

The Death of the Flesh the Life of the Spirit

Preached at Zoar Chapel, Great Alie Street, London, on Thursday Evening, July 25, 1844

"O Lord, by these things men live; and in all these things is the life of my spirit." Isaiah 38:16

The words I have just read, some of you may remember, are a part of "the writing" that King Hezekiah penned after "he was recovered of that sickness" which Isaiah the prophet was sent to declare was unto death. But when the Lord, in answer to Hezekiah's prayers and tears, reversed the sentence, and raised him up once more to health; and not only so, but enabled him to say, "Thou hast in love to my soul delivered it from the pit of corruption, for thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back"—then, that there might be a lasting record of the Lord's dealings with him, and a standing word of consolation to Gods afflicted people, under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, he penned this writing. Thus was his triumphal chant; the song of his deliverance which he sang upon the "stringed instruments in the house," and to the honour and praise "of the Lord." (Isa. 38:20.)

Before, then, I enter into the spiritual and experimental meaning of the words of the text, it will be necessary to trace out a little of Hezekiah's experience, that we may know what he intended, when he used this expression, "O Lord, by these things men live, and in all these things is the life of my spirit." The term, "*these things*," is clearly the key of the text, and has a reference to certain dealings of God upon his soul; in order, therefore, to know what he meant to convey by it, we must take a glimpse at these dealings of God with him.

Hezekiah, let it be remembered, was a gracious character before God brought on him the heavy trial recorded in this chapter. (Isaiah 38.) But he was where many of God's people are, though he knew it not: he had not been plunged deep enough into a knowledge of his own ruin, helplessness, and hopelessness as a fallen sinner. He wanted what Mr. Hart speaks of in his experience; (he uses a strange word, but a very expressive one;) he says, "After this my, shall I call it *reconversion*?" Many of God's people need this reconversion. They want a second plunge; and until they have had this second plunge, they do not, for the most part, know gospel mysteries deeply.

I shall endeavour by tracing out the experience of Hezekiah to explain my meaning more fully; and thus show how consistent it is with the teachings and dealings of God the Spirit on the heart. Hezekiah, as I have hinted, was a partaker of grace before the heavy trial came on him recorded in this chapter. And you will perceive most marked traits of his being a spiritual character, if you will read what is said of him in the corresponding passages in the books of Kings and of Chronicles; for there we have many proofs of his being one that feared God. For instance, we find in him a great zeal for the Lord, in breaking down the images, and cutting down the groves. It is also expressly said of him, that "he trusted in the Lord;" that "he clave to him, and departed not from following him;" and that "the Lord was with him." (2 Kings 18:4-7.) How earnest he shewed himself that the house of God might be opened, (which had been shut up by his father Ahaz,) every part of the temple purified, its worship and sacrifice restored, and the Passover duly celebrated. (2 Chron. 29.) And we see how his love extended beyond Judah; he sent post, we read, even from Dan to Beersheba to gather together to the solemn feast those that feared the Lord of the tribes of Israel. He was a man of a

tender conscience also; one who knew something of real brokenness and contrition before the Lord; for when the blasphemous letter came from the King of Assyria, we find him rending his garments, clothing himself in sackcloth, and going into the temple to spread out the letter before the Lord; and not merely spreading out the letter, but also pouring out his soul in cries and groans, in prayers and supplications, that God would vindicate his own cause, and deliver him and his people from the hands of Sennacherib. (Isa. 37.) Besides this, on the very eve of the trial came the deliverance. God heard his cries, smote the army of the King of Assyria, and gave Hezekiah this striking testimony that he had heard his prayer, by cutting off a hundred and fourscore and five thousand of that mighty army which had threatened him and Jerusalem with total destruction.

