

SERMON XII.*

THE USE OF FAITH, IF POPERY SHOULD RETURN UPON US.

The just shall live by his faith.—HAB. ii. 4.

OUR inquiry is, how we may live by faith, with reference unto these difficulties we have, or may have, to conflict with in the days wherein we live. The last head we spake to was, how we may live by faith in reference to all the reproaches and scornful contempts that are cast upon that way of worship, that order and fellowship of the gospel, which we cleave unto; and the persecutions which we may undergo upon that account. I now proceed.

2. The second difficulty that we have, or may have to conflict with, is the return of popery into this land. Half the talk of the world is upon this subject. I have nothing to say to some among ourselves; but I verily believe, that those who have the conduct of the papal antichristian affairs throughout the world, are endeavouring to bring it in upon us. I remember what holy Latimer said when he came to die. 'Once I believed popery would never return into England, but,' said he, 'I find it was not faith, but fancy.' I wish it prove not so with many of us. Now that which I am to speak unto is this, How we should live by faith, both in the prospect of the danger of it, and if it should come upon us. I shall name unto you a few things which I exercise myself with. If you have more supporting thoughts, and a better guidance of light, I pray God confirm it unto you.

(1.) The first thing I would exercise my thoughts upon, and that my faith rests in, in this case, is this, That there is a fixed determinate time in the counsel of God, when antichrist, and Babylon, and idolatry, and superstition, together with that profaneness of life which they have brought in,

This sermon was preached May 7, 1680.

shall be destroyed. It is so fixed, that it shall not be altered, all the wisdom of men, all the sins of men, and all our unbelief, shall not hinder it a day; it shall assuredly come to pass in its appointed season. This time is reckoned up in Scripture by days, by months, by years; not that we should know the time of it, but that we should know the certainty of it; for if it hath but so many days, but so many months, and years, then it must have a certain period.

Under the Old Testament, we see this all along. Saith God to Abraham, 'Know of a surety, that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and they shall afflict them four hundred years, and then I will judge that nation;' Gen. xv. 14, 15. They knew not the beginning nor the ending of this four hundred years; but they knew, that at the end of them, it should be as God had said; 'and the selfsame day it came to pass;' Exod. xii. 41. Likewise God threatens the Jews with a seventy years captivity in Babylon; 'And it shall come to pass,' saith God, 'when the seventy years are accomplished, that I will punish the king of Babylon, and that nation for their iniquity;' Jer. xxv. 11, 12. The church knew not when they began, or when they would end, but this they knew, that the same day they were accomplished, it should be as God had said; and so it was.

The fixing and computing of the time of the man of sin, of antichrist, by days, and months, and years, is to secure our faith in the punctual determination of the season, but not to satisfy our curiosity when the season should be. But the consideration of this, that there is such a time, or a determinate season, is a great foundation of faith and patience. Isa. lx. 22. 'A little one shall become a thousand, and a small one a strong nation; I the Lord will hasten it in his time.' But if there be a fixed time for the accomplishment of this promise, you may ask, how can it then be hastened? Why, if you live in the exercise of faith and patience, it shall surprise you; it shall come when you do not think it will, nor expect it. 'I will hasten it in its time.' I will not bring it before its time, be ye never so patient, or impatient; but exercise faith and patience, and I will so order it, that it shall be a sweet surprisal unto you. And it is a means of patience; Hab. ii. 3. 'If the vision seem to tarry, wait for

it, for it will surely come.' When we know it will come, when we know there is such a determinate time, and that it will surely come, it is a great ground of patience to wait for it. This is a great consideration with me, and I leave it with you. Here I can exercise faith without fancy, or conjecture, that there is a certain determinate time in the counsel of God, wherein he will pour out all his judgments and plagues upon the antichristian world, until antichristianism be destroyed, and rooted out.

(2.) Another thing that comforts my heart is this; It is no less glorious to suffer under the beast and the false prophet, than it was to suffer under the dragon. The book of the Revelation is chiefly made up of these two things, of the persecutions of the church, one by the dragon, and he is conquered; the other by the beast and false prophet, and he shall be conquered. The dragon was the heathen power of the Roman empire; and it was a glorious thing to suffer under that power. They that did so, are described, Rev. vii. 13—15. 'These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple; and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them.' And of those that suffered under the beast and the false prophet, it is said, Rev. xii. 11. 'That by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony, they overcame him.' We account them great and glorious persons, who won the liberty of the gospel, and the Christian religion, by suffering against the pagan power; and who destroyed all idolatry by their blood, starving and 'famishing all the gods of the heathen;' Zeph. ii. 11. Never were men more glorious than they. These made up the 'Turba palmifera,' that is, the company who, with palms in their hands, and a new song in their mouths, give glory unto God; Rev. vii. 9—12. I say, it is not less glorious to suffer under the beast and false prophet, the second persecuting power, that is, the papal antichristian power, than it was before under the pagan. This the church hath for many ages conflicted withal, and must continue to do so, until the time is come, when they shall have a perfect and complete conquest over this also. It is a glorious thing, and I would have you reckon

upon it as such. If a time of going into Smithfield should again come; if God shall call us to that fiery trial, or any other, whatever it may be, remember, that to suffer against antichrist, is as great and glorious, as to suffer against paganism.

