

Confiding Trust and Patient Submission

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"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. I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him, until he plead my cause, and execute judgment for me: he will bring me forth to the light, and I shall behold his righteousness." Micah 7:8, 9

The chapter begins with a note of lamentation: "Woe is me!" This mournful strain is a frequent one with the saints, and more especially with the servants of God. Thus Isaiah, when he saw "the Lord sitting upon a throne high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple," cried out, as if penetrated to the heart by a view of the glory of Christ (John 12:41), "Woe is me! for I am undone: because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts." (Isaiah 6:5.) Jeremiah used the same mournful strain when he said, "Woe is me, my mother, that thou hast borne me a man of strife and a man of contention to the whole earth! I have neither lent on usury, nor men have lent to me on usury; yet every one of them doth curse me." (Jer. 15:10). So Ezekiel's roll was written within and without: and there was written therein lamentations, and mourning, and woe. (Ezekiel 1:10.)

But what was the immediate cause of this note of lamentation that the prophet Micah put up when he said, "Woe is me?" There were two: 1, one was an *inward sense of his own barren, unfruitful condition*. He says, "I am as when they have gathered the summer fruits, as the grape

gleanings of the vintage: there is no cluster to eat." The children of Israel were expressly prohibited going a second time over the olive-yard and over the vineyard: "When thou beatest thine olive tree, thou shalt not go over the boughs again: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow. When thou gatherest the grapes of thy vineyard, thou shalt not glean it afterwards: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow." (Deut. 24:20, 21.) There was, therefore, more fruit probably left on the boughs in Micah's time and country than now in Italy or France in their corresponding olive harvest and vintage. Still, the best fruit was doubtless gathered first, and what was left was not only scanty in quantity, but poor in quality—hidden, it may be, under the foliage, so that it escaped the eye of the first gatherer, "or two or three berries on the top of the uppermost bough, four or five on the outmost fruitful branches thereof," out of the easy reach of his hand. (Isai. 17:6.) There is no more continual source of lamentation and mourning to a child of God than a sense of his own barrenness. He would be fruitful in every good word and work, yea, would be "filled with those fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ unto the glory and praise of God." (Phil. 1:11.) But when he contrasts his own miserable unprofitableness, his coldness and deadness, his proneness to evil, his backwardness to good, his daily wanderings and departings from the living God, his depraved affections, stupid frames, sensual desires, carnal projects, and earthy grovellings with what he sees and knows should be the fruit that should grow upon a fruitful branch in the only true Vine, he sinks down under a sense of his own wretched barrenness and unfruitfulness. It is then this feeling which makes him take up the language of the mourning prophet, "Woe is me! for I am as when they have gathered the summer fruits, as the grape-gleanings of the vintage." Is not similar language used by another man of God? "From the uttermost part of

the earth have we heard songs, even glory to the righteous. But I said, My leanness, my leanness, woe unto me! the treacherous dealers have dealt treacherously; yea, the treacherous dealers have dealt very treacherously." (Isai. 24:16.) So also felt Job when he said, "And thou hast filled me with wrinkles, which is a witness against me; and my leanness rising up in me beareth witness to my face." (Job 16:8.)

2. But there was another cause for the utterance of "Woe is me!" closely connected with the preceding—*the view which the prophet had of the general state of things around him*. Not only had he reason for mourning over himself, as seeing and feeling the case within so deep and desperate, but the prospect without was as gloomy as the sight within. "The good man is perished out of the earth, and there is none upright among men." He saw how few there were who really feared and loved God; and looking back to days past when he had had sweet converse with many highly favoured saints of God, men of sincerity and uprightness, pillars of truth and ornaments of their profession, and compared with these godly men the generation of professors amongst whom his present lot was cast, it seemed to him as though the good man was altogether perished out of the earth, and none was upright amongst men. The envy and jealousy, the crafty policy and murderous intents of the professors of his day, as in ours, struck a solemn damp into his soul: "They all lie in wait for blood; they hunt every man his brother with a net."