Putting all these marks together, we cannot entertain a doubt that Hezekiah was at this time a partaker of grace. We see his zeal, his faith, his love, his humility, and the tenderness of his conscience; that he knew what spiritual prayer was, and answers to prayer; the application of promises, and the fulfilment of them. But still, though he had the grace of the Spirit in his soul, though he had a new heart and a new nature, and had received tokens of mercy from God, yet there was something deficient, something grievously lacking in him. And this is the case with many of God's people. They have the fear of God in their conscience; they have a zeal for the Lord of hosts; they have a love to his Name, to his people, and to his truth; they have a measure of tenderness of heart and godly sincerity; and at times, when brought into straits and circumstances, the Spirit of grace and of supplications is poured out upon them, by which they cry to the Lord, and which he hears and answers. Yet there is something grievously lacking in them; they are still floating on the surface of truth only; they have still a superficial

religion; "the fountains of the great deep," as Hart says of himself, "have not been broken up;" the depth of human depravity, the treachery of the heart, the pride, presumption, and hypocrisy of their fallen nature, and all that fathomless abyss of the Adam-fall which is so covered over by the veil of ignorance and unbelief—this gulph of ruin into which they were precipitated by their forefather's transgression has not been opened up by the Spirit of God in their conscience. Therefore, they only float upon the surface of truth, without diving deep into that unfathomable sea of man's misery and God's mercy, to pluck up the precious jewels which are only to be found there. So that, for want of a deeper work upon their conscience; for want of being more stripped, searched, and exercised; for want of being more powerfully led into a knowledge of their ruin and misery, their views of Jesus are superficial, and shallow, mere floating in the head than felt in the heart, and consisting rather in the reception of sound doctrine in the judgment, than in a spiritual acquaintance with Jesus as he is, and with all that he has done for his people, in a broken and contrite spirit. Is not this true of the greater part of God's people in town and country? And is not this slight, flimsy religion fostered by the superficial, doctrinal preaching of the day? Persons have confessed to me, with tears flowing from their eyes, that whilst they sat under doctrinal ministers, they never knew their own misery, nor ever tasted God's mercy.

Now what is to cure this deficiency? What is to lead them into a more powerful experience of the truth? What is to bring them off this sincere yet shallow religion? What is to deepen the work of grace in their conscience? Why, the things that God brought upon Hezekiah: "In those days was Hezekiah sick unto death. And Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz, came unto him, and said unto him, Thus saith the Lord, Set thine house in order; for thou shalt die, and not live." (v. 1.)

That was the way the Lord took to deepen his work in Hezekiah's heart—to bring death before him. And no doubt, as the sentence of death entered into his body, so the sentence of death also entered into his conscience. And thus, the Lord, by sending home the sentence of death into his very vitals, and bringing it by divine authority into his heart and conscience, broke to pieces that which was hollow, false, and insincere, and showed him his true standing before him. In a word, he felt that he was not fit for eternity, to enter into the presence of God. His faith had not yet fully embraced the Person, love, work, and blood of Jesus; his hope had not yet taken a firm anchorage within the veil; and in fact, his religion stood more "in the wisdom of men" than in "the power of God."

Now, my friends, I know from soul experience, that until the Lord tries his work upon our heart, we shall rest in a superficial religion; we shall be content with shallow evidences, dim hopes, and shadowy expectations; we shall be content with a slight wounding and a slight healing, with being sincere in the main, and in being truly desirous to serve, please, and fear God. For want of clearer and deeper teaching, we shall be ready to think we have attained to far greater things in the divine life than we have attained unto, and so be apt to deceive ourselves *partially*; mind, I do not say *entirely*, for I have along been tracing out a true, though shallow experience. But all this superficial religion is for the want of God's sending home the sentence of death into the conscience; as the Apostle says, "We had the sentence of death in ourselves." (2 Cor. 1:9.) I speak of what I know; for I was here, I believe, myself for some time after the Lord first quickened my soul.

