

SERMON X.*

THE USE AND ADVANTAGE OF FAITH IN A TIME OF PUBLIC CALAMITY.

But the just shall live by his faith.—HAB. ii. 4.

THIS is the first time these words are mentioned in the Scripture, but they are three times quoted by the apostle Paul; he preached as it were thrice upon them. Rom. i. 17. Gal. iii. 11. Heb. x. 38. For it is full of heavenly matter, and is made use of by the apostle to several purposes. I know no one text that hath been more preached upon, or more written upon by them who have treated of the life of faith; how they just live the life of justification; and how they live the life of sanctification, the life of consolation, the life of peace, the life of joy, the life of obedience, &c. My design is quite of another nature, and is that which falls in with the design of the prophet in the first use of the words, as we shall presently see.

You know, that for many years, upon all these occasions, without failing, I have been warning of you continually of an approaching calamitous time, and considering the sins that have been the causes of it. The day is with the Lord, the year, and month I know not; but I have told you, 'That judgment will begin at the house of God;' that in the latter days of the church, 'perilous times will come;' that God seems to 'have hardened our hearts from his fear;' and caused us 'to err from his way;' and that none knows what 'the power of his wrath will be.' In all these things I have foretold you of perilous, distressing, calamitous times; and in all men's apprehensions, they now lie at the door, and are entering in upon us. Now I must change my design; and my present work will be both upon this, and, if I live, upon some other occasions, to shew how we ought to deport ourselves in and under the approaches of distressing calamities

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that are coming upon us, and may reach, it may be, up to the very neck.

What this text teaches us is, That in the approaches of overwhelming calamities, and in the view of them, we ought, in a peculiar manner, to live by faith. That is the meaning of the place.

And that this is our duty, appears from this passage, and the context. For the prophet had received a vision, a dreadful vision from God, of the coming in of the Chaldeans, and of the destruction they would bring upon the church, and upon all the land, in the foregoing chapter. Having received this vision, he considers what is his own duty, and what is the duty of the church, in the approaches of this distressing calamitous season. Why, saith he, ver. 1. 'I will stand upon my watch and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what he will say unto me, and what I shall answer when I am reprov'd.' God will reprove me; there will be great arguings between God and my soul: I know my own guilt and sin, and I would be in a readiness to have something to answer God when I am reprov'd, something to betake myself unto. The answer, saith he, I will betake myself unto is this, 'The just shall live by his faith.' Two things are here included.

First, saith he, I will betake myself (as the apostle makes use of it) unto 'Jesus Christ for righteousness.' I have nothing else to answer God, when I am reprov'd.

Secondly, I will pass through all these terrible and dreadful dispensations of providence that are coming upon me, by living the life of faith: a peculiar way of living, as we shall presently see. When the flood was coming upon the world, 'Noah was a preacher of righteousness;' 2 Pet. ii. 5. What righteousness did Noah preach? Why, that righteousness whereof he himself was partaker, 'for he became an heir of the righteousness which is by faith;' Heb. xi. 7. When the flood was coming, Noah preached the righteousness of faith to the world, that they might escape, if they would attend unto it; but it was rejected by them. Wherefore, I say, in the approach of a calamitous season, there is in an especial way and manner, a living by faith required of us.

But you will say, What is a calamitous season? or when do you esteem a season calamitous?

I will give you two things for the description of such a season as I judge to be manifestly calamitous.

1. When it exceeds the bounds of affliction, or when the dispensations of God's anger in it cannot be reduced to the head of affliction; Ezek. xxi. 9, 10, 13. 'Son of man, prophesy, and say, Thus saith the Lord; say, A sword, a sword is sharpened, and also furbished. It is sharpened to make a sore slaughter; it is furbished that it may glitter. Should we then make mirth? It contemneth the rod of my son, as every tree. Because it is a trial, and what if the sword contemn even the rod?' The rod comprises all affliction; but God will bring a sword, a judgment that shall not be reducible to the head of affliction; it shall contemn it. Now, I say, let it be what it will, when a calamity doth befall a people, or the church of God, that cannot be reduced to the head of affliction, but that every one shall find there is anger, judgment, wrath, in it; then it is a distressing time.