But if he turned from the professing church to the profane world did he find matters any better? What example of good works was shown by those who clamoured so loudly for them? And how did those in high places act who should at least have kept their hands clean from bribes, as well as from blood? "That they may do evil with both hands earnestly, the

prince asketh, and the judge asketh for a reward: and the great man, he uttereth his mischievous desire." And all this under a cloak of hypocrisy: "So they wrap it up," or, as the word might be rendered, "twist it round," entangling and perverting all truth and judgment. It is our mercy to live in a land where justice is fairly administered, and where the judge on the bench or the magistrate in the court cannot be bribed by the rich to give wrong judgment against the poor. The crying sin of oppression is not indeed dead in this land, but publicity has much stifled it from showing its hideous face on the seat of judgment. But what a description does he go on to give of men generally—even of the very best, whether friend or foe, saint or sinner. "The best of them is as a brier: the most upright is sharper than a thorn hedge." His own soul had been so torn and lacerated by some of the best of men—that is, apart from their infirmities which were inherent in and grew out of their very nature, as prickles in and out of a brier, that he felt to come into close contact with them was to be caught and scratched. Nay, the most upright, honest, and sincere of men had so pierced and wounded him by their words or ways that even they were "sharper to him than a thorn hedge," which is more pleasant to look at in spring than to fall into in winter. It is when we come close to men, get connected with them in business and even sometimes in church fellowship, that we really learn what they are; and we ourselves, let it be borne in mind, may have as many thorns and prickles to scratch and tear them as they may have to scratch and tear us.

But there was a sadder sight still to make him cry, "Woe is me!" There was a breaking up of all mutual confidence in the nearest and tenderest relationships, calling forth that sad and fearful warning, "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." What a state of things is here

disclosed when no friend could be trusted, no guide confided in and the secrets of the heart to be concealed from the wife of the bosom. But I cannot enlarge upon this point. If you will read it for yourselves, you will plainly see how his soul was grieved and pained, not only with what he felt within but with what he thus saw without, as some of the worst features of human depravity.

Yet what was the effect produced by all this upon his own soul? To wean him from the creature—to divert him from looking to any for help or hope, but the Lord himself.

"Therefore," he says, in the verse preceding the text, "I will look unto the Lord; I will wait for the God of my salvation: my God will hear me." It is in this painful way that the Lord often, if not usually, cuts us off from all human props, even the nearest and dearest, that we may lean wholly and solely on himself. As, then, he was thus cut off from all other props, a sweet confidence sprang up in the prophet's bosom that God would hear his petitions.

But this brings us at once to our text, in opening up which I shall, with God's help and blessing, call your attention to four leading features:

I.—*First, the expostulation* that the prophet makes with his enemy: "Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy."

II.—*Secondly, the confiding trust* which he has in the Lord: "When I fall I shall arise; when I sit in darkness, the Lord shall be a light unto me."

III.—*Thirdly, his patient submission*, and the *reasons* of it: "I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him, until he plead my cause and execute judgment for me."

IV.—*Fourthly and lastly*, his firm *assurance* that all would be well in the end: "He will bring me forth to the light, and I shall behold his righteousness."

I.—When the Lord is pleased first to deal with our soul, in those early days of our spiritual youth when we are but little acquainted with the evils of our own heart, or the evils that lodge in other men's, we are often astonished at the sudden burst of persecution that arises against us from most unexpected quarters, and frequently from some of our nearest and dearest friends and relatives. In those days, eternal realities usually lie with great weight and power upon our mind: they occupy our waking and sleeping thoughts; and the whole subject being new, it takes fast hold both of heart and tongue; for we cannot be silent, and as we are made honest and sincere we speak as we feel. The things of eternity pressing with serious and solemn weight upon our hearts, press words out of our mouth, we at the time little anticipating the effect which those words produce upon the minds of those to whom they are addressed. What is that effect? What we little expect—enmity. We anticipate some conviction of the truth which we lay before them, or, at least, some kind and favourable reception of it. We speak it honestly and sincerely, meaning it for their good; but instead of receiving it as we intended, they rise up in enmity and rebellion against us. Why is this? Because their carnal mind, and they can have no other if they are not spiritual, is enmity against God. A veil, too, of unbelief and ignorance is spread over their heart, so that our meaning is misunderstood, our actions misrepresented, and our kindest words and intentions perverted to evil.