But what I want to draw your attention more particularly to is this—What effect was produced on Hezekiah when the

sentence of death entered his conscience? We read, "Then Hezekiah turned his face toward the wall, and prayed unto the Lord." What a reality, what a power, what a truthfulness shine through that expression! It is as though he turned away from the creature, from the world, and from all the strength, wisdom, and righteousness of the flesh, to seek God alone as his refuge. No doubt, there were in Hezekiah's time, as in ours, those who would give him false consolation; there were, doubtless, around his death-bed, plasterers, with polished trowels and heaps of untempered mortar. The priests, we may be sure, flocked around him, and sought to administer false comfort to his soul. "Remember," they would say, "O king, thy zeal for the Lord; call to mind how thou didst purify the temple; how thou didst keep the passover; didst break to pieces the brazen serpent; the many things thou hast done for God; and how the Lord delivered thee from the hand of the king of Assyria." But all these consolations (or that which they meant to be such) administered to him no comfort; for they all fell upon a heart that could not receive them. The sentence of death was in his conscience; guilt, wrath, and condemnation were all burning up his soul; the arrows of the Almighty were drinking up his spirit. It was God's purpose that he should not be thus comforted; for if he could have taken peace from the things that they were trying to plaster him over with, he would have lost the comfort which God had designed through this trial to bring into his soul.

Now, that is the reason why God will not let his people take comfort from the opinions of men—because he means to bring them off the creature; to wean them from leaning on an arm of flesh, and to bring them to that spot where he, and he alone, becomes all their salvation and all their desire. In order, therefore, to bring them off from the creature, he knocks away the rotten props from under them, by which

they so often try to shore and buttress up their sinking souls. But where did Hezekiah turn to? He turned "toward the wall, and prayed to the Lord." His bed was probably near the wall; and by turning to it, he implied that he felt that now he had to deal with God alone, and that no creature should come between the Lord and him. He turned, then, away from friends and from every earthly thing, to seek the Lord only. Now this is the spot to which God will bring all his children. He makes all his people, and that through painful, sharp, cutting convictions in the conscience, turn away from creatures, and from all false comfort; and to come to the Lord as feelingly lost, naked, guilty, and undone, that he may bind up the wounds which his own hands have made. This is close work. Presumption, hypocrisy, and self-righteousness cannot live here. Godly fear and spiritual sincerity alone breathe in this air.

But, we read, that he not only turned his face to the wall, but "*prayed unto the Lord, and wept sore.*" There is no real prayer till we turn our faces to the wall. There is no true pouring out of the heart before the Lord till we are brought into circumstances from which his out-stretched arm alone can deliver us. How many of God's own people go on praying in a formal way, bending their knees night and morning with all due regularity; (I speak not against it); yet how little do they know of heart-felt prayer, or of crying unto the Lord out of distress of mind, and of pouring out their souls into his bosom, because they have no other refuge wherein to hide their guilty heads! But depend upon it, there is no real prayer till there is this pouring out of the heart before the Lord, nor any real supplication, fervent wrestling, and importunate pleading till the soul, from deep necessity, turns its face to the wall to seek Jesus as its only hope and refuge.

"And he wept sore." He could take no comfort from the

things he had done for the Lord. He could not look at his evidences, they were all obscured; he could not review his well-spent life, it was blemished and stained throughout; he could not look at the future, or to what he meant to do for God, for the future was a dreary blank; yea, an eternity into which he was hastening without knowing how he stood before the Lord, whether he was pardoned, accepted, and saved, or whether the wrath of God was to abide on him for ever.

Now when he was reduced to this extremity, the Lord appeared for him. The Lord always meant to appear; he never intended to cut him off, as he threatened; he always purposed to lengthen his life fifteen years. But he led him through this trial, not only to teach him his deep guilt and misery, but also to show the superaboundings of his own grace in pardoning his sins through the blood of the Lamb. Thus Hezekiah had to bless God all the days of his life, as he himself declares, for being led into these deep waters, for having passed through this furnace, and being brought into this trial; because in it he learnt what he could not learn anywhere else, and in it pardon and peace were blessedly communicated with divine power and sacred unction to his soul.

In delivering him, then, out of this trial, the Lord lengthened his natural life, smiled upon his soul, and preserved him from going down to the pit, casting all his sins behind his back. Taught, then, and guided by the Spirit, Hezekiah penned this writing as a sweet memorial of the Lord's dealings with him, and that it might be an encouragement to God's people in similar circumstances in time to come.