2. When judgments fall promiscuously upon all sorts of persons, and make no distinction, then I take it to be a distressing time; for they strip men of the comforts they cherish in their own minds. Job. ix. 22, 23. 'This is one thing, therefore I said it, he destroyeth the perfect and the wicked.' What doth God always do so? Doth he never make a distinction about judgments? Yes, sometimes; 'but if the scourge slay suddenly, he will laugh at the trial of the innocent.' When God brings a scourge, or a sword that shall slay promiscuously, that shall seize upon, destroy and devour the innocent, so that they shall not escape, he will be as one that standeth by, rejoicing, to see how they carry themselves under their trial.

Now this is enough to give satisfaction, what I intend by a distressing calamitous time: it cannot be reduced to the head of affliction; and it slayeth suddenly and promiscuously, the perfect and the wicked; and it may be, 'the good figs shall go first into captivity.' I am not much otherwise minded; and God may have mercy for them in that dispensation.

I shall now shew you these two things:

I. How we shall live by faith; how we should deport ourselves; what faith will do in such a season; what our duty

is under the approach of these calamitous, distressing times that are coming upon us.

II. I shall shew you, how faith doth, and will carry it under other perplexities that we have upon us, that we either feel or fear.

1. Faith will guide and act the soul under the approach of these distressing calamities, in these following things.

(1.) It will give the soul a reverential fear of God in his judgments. So it did unto the saints of old; Heb. xi. 7. 'By faith Noah, being warned of God,' ἐνλαβηθεὶς, 'moved with a reverential fear.' There is no man that is not stout-hearted, and far from righteousness, but is, upon God's warning, moved with a reverential fear of God in his judgments. It was so with David, Psal. cxix. 120. 'My flesh trembleth for fear of thee; and I am afraid of thy judgments.' He was not afraid as to outward judgments, but under them his flesh trembled with a reverential fear of God. And so was it with the prophet Habakkuk, upon the vision he had of the approach of the Chaldeans, chap. iii. 16. 'When I heard, my belly trembled, and my lips quivered at the voice; rottenness entered into my bones, and I trembled in myself, that I might rest in the day of trouble: when he cometh up unto the people, he will invade them with his troops.' He had a reverential fear of God in his judgments working upon him. According to my best observation of things in this state wherein we are, the generality of people may be distributed under these three heads: [1.] There are some that are indeed really afraid of approaching judgments; they do not know how soon they will reach unto themselves, their persons, their families, their relations, their estates, all that they have laboured for, and exerted their utmost care and industry about in the world; the flood lies at the door ready to carry all before it; they fear every day. Some men die also for fear of dying; they are poor for fear of poverty; they will part with nothing, because they fear they must part with all. A strange contradiction of spirit! Now this is not the work of faith. So far as it prevails upon any of our spirits, God will rebuke us for it; Isa. li. 12, 13. 'Who art thou that shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man which shall be made as grass; and forgettest the Lord thy maker, and hast feared continually

every day, because of the fury of the oppressor?' chap. viii. 13. 'and hath not sanctified the Lord in thy heart, nor made him thy fear?' Who art thou? God hates this sinful fear; it is an abomination unto him. This is nothing but the fear of self; we will keep all warm about us, while we are in this world, and are afraid of the besom of destruction. [2.] There are others who utterly despise these things; take no notice of them; who do not think any such distressing calamity shall come upon them; if it does, they shall deal well enough with it. Isa. xxviii. 14, 15. 'They have made a covenant with death, and a league with hell, and say, when the overflowing scourge passes through, it shall not come near them.' They have a thousand ways to disinterest themselves from any thing of the most distressing calamity, that is coming over the world. This swallows up the generality of mankind, and is that which the prophet doth so reflect upon. Isa. xxvi. 11. 'When thy hand is lifted up, they will not see; but they shall see, and be ashamed for their envy at thy people, and the fire of thine adversaries shall devour them.' [3.] The other sort is mentioned in Judges v. 6. and may be called way-side men, idle, discursive men, that have nothing else to do, but to walk up and down and talk, and are not concerned with a reverence of God and his judgments; they talk of them as if there was no God in heaven to regard them, or as if they had no concernment with him. If we have the least true saving faith in exercise, it will cast this cursed frame out of our hearts, it will be daily working it out of our souls, and will bring us to that which I told you is its proper work. 'God,' saith the psalmist, Psal. ix. 16. 'is known by the judgment which he executes.' And what of God, is principally known in the judgments which he executes in the world, is but little considered. That which God makes known of himself in a peculiar manner in these dreadful dispensations is, his majesty, his holiness, and his power.