1. The *world*, then, be well and thoroughly assured, will always prove an enemy to the saint of God; nor can the

enmity ever be eradicated, for God himself has put it between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent; and under the influence of this enmity, "judgment is turned into gall, and the fruit of righteousness into hemlock." (Amos 6:12.) Be not surprised, therefore, if you have found the world, nay, those of your own flesh and blood, your nearest and dearest friends, turned to be your enemies. It is meant to break off your own friendship with it, that you yourself may not be God's enemy; for "the friendship of the world is enmity with God; whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is an enemy of God." (James 4:4.) Yet we may still keenly feel the enmity manifested; the coward flesh may and does shrink from the persecution often so severe, and usually so little anticipated. The servants too of God, such as was Micah, are especially liable to the manifestation of this enmity. The gospel they preach, the faithfulness they manifest, the holiness they display, the separating line which they draw when "they take forth the precious from the vile," stir up the deepest enmity of the profane and professing world; and, by a singular perversion of ideas, they are often viewed and called personal enemies. "Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?" said Ahab to Elijah, viewing him as his personal enemy, because he denounced his sins. When, then, as often happens, matters so fall out as to give the world cause for rejoicing; when any striking reverse in providence, or a painful and sudden calamity falls on the child of God, it is often viewed as a judgment upon him for his temper or spirit; and thus his very distress either of mind or circumstances affords a matter of ungodly triumph to his enemies. It is at best indeed but a blank source of joy, an almost fiendish delight soon to reap its own miserable reward, that any should take occasion to triumph and rejoice in the afflictions of the saints of God; but, such is the implacable enmity of the human heart against God as manifested in the persons of his saints, that many would

rejoice even in their destruction. We certainly see much of this in the scriptures, especially in those Psalms which speak of the persecutions of Christ and his people. How our Lord speaks in his own case, almost in the very words used by his enemies: "But I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men and despised of the people. All that see me laugh me to scorn: they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, he trusted on the Lord that he would deliver him: let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him." (Psal. 22:6, 7, 8.) And again: "Draw nigh unto my soul, and redeem it: deliver me because of mine enemies. Thou hast known my reproach, and my shame, and my dishonour: mine adversaries are all before thee." (Psal. 69:18, 19.) And so he speaks: "For they persecute him whom thou hast smitten; and they talk to the grief of those whom thou has wounded." (Psal. 69:26.) But the worst cause of their malicious joy which our Lord never gave them, but which we too often give, is when they can rejoice over our slips and falls; when by some unguarded word, or some unbecoming deed, we put before them a sweet morsel on which to feed, enabling them to say, "Ah, ah, so would we have it." This made, and still makes, David "the song of the drunkards;" this lowered the man after God's own heart below the lowest man in Jerusalem, and thrust the exalted king of Judah and Israel among the criminals worthy of death by the law of Moses. May we never give joy to our enemies in this way.

2. But it would be well for the saint of God if he had no other enemy than what he finds in the world, or amidst the ranks of the professing church, or even in the bosom of his own family. He has an enemy more watchful, more implacable, and more continually at hand than they; an enemy who cannot only see outward reverses and slips and falls, but can come to close quarters and attack and harass the mind night and day. I need not tell you who this enemy is, and that his

name is *Satan*, which means enemy. Now when the soul of a child of God is cast down, as it often is by seeing the Lord's hand going out against him in providence, or is suffering under his chastising hand for any slip or fall inward or outward, Satan, the enemy, is almost sure to urge on the calamity. Joining hand in hand with his foes, he cries aloud as the battle word, the signal for a combined attack of earth and hell, "God hath forsaken him; persecute and take him; for there is none to deliver him" (Psalm 71:11.)

Now if a little helped and blessed, the child of grace can expostulate, as we find the prophet here, with this enemy: "Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy." The enemy, the arch enemy, will rejoice at anything that causes the soul distress. The sighs, the tears, the sorrows of the saints are the serpent's food. He rejoices to see them in distress, because he hates anything like heavenly joy or spiritual confidence. Thus when the soul mourns he rejoices. Feeling this, the child of God says: "Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy," which leads us to our second point:

II.—The prophet's *confiding trust* in the Lord: "When I fall, I shall arise; when I sit in darkness, the Lord shall be a light unto me."

i. The fall here spoken of is not necessarily, nor does the prophet seem to imply, a fall into any gross sin or into any such evil as would make the world rejoice, or gladden our implacable foe. It is a mercy for the saints of God that the Lord for the most part hedges them round with strong restraints in providence, and still stronger in grace; that he plants his fear deep within their heart as a fountain of life, to depart from the snares of death. But though the Lord's people are for the most part—I will not say invariably, for we have strong scriptural examples to the contrary—preserved

from falling into those gross and open sins which open the mouth of the enemy, yet they do fall into many deep, dark, and desolate spots, where the foe seems to rejoice over them.

1. They fall, for instance, into many *afflictions*, into great providential reverses. Now when the world sees affliction after affliction, and reverse after reverse, pursue the saints of God; when they perceive that nothing, as is often the case, prospers with them, but whatever they take in hand a blight is upon it; that they sink lower and lower in the world, descending from one stage of poverty to another; in this their calamity, their foes rejoice. It is a matter of infernal triumph to them, proportionately as it is a matter of distress to the saint of God; for his mind being in darkness, he misreads these signs, and views these dispensations of God in providence as so many marks against him; or, instead of receiving them as fatherly chastisements to wean him from the world; he rather reads in them the angry frowns of God, or even judgments for his sins and transgressions.