(3.) Though our persons fall, our cause shall be as truly, certainly and infallibly victorious, as that Christ sits at the right hand of God. Among the heathens, men of courage did not value their own lives, so their cause was carried on. Now, however your persons, or my person, may fall in this trial; yet the cause, in which we are engaged, shall as surely conquer as Christ is alive; and shall prevail at last. Upon the first rise of the beast, it is said, Rev. xiii. 7. 'He made war with the saints, and overcame them.' The poor Waldenses looked upon themselves to be the people there prophesied of; and said, when they were under the butcheries of the papal power, 'We are the conquered people of God, but there shall come forth conquerors.' When going to die, they knew and believed their cause would conquer. And so, after antichrist hath conquered and prevailed over persons for a season, at length it will come to a final issue. 'They shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them; for they that are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful;' Rev. xvii. 14. The gospel shall be victorious. This is the third thing that greatly comforts and refreshes me, that if God should give me the honour, the strength, and grace to die in this cause, my cause shall be victorious, as sure as if I had the crown in my hand.

(4.) The judgments of God shall come upon the anti-christian world, when they look not for them: when the kings of the earth do not look for them; yea, when believers themselves do not look for them, they shall come so suddenly. The Holy Ghost saith so expressly, Rev. xviii. 8. 'Her plagues shall come in one day, death and mourning, and famine, and she shall be utterly burnt with fire.' How is it possible, that she that is in the state and condition wherein she is, should have her plagues come upon her in one day? The reason is added, 'For strong is the Lord God that judgeth her.' Almighty strength shall be put forth for the accomplishing of it. And if this be not enough, the

seventeenth verse tells you, 'that it shall come in one hour.' And I do verily believe, that the destruction of this cursed antichristian state (of the head of it), will be brought about by none of those means we see, or know of; but that the strong Lord God shall break in upon her, and destroy her, by ways unknown to us. It may be to-morrow, it may be not these hundred years. She herself, when it is done, shall look for no such thing; ver. 7. 'She glorified herself, and lived deliciously; for she saith in her heart, I sit a queen, and am no widow, and shall see no sorrow. Therefore her plagues shall come on her in one day.' When she is boasting herself, destruction shall come; when the kings of the earth shall have no expectation of it; for they shall cry, ver. 16. 'Alas, alas, that great city Babylon, that mighty city; for in one hour so great riches is come to nought.' And believers themselves will be such as the children of Israel in Egypt; when Moses came, they could not believe, because of the cruel bondage they were under: it is like the day wherein God's judgments will come upon antichrist, the old enemies of Jesus Christ.

(5.) I would consider very much with myself, the greatness of the indignation of God against those that shall in the least comply with antichristianism, when it doth come upon us. In Rev. xiii. 11. there is mention of 'a beast that had two horns, like a lamb, and he spake as a dragon (which I think is the pope), and he exercises all the power of the first beast;' that is, he exercises a power answerable to the pagan power. And what then? ver. 16. 'He causes all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads; that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark.' No matter what the mark is; but to receive any thing of him, is to receive his mark, either in our foreheads, where we shall shew it unto all the world; or in our right hands, more privately, where it may be shewn when opportunity serves. What then? Why, in chap. xiv. 6, 7. 'I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people, saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven

and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters.' When antichrist would bring his mark on the foreheads of the people, and into their hands, God, by his gospel, calls men from their false worship and idolatry. But what if they do not obey? The ninth and tenth verses tell us, 'A third angel followed, saying with a loud voice, If any man worship the beast and his image, and receives his mark in his forehead, or in his hand, the same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God which is poured out, without mixture, into the cup of his indignation, and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb,' &c. Some will be apt to say, Let us make a fair composition, and use some compliance to put an end to these disputes. No, do it at your peril; God saith, you shall drink of the wine of his wrath, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation, and that for ever and ever. And I believe, with all my heart and soul, that this will be the portion of all the men and women in this nation, that shall comply with any return of antichristian idolatry among us; God shall pour out his indignation upon them.

(6.) Remember, that if the trial comes, it is a day of battle; and it is not for you, when you should just engage in a battle, to be considering of this or that way, or contrivance to escape; no, it is courage and constancy, and faith alone must be set on work, or you will not be preserved. All your wisdom and contrivances will not preserve you; but it being come to the issue between Christ and antichrist, 'it is the girding up the loins of your mind, and a resisting unto blood against sin,' and abiding in it, that is your duty, and must preserve you. Nothing will save you but faith, courage, and constancy.

(7.) There are, in the Scripture, intimations, that those who, in an especial manner, cleave unto God and his worship, with faith, love, and delight, shall be preserved and saved.' I do not propose this unto you as an object of your faith; all the rest I do; but I say, there are intimations that give me some satisfaction, that they who with quick and lively spirits do act faith, and love, and delight in God and his worship, or that are worshippers in the inner court of the temple, shall be peculiarly secured at such a time.

But I am afraid few of us shall have it, because I see so much coldness and deadness grown generally upon us, and the churches of Christ; it makes me think exercises will come upon us all; for we have need of them.

To conclude,

First, Let not your talk about strange things, keep the thoughts of these things you have been hearing out of your hearts; for you will be tried with antichristianism before you die. We talk of news, and great things we look for in the world, and that antichrist shall be destroyed; and so he will; but I do believe he will try us sorely in the mean time.

Secondly, Take heed of computations. How wofully and wretchedly have we been mistaken by this! We know the time is determined; its beginning and ending is known to God; and we must live by faith till the accomplishment.

Thirdly, So many of us as have afresh engaged ourselves in covenant unto God, let us remember that we have taken the 'mark of God upon our foreheads;' and it will ill become us to set the mark of antichrist by it.

This is all I have to offer unto you as to living by faith, under the apprehensions of those difficulties we have to conflict withal, in reference to the coming in of profaneness and idolatry wherewith we are threatened, by hell and the world, who are at this day combining together to bring them again upon this nation.