God will appear to be awfully majestic and wonderfully glorious in such dispensations. He speaks of himself upon that occasion; Isa. ii. 19—21. 'In that day shall a man cast away his idols of silver, and idols of gold, to the moles, and to the bats; to go into the holes of the rocks, and into the caves of the earth, for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of

his majesty, when he ariseth to shake terribly the earth.' If we have the light of faith to let it in, we shall see a majesty and glory in God's actings, even in his public and distressing judgments; such a greatness, and a glory, that the soul will be constrained to bow down before him.

God doth in his judgments also manifest his holiness, of which we shall speak afterward. So Rev. xv. 4. 'Who will not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name? for thou only art holy.' How doth this appear? 'For thy judgments are made manifest.' When God makes his judgments manifest, his holiness will appear. And so, when Habakkuk came to plead with God about that great judgment of the Chaldeans, which gave occasion to my text, he cries out, 'O Lord my God, my Holy One, thou art of purer eyes than to behold iniquity.'

God in them also glorifies himself in his power. He sets up one, and pulleth down another, and doth whatsoever he pleases; herein he manifestly shews his sovereign power.

Now, to live by faith, is to cast out all those cursed frames before mentioned, and to bring this frame into your hearts, as the foundation of all that follows, namely, that you have a reverential fear of the majesty, the holiness, and the power of God, in all his judgments. And without this, we shall not please God in any thing we do. These are the true sayings of God. If there be another frame in us, this dispensation will pierce to the very soul before it be over: that is the first thing.

(2.) Where faith hath filled the soul with a reverential fear of God, its first work will be to put the soul upon preparing and providing an ark for itself: so it was in the great example of our faith before mentioned. Noah, being moved by fear, 'prepared an ark,' wherein he saved himself and his family. Let men pretend what they will, unless they are under a strange careless stupidity and security (which I fear is upon the generality of professors), they cannot, in such a season as this, but be preparing some reserve for themselves. What shall we do when this comes upon us? They have some predominant reserve. 'The rich man's wealth is his strong city;' Prov. xviii. 11. He may lose a great deal, but he will save enough for himself; so the strong man trusts to his strength, the wise man to his wis-

dom: one thing or other men prepare for themselves to be an ark against the storm comes; and those who do not so, they fluctuate up and down at uncertainties, hoping, that by one way and means or another, that they know not of, they shall be carried above all, have a good issue; that it shall not be as this or that prophet, or minister foretells, but that some way they shall escape. This is not to prepare an ark, which is the work of faith to do. And here I shall inquire into two things: [1.] What is this ark that is to be prepared; [2.] How we ought to enter into it, or how we are to make especial entrance into it, in reference to an approaching calamitous season. I say,

[1.] This ark is Jesus Christ; faith in him is necessary. In this chapter of my text, where inquiry is made, what shall be answered unto God, and what course shall be taken upon the coming in of the overflowing flood of the Chaldeans; this is the course to be taken, 'The just shall live by faith.' What is that? It is to seek for righteousness by Christ; to seek afresh for justification and life by Christ. There is no other way, no other ark; and he is described as this ark in that known place, Isa. xxxii. 2. 'And a man,' that is Jesus Christ, 'shall be as a hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest, as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land:' that is the ark. I know not how to describe what I intend, by securing ourselves in the ark, like the description the prophet here gives, though in terms metaphorical. Likewise in Micah, v. 5. having given a promise of Christ, he adds, 'And this man shall be the peace, when the Assyrian shall come into our land.' To betake ourselves to the ark, is to betake ourselves to the fountain of our peace. And so Psal. ii. 12. 'If God's wrath be kindled but a little,' how then? 'blessed are all they that' betake themselves unto him, 'trust in him;' in whom? in the Son; 'kiss the Son.' And surely, my brethren, the wrath of God is now kindled not a little, but a great deal, in all sorts and ways. The indications of the wrath of God are upon the spirits of men of all sorts, of professors, of the world, in their own persons, in all societies and relations. Where are we then to betake ourselves, but unto Christ? 'Blessed are all they that put their trust in him.'

