and deliverance of his own inheritance.

I shall go no farther than the text to prove it; for the opening the text, and the proof of the doctrine will be one and the same.

In the words we have,

I. What is prayed for, what the prophet pleads for; and that is, 'Feed thy people with thy rod.'

II. There are the arguments of faith the prophet pleads in this condition, when God had inevitably decreed desolation to the whole land; and these are four: 1. That they were God's people; 'Feed thy people.' 2. That they were the flock of his heritage; 'Feed thy people, the flock of thine heritage.' 3. That they 'dwelt solitarily in the wood, in the midst of Carmel.' 4. That God had in former days 'fed them in Bashan and Gilead.'

I shall briefly handle these things, and both shew you what is prayed for, and what in these arguments faith hath to plead in such a condition. For though God may say concerning a nation, Plead no more for it; yet he never saith so concerning his own people.

I. We shall consider what the prophet here prays for; which is, that God would feed his people with his rod. 'Feed thy people with thy rod.' God is here compared to a

shepherd; and it is a relation that he doth very frequently in Scripture take to himself; and you know what a large field I have to walk in, if I would insist upon the allusion. God is a shepherd, and Christ is a shepherd; therefore he saith, 'Feed thy people with thy rod.' The word שבט here used sometimes is put for a sceptre, wherewith kings rule; sometimes for a staff; and sometimes for a rod. It was the instrument, whatever it was, that shepherds used in those days. It is mentioned, Psal. xxiii. which is a great description of God, as a shepherd; 'Thy rod and thy staff;' the same word as here. God, as a shepherd, rules his people with a rod, which they used both for direction and correction. He will not strike his sheep with great and violent instruments to break their bones, to destroy them; but he makes them know he hath a rod in his hand. But I take it, that this rod was principally for the direction of the flock; and he prays that God would 'feed them with his rod.' Truly we have reason to consider what is in this word, because I think here is a rule of faith given us what we are to pray for the people of God, in such a day as we have described. The great thing we are to pray for now, is, that God would 'feed them;' not that God would make them kings, and rulers, and great men, and give them the necks of their enemies to tread upon, and such kind of things; but when things are thus, saith he, your prayer should be, that God would 'feed them.' There are three things in this feeding of God's people.

1. That God would supply their spiritual and temporal wants, that they may be preserved from great distresses: this is in the word. Rev. xii. 6. 'The woman fled into the wilderness, and God fed her there.' While the woman was in the wilderness, she was preserved with such spiritual and temporal supplies, as kept her from destroying distresses. This we may pray for, this we have a rule for, when we fear inevitable desolation is approaching upon a nation: God allows us to pray, and gives us a ground of faith to pray, that for his own people he would provide spiritual and temporal supplies, so as they may be kept from great distress.

2. There is in this feeding of them as a shepherd, that God, in that state which is coming upon them, would give them pledges, singular pledges of his own tenderness and love. It is so said of Christ under the like comparison,

Isa. xl. 11. 'He shall feed his flock like a shepherd.' How is that? 'He shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young.' We have this in the rule of faith for prayer at this day, that God would deal with all believers of all sorts according to their weakness, and according to their wants; that when the day of visitation, and the day of perplexity comes upon the world, Christ in a way of feeding would suit himself to every one's condition. Some may be more able to be driven before, others must be carried in his arms, and in his bosom. We must pray therefore, that he will deal with every one of them according to their state and condition.

3. By feeding is intended rule, protection, deliverance; present rule and protection, and deliverance in God's appointed time. It is not for a shepherd merely to carry his flock into good pasture; but he is to take care to preserve them from all evil, whereunto they are exposed. David, that great shepherd, who was a type of Christ, gives this account of himself: 'I was a shepherd, and I kept my father's sheep; and there came out a lion and a bear, and took a lamb out of the flock: and I followed him, and smote him; and when he rose up against me, I took him by the beard and slew him;' 1 Sam. xvii. 34, 35. This was part of David's care as a shepherd over his sheep. Feeding is ruling in the word here used: and chap. v. 4. it manifestly intends rule and protection: 'He shall stand and feed' or rule 'in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God, and they shall abide.' It is such a feeding of Christ in the majesty and in the power of God, as his people shall be preserved by. We have therefore in our rule particularly this comprised, thus far we may go; necessary supplies of spiritual and temporal, inward and outward mercies; grace and mercy towards all, according as their state and condition doth require; to the weak, diseased, those that are great with young, protection and powerful deliverance in God's good time.