But the main point to which I wish to call your attention is contained in the words of the text. Let us, then, with God's

blessing, see what the meaning and mind of the Holy Spirit is in them. "O Lord, by these things men live; and in all these things is the life of my spirit." What were "these things" he alludes to? The words "these things" have reference to what Hezekiah had been speaking of—the trial into which he had been thrown, and the deliverance which had been vouchsafed to him out of it; the laying of sin upon his conscience, and the casting of it behind the Lord's back; the furnace into which he had been put, and the Lord having brought him safely and uninjured out of it; the sentence of death sent into his conscience, and the manifestation of light, life, peace, and salvation whereby God removed it, when by it he had been thoroughly emptied, humbled, and stripped. Thus by "these things," by the trial and the deliverance, by the affliction and the consolation, by the smarting and the healing, by being cast down and being raised up, by being made poor and by being made rich; *by* these alternating series of God's dealings in the conscience "do men live;" "and *in* all these things," being brought into them, being carried through them, and being delivered out of them,—"*in* all these things is the life of our spirit."

I.—Let us, then, see how by "these things" men live. What is the effect when the sentence of condemnation comes into the conscience? By it we live. How so? Live by death? How can that be? Because the life of faith in the soul is of such a nature, that whatever weakens nature strengthens grace, and whatever feeds nature famishes faith. The life of God in the soul is a tender exotic which, like a flower among weeds, lives as nature dies, and pines as nature flourishes. So that "by these things men live," since spiritual life is carried on and invigorated in the soul through the trials and temptations that starve and weaken the flesh.

1. For instance; these trials *deaden us to the world*. Do we

not find this to be a solemn truth, that when all things go well with us, when the world is all smiles, when circumstances prosper, when the body is healthy, strong, and vigorous, spiritual religion is almost dying away in our souls? Is it not true, that, like Jeshurun, when we are waxen fat we kick? Do we not feel as the world gets a firmer hold upon our heart, that the things of God lose their reality and power in the conscience? Is it not a matter of experience, that just as nature flourishes within us, so grace seems to wither, pine, and languish? The flourishing together of these two things is incompatible. Is nature weakened? grace is strengthened. Is grace weakened? nature is strengthened. Nature and grace, the spirit and the flesh, are so entirely opposed, that the death of the one is the life of the other, and the life of the one is the death of the other. In order, then, to weaken nature, and to make the world and its charms as nothing in our sight, the Lord sends, or allows trials and afflictions to come upon us, that by weakening nature, and bringing us down in our soul, he may cause the life of the Spirit to be more active and vigorous in our heart. For instance, when a trial comes upon us, such as befell Hezekiah (a trial I have in a measure passed through, and therefore know something of it)—when the sentence of condemnation comes into our conscience, what is the effect of it? In what state and circumstance does the trial find us? For the most part, it finds us full of the world; we have some sincerity, some godly fear, some desire to be right, and some fear to be wrong. We have had some testimonies, enjoyed some measure of consolation and of the peace of God in our conscience. But still, for want of a deeper work, for want of the stripping and emptying operations of the Spirit, the world has gradually crept in upon us, and taken possession of our heart and affections; and we know not how far we have backslidden from the right way, and into what a state of leanness, barrenness, and deadness we have fallen till the

trial comes. But when the trial, temptation, or affliction comes; when the sentence of condemnation enters with power into the conscience, it shows us where we are, how insensibly we have slipped into the love of the world, and how imperceptibly its spirit has struck its deep fibres into our affections. When death stares us in the face, when our evidences sink out of sight, when God hides himself, and his wrath is felt in the conscience, what a vain thing the world is! When under these circumstances, and bleeding under the wounds which the Spirit makes in the soul, what poor consolation the comforts, pleasures, riches, and honours of this world afford! What balm can they give to the wounds of a guilty conscience? Thus, the spirit of the world, the dross and the tin mixed with the pure metal, is purged away by the severity of the trial, and the heat of the furnace into which the soul is cast.