2. But he falls also into many *temptations*, as James says: "My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations." These "divers temptations" into which the people of God fall, include all those multiplied and various trials and temptations into which sometimes suddenly and sometimes gradually they slip and sink. Peter calls them "manifold;" indeed it is just the same word in the original as "divers" (1 Pet. 1:6), and thus points to their number as well as their variety. It is surprising how the trials and temptations of the Lord's people differ. Wherever I go I find them a poor, afflicted, tried, and tempted people; but scarcely any one of them suffering under the same trial with an afflicted brother or sister. Some are afflicted in body, and yet hardly two exactly alike in bodily suffering; some are

exercised in mind, and yet widely differing in the nature and degree of their exercises; others cast down with temptations, and yet few with precisely the same. Thus their trials and temptations are manifold, divers—many and various.

But it is more peculiarly when they are under the power of temptation that the enemy rejoices, for he knows that temptation usually precedes a downfall. A man is "tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust and enticed." Then it is that there is a conception and a birth of the monster sin. "When lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin; and sin when it is finished (or accomplished) bringeth forth death." (James 1:14. 15.)

But these temptations are not, for the most part to open sin; there are internal temptations confined to a man's own breast, such as to doubt the goodness of God, to distrust his mercy, to rebel against his dealings, and be filled with fretfulness, murmuring, and self pity. Now when they sink into those spots where the Lord hides his face, (for he will not encourage rebellion, and "the rebellious dwell in a dry land,") they walk in great darkness and see no light; and thus are often led to question whether there ever was a work of grace upon their hearts at all, and whether their experience has not been a delusion. It is then at these seasons when they fall into these temptations, that Satan begins to rejoice over them with infernal triumph; for he takes advantage of these temptations to aggravate the malady, to increase the distance between God and their souls, to egg them on and incite them, as he did Job, Jonah, and Jeremiah, to burst forth into rebellious and peevish expressions, or may even urge them to such gloomy, wretched extremes as despair and suicide.

ii. But when, from these various causes, they are sunk thus

low, and Satan begins to rejoice against them, the Lord will sometimes, as it appears was the case of the prophet, break in upon their minds with a ray of heavenly light, and in that ray of light they feel a sweet persuasion, that though fallen, they are not fallen out of the Lord's hands or heart. In their fears and feelings the Lord's people may fall very low, but they never really sink into despair, for "underneath are the everlasting arms" out of which they never can fall. In their worst extremity there is a "Who can tell?" and their hope, as an anchor of their soul, sure and steadfast, still remains fast and firm within the veil. Nay sometimes they most rise when they most fall, for the more sensibly that they are sunk into a sense of their own wretchedness and misery, the more they fall, so to speak, flat before the Lord, with a deep conviction of their helplessness; and the more they fall into an experimental feeling of their weakness the more does the Lord make his strength perfect in that weakness, so that they can say, "When I am weak then am I strong." This enabled the prophet to dare and defy his enemy, "*When I fall I shall arise.*" You may rejoice against me as falling or fallen; but when I fall—at the very moment when I seem most sunk or sinking I shall arise. "Woe to him!" we read, "that is alone when he falleth, for he hath not another to help him up." (Eccl. 4:10.) Saul was alone when he fell, for God had forsaken him; so was Ahithophel, so was Judas. They fell therefore, and that without remedy. But Peter was not alone when he fell; neither was Jonah when he fell into the sea, into the whale's belly, and into the very belly of hell. Safe in the heart of Christ, all his saints are safe in the hands of Christ; "Yea he loved the people." There they are safe in the heart of Christ. "All his saints are in thy hand." There they are safe in the hands of Christ. (Deut. 33:3.)