This is the first thing, What it is we have a rule to pray for, even in the most calamitous season, and when inevitable destruction is decreed against a place or nation.

II. Let us now consider the arguments of faith to be

pleaded in this case, which our text affords. And these, as I have said, are four.

I would only first observe of these arguments in general, that there is no one of them taken from any thing of worth, of desert, from any thing of good, nay nor of grace, that is in the people themselves; but they are all taken from God himself, and the relation which they have to God, and what God had formerly done for them. Whatever pleadings or arguings in such a day we may have in our own spirits with God for safety and protection, if they are secretly influenced with thoughts that we are good, and better than others, there is nothing of faith in our arguings. God knows, all the graces and fruits of all believers and professors in this nation considered in themselves, will not make up one argument. But to proceed.

1. The first argument the prophet here uses, is, that they were the people of God: 'Feed thy people.' They were the people of God upon a threefold account, each of which contains an argument.

(1.) They are the people of God upon the account of election. Christ commands the apostle to abide preaching the gospel at Corinth with this argument: 'I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee; for I have much people in this city;' Acts xviii. 10. They were the people of God by election; God had eternally chosen them, and designed them to be converted by the gospel, by the preaching of his ministry.

Will this afford any argument to plead with God? Yes: Luke xviii. 7, 8. 'Shall not God avenge his own elect which cry day and night unto him; though he tarry long? I tell you he will avenge them speedily.' The argument for vengeance is from his people's being his elect: 'Shall he not avenge his elect?' There is something in God's decree of election and choosing his people, that may be pleaded with him for the highest part of feeding, which is to avenge them of their enemies.

(2.) They are the people of God by purchase and acquisition. This was the great plea under the Old Testament. 'The people of the Lord whom thou hast redeemed with a high hand, and with a stretched out arm:' whom thou hast taken out of the world, and planted for thyself. He made

it his argument to plead with God, because they were his people by purchase and acquisition; 'by a high hand, and by an outstretched arm.' And the argument is grown more strong under the gospel, because they are purchased by the blood of his Son: Rom. viii. 32. 'If God spared not his own Son, but gave him up to death for us all; how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?' The people we plead for are God's elect people, and he will avenge his elect speedily; they are God's purchased people, and that purchased with the blood of his Son; and will he not together with him give them all things, all necessary things, all things that pertain to life and godliness? Here is ground for faith to plead with God in such a case.

(3.) They are God's people by covenant. This is that which makes up their relation, which is prepared in election, acquisition, purchase, and redemption; but the formal denomination arises from the covenant. Jer. xxxii. 38—40. 'I will make a covenant with them, and they shall be my people, and I will be their God:' that completes the relation. Hosea ii. 23. speaks also to the same purpose.

What arguments arise from hence, that they are the covenant people of God? The sum of all arguments that can be pleaded upon that head, and they are great and many, are all laid down, Luke i. 68, &c. 'Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for he hath visited and redeemed his people, and hath raised up an horn of salvation for us,' &c. 'as he hath spoken by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began; that we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us; to perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant, the oath which he swore to our father Abraham, that he would grant unto us, that we, being delivered out of the hands of our enemies, might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness all the days of our lives.' Here is all we have warrant to pray for; all that is comprised in God's feeding of us. What is the plea and argument for it? God will 'remember his holy covenant, the oath which he hath sworn,' whereby it is established; and hence he will establish us, that we may 'serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness, all the days of our life.' A great argument! that those we plead for are God's cove-

nant people. 'Lord, feed thy people,' those that are thine by election, by acquisition and purchase, and those that are thine by covenant, a people that have made a covenant with thee.

2. The next argument is, because they are 'the flock of thine heritage.' There are two things in this argument that we may plead with God: (1.) That they are 'a flock;' (2.) That they are 'the flock of God's heritage.'

(1.) They are 'a flock;' that is, of sheep, wherein these three things are comprised, which are pleadable with God:

[1.] That they are helpless; [2.] Harmless; [3.] Useful. A flock of sheep is so.