2. But again. The trial finds us very much in this state, *mistaking the teachings of man for the teachings of God*; heaping up treasure, without the Lord communicating his precious riches, by the operations of the Spirit, to our conscience. How many persons there are, and it is to be feared that many of God's people are among them, who are mistaking the form of religion for the power of it; mistaking doctrines learned in the head for the teachings of the Spirit in the soul! Now when this trial comes upon us; when the Lord takes and puts us into the furnace, it burns up all this false religion. We have perhaps made ourselves very wise in the letter, possess retentive memories which we have well stored with texts and passages of Scripture, have heard a great many excellent preachers, read numerous books written by great divines, and thus have accumulated many treasures. But when the sentence of condemnation comes, these treasures, heaped up for the day of evil, are all driven away like smoke out of the chimney, or chaff from the threshing-

floor. They cannot stand the day of trial, not being wrought in the soul by divine power, nor sealed upon the heart by a testimony from God, but only floating in the judgment. When unpardoned sin lies heavy on the conscience, the soundest sentiments and the clearest views, which have not been wrought into the heart by the Spirit of God, cannot give peace to the mind; and we can no more hang upon them to save our souls from the wrath to come, than a drowning man can hang upon a straw to save him from sinking in the deep waters. Thus, this trial purges away a great deal of false religion.

3. Again. While in this state, before we have had the second plunge—for, mark you, I am speaking to the children of God—*there is a great deal of presumption in the carnal mind, which passes with them for faith.* Many of God's people use the language of assurance, which they never received from the teachings of God the Spirit. They have heard the minister say, "My God, and my Jesus;" at the prayer-meeting they have heard, "My God and my Father;" and they have sung it in the hymn, without the blessed Spirit having shed abroad the love of God in their heart, or given them the spirit of adoption to cry, "Abba Father." They have thus borrowed these terms of appropriation from the lips of others; and ignorantly mistake this presumption, so rife in the present day, for the real assurance of faith. But when God brings a man down to the waterflood, and gives him a second plunge, he drowns this presumption, and brings him to this spot—that he has nothing but what God gives, feels nothing but what God inspires, knows nothing but what God teaches, and is nothing but what God makes him. A man then looks at the numerous words that have dropped from his lips, how high he has soared, misled by the example of others; and he now finds what he once thought to be faith, to be nothing but daring presumption and vain-confidence. Thus this sharp trial

cuts up his false faith, and brings him down with grief and sorrow into deep humility and contrition before the Lord.

4. Another effect which the trial produces is this. When the sentence of condemnation from God's lips comes into the conscience, *it opens a man's eyes to see the reality of vital godliness*. My friends, there is a great deal of talk about religion; but how few persons know anything of what true religion is, of the secret of vital godliness, of the inward teachings and operations of God the Spirit upon the heart! Many men speak fluently enough of doctrines, and of the blessed truths of the gospel; but what good can mere doctrines do for me, unless they are sealed on my heart, and applied with divine power to my conscience? Without this, the greatest truths can do me no good. But when the Lord lays us low, puts us into the furnace, and drags us through the waters, he shows us that true religion, vital godliness, is something deeper, something more spiritual, something more supernatural, something that stands more in the teachings of God the Spirit and his operation on the heart, than ever we dreamt of before we entered upon the trial. We might have had the clearest views of doctrinal truth, and professed to believe too that true religion is the work of the Holy Ghost; and yet these were but dim notions floating in the head, before we came into the furnace. But these things now are seen in a different light, and felt in a totally different manner. What before was but a doctrine, becomes now a most certain truth; and what before was but a sound sentiment, is now sealed as a living reality in experience.

As the Lord, then, brings us into the dust, he strips away our mere notional, doctrinal religion. He begins to open up to our heart the real nature of vital godliness—that it is something deeper, something more spiritual, something more powerful, something more experimental than anything we have ever

yet known; that it consists in the teachings and leadings of God the Spirit in the conscience. As soon as this is felt, it strips a man of everything he has learnt in the flesh, and brings him down to the dust of death; and when brought there, the blessed Spirit opens up the truths of the gospel in a way he had never known before.