The prophet could also add as a further reason why he should arise: "*When I sit in darkness the Lord shall be a light*

unto me." We often have to sit in darkness. This expression signifies the condition of the soul in the gloom of unbelief, under the hidings of the Lord's countenance, when it loses all sensible enjoyment and all comforting light, as expressed by the prophet Isaiah: "Who is among you, that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness and hath no light"—that is, no bright light, for the word rendered "light" there means "brightness" or shining, not ordinary light. (Isa. 50:10.) Thus though he sat in darkness it was not unmitigated darkness—the darkness of death, or the darkness of despair, but that darkness which is the absence of bright light—an eclipse or dark thunder cloud rather than a winter midnight. In this darkness the Lord's people often sit; and yet in the very midst of it there is light, and light too the best and most blessed, for it is the Lord himself: "When I sit in darkness, the Lord shall be a light unto me." Now here the saint of God differs from all others. None but he in fact really knows what darkness is, for none but he has light to see it, or life to feel it. It is the Lord's light in his soul that makes him see the darkness with which he is surrounded, and it is the Lord's life in his heart that makes him feel those cold damps which so chill his feelings and wrap him up, as it were, in a misty cloud. Those who walk in the sparks of their own kindling never complain of sitting in darkness. They know nothing of what it is to lose the light of the Lord's countenance, for they never saw or enjoyed it. A blind man cannot see an eclipse, nor does he know night from day. Those, therefore, in whom the God of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not never sat in darkness, because they never sat in light nor do they know the hidings of the Lord's face, because he has never lifted the light of his countenance upon them. As they have had no drawings near of the Lord to their soul, they have no withdrawings of his gracious power and presence. It is for this reason, that though thousands are in darkness, none *sit*

in darkness, that is feelingly and experimentally, but the saints of God. They "*walk*" or "*sit*," both postures implying life, in darkness, but the dead *lie* in it. But when they sit in darkness, the Lord is their light. He not only gives them beams and rays of divine light to illuminate their darksome path; but he himself is their light, it all centering in, and being communicated out of his own divine Person. His word indeed is a light, for "it is a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path;" but this is more a reflected than a direct light. It is he himself who in a peculiar way is light, for "God is light;" and though "he dwelleth in the light, which no man can approach unto," yet he shines upon those that fear his name, even when they sit in darkness, to cheer them in it and to give them a sweet persuasion that they shall come out of it.

iii. But you may perhaps ask, "Why does the Lord permit this darkness to spread itself over the minds of his people?" There are doubtless wise reasons why it is permitted; but take one. It is in this school that we learn our best and safest lessons. We have much pride that needs to be humbled, much self-righteousness to be brought down, much self-exaltation and self-dependence to be laid low, all which are sadly opposed to the life and power of God in the soul. These weeds, then, that overspread the Lord's garden need to be rooted out and plucked up, that the fruits and graces of the Spirit may have room to live and flourish. We, therefore, need to be brought into a place where the Lord only can do us good, and thus become our all in all. We need to have all other wisdom brought to an end but the Lord's wisdom, all other strength but the Lord's strength, and all other righteousness but the Lord's righteousness. Now when we are continually falling into afflictions, temptations, soul exercises, and in them darkness besets the mind, we begin to see and feel how little we can help ourselves, how little we

can help one another. In this hard but salutary school of experience, we learn that the Lord himself, and none but the Lord, must be our all in all. When, then, the Lord becomes our light, faith is strengthened to look unto him, and prayer excited to call upon his holy name. There is a more thorough and decided weaning from self, and a fuller, firmer resting on the promises and invitations of Scripture, clearer views of the Person and work of the Son of God; and all this strengthens our hope to anchor more strongly and actively within the veil. What a need be, then, there is for these trials and exercises, as Peter speaks: "Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations." (1 Pet.1:6.) And does he not give us a sufficient and satisfactory reason? "That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ." (1 Pet. 1:7.) Yes, it is to try our faith, and thus prove it to be more precious than gold that perisheth. The Lord would not put his children into the furnace unless the dross had to be taken away; he would not allow them to sink into depths, unless in those depths to cry, and experience deliverance: "Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O Lord." (Psal. 130:1.) Nor would he again and again allow Satan to triumph over them and rejoice in their misery, unless to show them the strength of his almighty arm, the clemency of his merciful heart, and the freeness and richness of his sovereign, superabounding grace. When we are passing through these dark and dreary things, we cannot usually see the wisdom of the Lord in thus exercising our minds, nor what profitable lessons we are learning, or what useful instruction the Lord is thereby communicating. But when he is pleased to bring us out of this furnace, then we begin to see what valuable lessons we have learnt in this trying path—how much secret self-righteousness and Pharisaical pride were in our mind; how