[1.] They are helpless. Sheep are poor, helpless creatures; the more of them there are, the more are they exposed unto all manner of rapine and destruction, when left unto themselves. They are poor, helpless creatures. And truly so are the people of God, unless Christ their shepherd be with them. They are and have been a poor, helpless people throughout the whole world. I confess, when Christ their shepherd goes before them, they will go through great difficulties; but of themselves they are altogether helpless.

[2.] They are harmless. So are sheep; and it is required of all the saints of God, that they be so likewise; Phil. ii. 15. 'Be harmless in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation.' Let us do the world no harm, neither public nor private; do them no wrong, nor injury; that we may have an argument from hence to plead with God.

[3.] Sheep are useful; and I will name three things (though I love not to pursue allegories) wherein the people of God are useful in the world. 1st. In the secret blessing that goes along with them. 2dly. In the good example they give. 3dly. In their industry in the world.

1st. There is a secret blessing goes along with them; as you see here, chap. v. 7. of this prophecy: 'The remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst,' or in the bowels 'of many people, as a dew from the Lord, as the showers upon the grass, that tarrieth not for man, nor waiteth for the sons of men.' This poor remnant of Jacob that lies in the bowels of the people, communicates secret blessings to them; this remnant is as the dew that makes them spring; all they have is from this remnant of Jacob in their bowels. But

who sees it? No, saith he, it is not such a dew; 'it tarrieth not for man;' none see the secret way whereby the dew falls; nor those secret ways whereby blessings are communicated to the whole nation from this secret remnant of Jacob, that lies in the bowels of them.

2dly. They are useful from the good example they give; walking in the world as becomes creatures made to the glory of God. Tit. iii. 8. 'This is a faithful saying, that they which have believed in God, might be careful to maintain good works: these things are good and profitable unto men.' Not only unto them who are relieved by them, but unto all mankind it is profitable. When professors are diligent and fruitful in good works, all mankind is profited by their example.

3dly. They are profitable and useful in the world by their industry in it. Tit. iii. 14. 'Let ours also learn to maintain good works,' to profess honest trades, 'for necessary uses, that they be not unfruitful:' useful to the world by their 'industry in their honest trades;' the words may be well rendered so, and it is so in the margin of your Bibles. Many others help only to consume the fruits of the earth in luxury and wantonness; but God gives these an industry in their honest callings. Here is argument in this, that this flock is helpless, harmless, fruitful, useful. But,

(2.) The main of this argument lies upon the adjunct. Saith he, 'Feed the flock of thine heritage.' This flock is God's heritage. Deut. xxxii. 9. 'The Lord's portion is his people, Jacob is the lot of his inheritance.' Why the lot of his inheritance? When the people came to possess the land, it was divided to them all by lot. God hath his lot in the world. That which, if I may so say, is fallen to God's share, is this flock; and Christ rejoices in it, Psal. xvi. 5, 6. 'The lines are fallen to me in pleasant places, and I have a goodly heritage.' His lot was cast in Canaan, in a good and fruitful place. Christ takes a view of his church, and is satisfied with it. I desire no more, saith he, 'The lines are fallen to me in a pleasant place,' this my lot is a 'goodly heritage.'

And these things may be pleaded from this, that they are 'the flock of God's heritage:'

[1.] It being God's heritage, if he take not care of it, no-

body else will. Every man takes care of his own heritage, that which belongs to him; and if God take not care of his, there is none else to care for them. It is frequently so expressed, that they are such as none care for. Why? It is not their heritage. It is not the heritage of princes, and great men of the world; of the Turk, or the pope. As therefore it is God's heritage, if he will not take care of it, it is in vain to expect it from any other.

[2.] It is the heritage of him whom the whole world looks upon to be their greatest enemy. The whole world is at enmity against God: and you see the state of things in the world; every one's design is to destroy the heritage of his enemy. As long as the world continues in this enmity against God, its whole design is to destroy his heritage. Look upon the nations abroad in all their agitations, their main design is to ruin this heritage, because it is God's, against whom they maintain enmity in their hearts, worship, and ways. If therefore God doth not take care of his own heritage, it will certainly be destroyed, because his.

[3.] This argument may also be pleaded: if this flock be the lot of God's heritage, then take it away, and the whole world is hell. If God's lot be out, if this remnant be destroyed, let men make things as fine as they will, adorn their dungeons as much as they please, it is all but hell.