[2.] But now, it would not have advantaged either Noah or his sons to have an ark prepared for them, unless they had a door to the ark. 'Make a door,' saith God to them, 'that ye may have entrance.' To obtain an interest in Christ is the general work of faith all our days. But how shall we be able now to make an especial entrance into this ark, suitable unto the state and condition wherein we are, and to approach a calamitous season, that is hastening upon us? I know but of one way for our making an especial entrance into this ark; Jesus Christ, in reference to such a season, which is, the solemn renovation of our covenant with God. This is the way that hath been used by the church from the foundation of the world, without any instance of the contrary; that when a storm was coming, if ever they were delivered from it, they entered into the ark by the renovation of their covenant with God: and seeing the end is certain, we are thus afresh to enter into this ark, Jesus Christ. It is no wisdom in civil things to remove a means, unless we have a better to substitute in the room of it; and it is so in spirituals. I desire all that fear God would stir up their hearts and thoughts, and offer to us (if they can) better way for this church, or any church to enter into the ark in the approach of a storm than this, and it shall be embraced. This church hath done so; though I begin to fear some look upon it as a very dead, sluggish commodity, they know not how to trade with. But do not mistake, you have no such thing lies by you in the sight of God this day. Do not despond, the day is approaching 'when others shall come,' (as it is in Zech. viii. 23.) 'and lay hold upon your skirts, saying, We will go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.' Some, blessed be God, and let his holy name be exalted, have far outgone us already, both in zeal and warmth, and courage, under a sense of engagements that are upon them. I look for no safety, no deliverance in the trials and afflictions that are coming upon the earth, but what is had in the way of believing. I value not those that are otherwise minded. Bless God who hath provided for you this door of entrance before the flood comes, and the rain falls; bless God, I say, for it, and make use of it, and be able to plead it with God: and let the Lord know that you have made your choice to be his, and are under his care,

and not under the protection of the world. I will not say you shall be saved temporally, but you shall be saved eternally; I cannot say you shall have peace with men, but you shall have peace with God; I cannot say you shall not lose your lives, but I will say you shall not lose your souls; and these are our principal concernments. Make good your entrance. A door made into the ark will do you no good, unless you enter in and make good your entrance at the door. How shall we make good our entrance into the ark, that we may have safety therein? If we are not at this work, we have no faith. Why, stand to your engagements, stand to the performance of those duties God requires at your hands, not only as there is no one thing required but what is a special duty of the New covenant; but stand to them now as those that have been your entrance into the ark, where God will give you all that rest that in this world you can be partakers of. This is another work of faith in the approach of a calamitous time.

(3.) If we live by faith, in the approach of a calamitous season, this will put us upon the search and examination of our own hearts, what accession we have made to the sins that have procured these judgments. This is that which faith (where it is in any measure sincere) will assuredly put us upon; and it is that God doth now in an especial manner call for. Now the sins which do, and have procured these judgments, are of two sorts. [1.] The open and flagitious sins of the world. [2.] The sins of churches and professors.

[1.] The open and flagitious sins of the world. The apostle reckons them up together, 1 Cor. vi. 9, 10. 'Be not deceived, neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God.' He doth it again in Eph. v. 5, 6. 'For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ; for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience.' He reckons them up also in Gal. v. 19, &c. 'The works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions,

heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, and such like.' There is a marvellous large copy written out of these texts in the nation at this day : every man may read an exposition of these things in the practice of multitudes. Some will say they bless God they are free from these things, and so they hope they have had no hand in procuring the judgments of God, that are coming upon the nation ; let them fall upon them and their interest, who are guilty of these provoking abominations, such as for which the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against their ungodliness. Why, it is well if they are not guilty of any of these sins. But the seed and foundation, even of all these sins, lie in our nature, if not in our persons ; and what irruptions they have made towards the provoking the eyes of God's glory, I know not. But suppose you have escaped these pollutions that are in the world through lust ;

[2.] There are other sins, sins of churches, and of professors, that in reference to Christ's mediatory kingdom, have as great influence for the procuring of judgments, as the worst sins of the world have for the procuring of judgments in his providential kingdom. I know a time when there was a storm, wherein a whole vessel, and all that were in it, were like to have been cast away ; but one Jonah, that was in the ship was the cause of the storm.

I shall just mention the judgment-procuring sins of churches and professors, which are reduced in Scripture to these four heads :

1st. Lukewarmness, which was the judgment-procuring sin of Laodicea.

2dly. Contenting ourselves in outward order and freedom from scandal, which was the judgment-procuring sin of Sardis, and will prove ruinous to the best churches in the world.

3dly. Want of love among ourselves, and division in churches.

4thly. Earthly mindedness, and love of the world, and conformity to it, that is found among the generality of professors.