much vain confidence was mingled with our faith, how much of our own strength, wisdom, and self-dependence really worked in us, and was nurtured by us, but was hidden from our eyes by the pride and self-righteousness of our heart. But being brought into circumstances which gave our enemies temporary cause of triumph, falling continually into some affliction, some soul desertion, some trial in providence, or some exercise in grace, and having from time to time to sit in great darkness of mind, we learn in that school to depend less upon our own strength and wisdom and to hang more simply, more really, more earnestly, and more perseveringly upon the Lord himself. It is thus we learn what the Lord is able to do by his Spirit and grace; thus we see the difference between spiritual and natural religion; between that faith that stands in the wisdom of men, and that which stands in the power of God; between the hope of the hypocrite that perishes, and the good hope through grace that supports the saint of God in the trying hour. And as our Lord was "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief;" as reproach broke his heart; and as he knew, for a time at least, what it was to be forsaken of his God, the soul is thus brought more into communion with its tempted Head, and to have some measure of fellowship with him in his sufferings. Thus, though the soul may have faith to say, even when it falls into affliction and temptation, "Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy, when I fall I shall arise;" and even when it sits in darkness may feel some sweet persuasion that the Lord will be a light unto it; yet when matters are in some measure cleared up by the shining in of the Lord's countenance, it sees that there were also other needs be for walking in this path besides those which I have just mentioned, and another work to be accomplished within, not less for its good and the Lord's glory; which brings me to my next point:

III.—The *patient submission* of the soul to the Lord's

righteous dealings, and the *reasons* why it thus submits: "I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him, until he plead my cause, and execute judgment for me."

i. The Lord will bring our secret sins to light, and set them in the light of his countenance. And O, what a day and hour is that when the Lord summons up dead and buried sins like so many gaunt spectres, brings them to mind and memory, and lays them with weight and power upon the conscience. Men conceal their sins, not only from others but from themselves: they are not willing to have them brought forth and laid upon their conscience, so as to feel true repentance and godly sorrow for them. They think repentance is so bitter a thing, and that true sorrow for sin is attended with such guilt and distress, that they are glad to escape such bitter feelings and such a fiery furnace. But the Lord will and does bring forth out of the heart of his people all their secret sins, visibly arrays before their eyes the iniquities they have committed in times gone by—transgressions of their infancy, childhood, youth, and manhood; of heart, and lip, and life. So Job found it: "For thou writest bitter things against me, and makest me to possess the iniquities of my youth." (Job 13:26.) And thus Moses the man of God testified, "Thou hast set our iniquities before thee, our secret sins in the light of thy countenance." (Psal. 90:8.) Now though painful, this is necessary to true and unfeigned repentance. The great Searcher of hearts must lay it bare before sin is felt, or confession made. There is a covering transgressions, as Adam, by hiding iniquity in the bosom (Job 31:33), as well as rolling it like a sweet morsel under the tongue; but "God will bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing whether it be good or whether it be evil," (Eccl. 12:14); and then "the morsel which thou hast eaten shalt thou vomit up" (Prov. 23:8), and loathe both it and thyself. But though the Lord sets his

people's sins in the light of his countenance, and brings them to bear with weight and power upon their conscience, and thus for a time at least lets them sink and fall into distress and grief, he will support them under the heavy load, that they may not altogether be crushed by it.

I do think, and here I must express my opinion, that if there is one single grace more overlooked than another in the church of God at the present day, it is the grace of repentance. Though it lies at the very threshold of vital godliness, though it was one main element in the gospel that Paul preached, for he "testified both to the Jews and also to the Greeks repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 20:21), yet how it is passed by. Men speak of faith, hope, and love; but repentance, contrition, godly sorrow for sin, how much this part of God's work upon the soul is passed by. But the Lord will not pass it by. Books may pass it by; men may pass it by; ministers may pass it by; but the Lord will not pass it by. He will bring out these secret sins and set them in the light of his countenance; and when he lays them upon the sinner's conscience, he will make him feel what an evil and bitter thing it is to have sinned against the Lord.

1. Now when one taught by grace feels the weight and burden of his sins laid on his conscience, and has a spiritual sight and view of the nature and enormity of the transgressions which he has committed against the Majesty of heaven, he will begin to say, "I will bear the indignation of the Lord." This indignation, thus submissively and patiently borne, is not that fearful displeasure which will one day burst forth and consume a guilty world, for that cannot be borne, as Cain complained and thousands have felt; nor is that "fiery indignation which shall devour the adversaries" ever directed against the people of God; for fury (or penal wrath)