These are the arguments that may be pleaded with God from this: 'Feed thy people,' and 'the flock of thy heritage.' It is a poor, helpless, harmless flock, yet useful to the glory of God, and the good of men. It is God's heritage, if he minds it not, none will; and if it be taken out of the earth, it will presently become a hell. This is the second argument in the text for faith to plead with God.

3. The third argument is taken from their state and condition: 'That they dwell solitarily in the wood, in the midst of Carmel.' The first argument pleads God's glory, his love, and faithfulness: 'Thy people' in covenant. The second argument pleads God's interest: 'The flock of thy heritage.' This third argument pleads God's pity and compassion; 'Which dwell solitarily in the wood, in the midst of Carmel.' Every word hath argument in it to plead with God in this case.

(1.) They 'dwell solitarily;' that is, disconsolately. It

is a poor disconsolate flock, that dwells separate from relief. This takes in two things: Inward disconsolation from themselves, and their own fears and distresses; and outward helplessness. They are where none comes at them to relieve them. It is a great plea, the solitariness of God's flock, with the compassion and mercy of God for their relief. It may be, through our peace and plenty, and such things as we enjoy, we are not so sensible of the efficacy of this argument; but the Lord knows, and many of his understand, how strong a plea it is with God upon that account: we are a poor solitary people, comfortless within, and helpless without.

(2.) As they 'dwell solitarily;' so 'in the wood;' that is, in a dark and entangled condition. They are not only solitary, disconsolate, and helpless; but they are in the dark, see not their way, and so in danger to wander; and if they are out of the certain path, the wild beasts of the forest are ready to devour them. There is nothing harder with the people of God at this day, than that they are in the wood, where it is difficult to find their way. The Lord make them careful, and to see the steps of their shepherd going before them, that they may not wander, and so be exposed to the wild beasts that are ready to devour them.

(3.) Another plea is from the place where this wood is: it is 'in the midst of Carmel.' Though there was a particular place so called, yet the word is a common name for a fruitful field for feeding: the country or nation where they lived was such. Some think this hath relation to Babylon, which was very fruitful unto the inhabitants of it; yet the poor remnant dwelt in the wood, in the midst of Carmel. The Jews did so. Nehemiah gives us a most pathetic description of their state, chap. ix. 36, 37. 'Behold, we are servants this day; and for the land that thou gavest unto our fathers to eat the fruit thereof, and the good thereof, behold, we are servants in it. And it yieldeth much increase unto the kings whom thou hast set over us, because of our sins; also they have dominion over our bodies, and over our cattle at their pleasure, and we are in great distress.' This people 'dwelt in the wood, in the midst of Carmel,' a land good and pleasant, yet they were in a distressed condition.

(4.) There is yet another plea in it for mercy: that they

are not only solitary for a little season, entered into the wood; but they dwell in this solitary condition, have been long in it, and may continue long so; it signifies an abiding or continuing in that state. This argument, as I told you, respects the pity, the bowels of God, his compassion and tenderness, when his poor people shall dwell and abide long solitary, in an entangled, perplexed condition, as in a wood, in the midst of a fruitful land, that God had given their fathers. It is so at this day with many of God's people; and it is a great plea for mercy and compassion.

4. There is one argument more in the words, which I shall but name, and I have done. 'Let them feed,' saith he, 'in Bashan and Gilead, as in the days of old.' Bashan and Gilead were places of very fruitful pasture. Whence the children of Reuben and Gad desired Moses, that they might have their possession in Gilead, and in the kingdom of Bashan; 'because,' say they, 'it is a place for cattle, and thy servants have much cattle.' It was a fruitful place where their flocks were well fed and nourished.

Where lies the argument here? It is fetched from former experiences of what God had done. It is from God's faithfulness grounded upon former experience. We have seen what God can do, how he hath brought his people out of straits, and carried them through difficulties, and delivered them out of troubles, and fed them in Bashan, and in the land of Gilead: which is made an argument, that he would feed them so again.

I might press this argument farther; but I shall offer nothing more at present; and I think what I have said is not unseasonable. We have seen the state of things laid before us, that we have a rule of faith what to pray for in such a day, that God would feed his people. We have shewed you what is contained therein, and have gone over briefly those arguments that may be pleaded with God in such a case, reserving the time and season unto his own sovereignty.