is not in Him to those who fear his name. Where there is all wrath there is no repentance either on the part of God or man. The wrath that burns to the lowest hell, like Tophet's dreadful flame, is ever kindled by the breath of the Lord like a stream of brimstone. (Isai. 30:33.) The indignation, then, or fatherly displeasure, which is bearable, the soul will, as grace enables, patiently and submissively endure. We see much of this in the third chapter of Lamentations, and especially in that touching inquiry and exhortation: "Wherefore doth a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins? Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to the Lord. Let us lift up our heart with our hands unto God in the heavens" (Lam. 3:39, 40, 41); "Remembering mine affliction and my misery, the wormwood and the gall. My soul hath them still in remembrance, and is humbled in me. This I recall to my mind, therefore have I hope." (Lam. 3:19, 20, 21.) This stilling of complaints under a sense of chastisement for sin; this remembering the wormwood and the gall, being humbled by it, and gathering up hope as a support under it, harmonise with "I will bear the indignation of the Lord, *because I have sinned against him.*" It is as if the prophet said, "I will submit to it; I will not murmur nor fret nor rebel. I deserve it all, were it ten times more." It is a view of our sins against God that enables us to bear the indignation of the Lord against us and them. As long as we are left to a spirit of pride and self-righteousness, we murmur at the Lord's dealings when his hand lies heavy upon us. But let us only truly feel what we rightly deserve: that will silence at once all murmuring. You may murmur and rebel sometimes at your hard lot in providence; but if you feel what you deserve, it will make you water with tears of repentance the hardest cross. So in grace, if you feel the weight of your sins, and mourn and sigh because you have sinned against God, you can lift up your hands sometimes with holy wonder at God's long-suffering mercy that he has

borne with you so long; that he has not smitten you to the earth, or sent your guilty soul to hell. You will see, too, that the heaviest strokes were but fatherly chastisings; that the rod was dipped in love; and that it was for your good and his glory that it was laid on. When this sense of merited indignation comes into the soul, then meekness and submission come with it, and it can say with the prophet, "I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him." You would not escape the rod if you might. As Cowper says,

"Bastards may escape the rod,
Sunk in earthly, vain delight;
But a true-born child of God
Must not, would not if he might."

Thus there is a willingness to bear the rod and submission to the stroke. The saint of God would sooner be chastised with the children than be let off with the bastards, knowing what will be the end with all such. Thus he feels he will bear the indignation of the Lord in this time state.

But even were these strokes ten times heavier, he could bear them with submission, not only because of his deserts, but from a sweet hope, amounting at times to a confidence, that the Lord will *plead his cause*, that the enemies of his soul shall not always rejoice and triumph over him, but that the Lord himself will interfere in his behalf.

This brings us to the second reason why the prophet says, "I will bear the indignation of the Lord" in the confidence that the enemy shall not triumph over him. "*He shall plead my cause.*"

2. How this leads us at once to the advocacy of Jesus at the

right hand of God: "We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." This advocacy is here called, as elsewhere, "pleading the cause" of the believer and is connected with deliverance, for such an advocate can never fail: "O Lord, thou hast pleaded the causes of my soul; thou hast redeemed my life." (Lam. 3:58.) The figure is taken from a lawyer pleading the cause of a criminal and using his best endeavours to bring him off uninjured. But such advocacy may fail for two reasons: 1, the incompetency of the advocate, or 2, the badness of the cause. But there are no such hindrances to the success of the advocacy of Christ. How he can plead his own sufferings, blood, and obedience. His very Person, as the Son of God, and yet son of man, gives unspeakable value and validity to every plea of the great Intercessor. What validity, then, has his intercession in the court of heaven! It is true that he cannot deny the truth of the charge brought by the accuser of the brethren against his client; but he can present his own meritorious sufferings, and the sorrows he endured for the culprit. On this ground he can stand up as his surety and representative, and plead with his Father that he has suffered in his place and stead. On the firm, solid ground, then, of justice and equity, he can plead on his behalf, "Let him go, for I endured the penalty due to him."

And not only in the courts above, but here below the same all-prevailing Advocate may and often does, in the face of the world and in the face of Satan, so plead his cause as to bring off his client victorious. You may have fallen, for instance, under false and cruel charges; ungodly men or carnal professors, who are often worse, may have endeavoured to calumniate your character; and you may have sunk very much in your soul under these strokes. We feel keenly when we know we are innocent of charges brought against us. But you bear the indignation of the Lord, because you know that

though innocent of those charges, in other matters deeply registered on your own conscience you have sinned against him; hoping he will plead your cause in the face of your enemy, and make it plainly appear that your cause is his own.

3. "*And execute judgment for me.*" This third reason follows necessarily upon the Lord's pleading his cause; for the unfailing Advocate is the Almighty Judge.

O what a grievous thing it is to be an enemy of God and godliness, a foe to the Lord and to his people. All men, though they know and feel it not, are fighting against a God who with a look could crush them into eternal ruin, and will one day sentence them to eternal misery, for he will certainly execute judgment, and pass sentence of eternal banishment from his presence upon all his and his people's enemies. A day will come when the Lord will openly plead the cause of his people, when his saints shall come forth in all their glory, shining like the sun in the sky for ever and ever. At present, he may say, "My soul is sitting in darkness; I feel gathering around me the clouds of obscurity; the Lord does not shine upon my soul as I would wish; things in providence are obscured, and in grace are obscurer still. But will it always be so? Will my sun set in gloom? No," he says, in sweet confidence; "he will bring me forth to the light." This leads us to our fourth and last point:

IV.—The *firm assurance* of the prophet that the Lord will do two things for him: 1, "He shall bring me forth to the light," and as the consequence of that, 2, "I shall see his righteousness."

1. What is this "light?" The light of his own countenance, of his own grace, in the manifestations of his own pardoning

mercy and love.

While we are sitting in darkness; bearing the indignation of the Lord, we are not walking in the light of the Lord's countenance. We may see it at a distance. As by the natural eye we may see a ray of light peeping through a dense bank of clouds on some distant object, or the sun shining upon a mountain a great way off, as I remember once seeing the rising sun shining on the top of Mount Snowdon in North Wales before he was above the horizon; so in divine things we may see there is such a thing as the shining of the Lord's countenance, and that it shines brightly on others though not on ourselves. We may have enjoyed it ourselves in days past, yet now our path may be darkness and gloom, and still there may be a sweet persuasion in the soul, "He will bring me forth to the light."

But the words will bear another meaning in full harmony with the general bearing of the text. The Lord will clear up the false charges against you. Though clouds may for a time rest upon your Christian character; though enemies may misrepresent, calumniate, and cast a temporary shade over you, yet if you are right before God, if you are innocent, if the matter is merely one of calumny, and your hands are free from this charge, the Lord will bring you forth to the light. If it be true, you must fall under the charge; if your enemies have any real cause of offence against you, you must acknowledge it and bear the indignation of the Lord for it. But if it be merely a calumny, a groundless accusation, the Lord will bring you to the light and make it plain you are innocent, and that he is on your side. But mind, *he* must do it. It is of no use your justifying yourself, nor even bringing forth evidence to clear up things that may be misconstrued, though it may be right to do so, as enemies will rarely hear it or acknowledge it. Rather patiently bear the indignation of

the Lord for having sinned against him in matters not laid to your charge. In his own time and way he will bring you forth to the light and clear up all that is dark against you.

i. He adds, therefore, "*And I shall behold his righteousness.*" What is that righteousness?

1. First, it may signify God's *faithfulness*, for he is a faithful God, and righteousness is used sometimes in that sense. When he afflicts you, it is still in faithfulness; when he chastises, it is in faithfulness. He cannot be unfaithful to his covenant, to his promise, to his oath, to his dear Son, to the work of grace upon the soul. Clouds and darkness may surround his throne, but he is a righteous God still. Bear that in mind. Darkness is ours; he is light. All the unfaithfulness is ours; God is faithful. Let this be engraved on our heart of hearts: whatever takes place God is righteous and faithful still. All these dealings in providence and in grace that you have been so puzzled by, all spring from a God of righteousness. If he has cast you down in providence, if he has deprived you of earthly good, still hold by that truth, that God did it all. It is all of his hand, and in doing, it, he is still a righteous and faithful God. And if in grace you have gone down time after time lower and lower in the view of your misery and wretchedness; if you have had deeper and deeper discoveries of your sinfulness and wickedness, and the Lord has hidden his face more and more from you, may you ever hold it firm that it is done in consummate wisdom, truthfulness, and faithfulness. Now when the Lord brings you out into the light of his countenance, you will bless him for every afflicting stroke, for every temptation, every trial, and every desertion; and you will see in all God's righteousness.

ii. But there is another meaning of the expression, viz., *Christ's righteousness*. You will then more clearly see Christ's

righteousness, what a glorious righteousness it is, how suitable to all your wants and woes; and you will be able to hide yourself more and more under its covering protection.

Thus, if we know anything experimentally of the meaning of the text, we see how the Lord's people have to walk in these painful and gloomy paths. There may be those here who have been writing against themselves bitter things, because they have long had to walk in this path. You have rather reason to bless your Lord for placing you in it, because you have learnt in it important lessons. The Lord will eventually show you the reason of these dealings, and that wisdom and goodness and mercy are stamped upon them all.