Many people know the truth in the letter, but how few by the teachings and operations of God the Spirit in the heart! They have sound views of the way of salvation, but it has never been wrought out with a mighty power into their soul; they have clear heads, but their hearts are not broken into contrition and godly sorrow; their minds are well-instructed in the truths of the gospel, but these truths have not been communicated by "an unction from the Holy One;" nor have they been felt with a solemn, overwhelming conviction, whereby they know the truth and the power of it, and have their souls baptized into a spiritual conformity to, and sweet enjoyment of it. Till a man is made to see the emptiness of a mere profession, to have his free-will stripped and purged away, and to be brought out of that empty religion so generally current, and is broken down into humility at the footstool of divine mercy, he will not feel the power, the reality, the sweetness, and the blessedness of the overwhelming love of God displayed in the gospel. Until the soul is thus stripped, till the vessel is thus emptied, these things cannot be known, nor is it in a condition to receive the glorious riches of free grace. Until the dross and tin is removed from the heart, the pure metal cannot shine, till this chaff is blown away, the wheat lies heaped up in a confused mass on the threshing floor. The Lord, therefore, will try his work on the heart; for he is a jealous God, and he will not give his glory to another, but maintain to himself his prerogative of sovereign mercy, and of saving to the uttermost.

When Hezekiah, then, said, "By these things, men live," he meant that by these trials and deliverances, by these sinkings and raisings, strippings and clothings, emptyings and fillings, "by these things men," that is, spiritual men "live." It is a mystery, but a great truth, that just in proportion as we die to the world, to self, to sense, to nature, and to false religion, the more the life of God is strengthened in our conscience. The Lord, perhaps, has taught some of you this truth through great afflictions. But when these trials came upon you at the first, it seemed as though they would entirely overwhelm you; they took away your standing, and it appeared as though they had destroyed your faith and hope. But though these floods of temptation passed over the soul, they swept away nothing but the rubbish, which till then was mistaken for the inward teachings of God the Spirit. So far then from these afflictions overwhelming your faith, you found that faith was secretly strengthened by the very flood that threatened at first to drown it. True faith is no more destroyed by sharp trials, than the oak is destroyed by cutting away the ivy, or by a storm blowing down some of its rotten branches. When temptations first assailed us, we thought they would destroy us utterly; they were so powerful we could not stand up against them; they threatened to leave us not a single sail to set before the wind. But did we not find after the first gust of the storm had burst over, that we became more deeply rooted in the truth, and were enabled to enter more into the power and sweetness of it? I have compared professors of religion sometimes to trees of two different kinds of growth. There are those who resemble fir trees in a plantation, and others, oaks in a park. The fir trees, nursed in a plantation, (like professors in a church,) and sheltered from the wind, are easily torn up by the storm; while by the same gust the oaks only get more deeply rooted. The more the wintry winds blow and the tempests

howl, and the more they beat upon the oak, the more firmly fixed does it become, the more deeply the roots strike into the earth, the higher the branches tower up to heaven, the more broadly do they spread themselves over the soil. So spiritually, the storms and tempests that pass over a child of God, instead of weakening, only strengthen him; for they bring him nearer to the Lord. And thus, as the oak, the more the wind blows upon it, takes a firmer root in the soil; so the storms and tempests that blow upon the soul, only cause it to take a firmer hold of the truth, and to strike its fibres more deeply into the Person, love, work, and blood of Jesus. So that, "by these things men live;" for through them, the life of God is maintained and kept up in the soul, the Holy Ghost secretly strengthening it by the very things that seemed to threaten it with destruction.

II.—But he adds, "And in all these things is the life of my spirit." By "spirit," he means the "new nature," so called from its being born of the Spirit. This "new nature" has its ebbings and flowings, sinkings and risings; it has its fluctuations; and sometimes, to our feelings, appears almost ebbled out from our heart. But Hezekiah says, In all these afflictions and consolations, these ebbings and flowings, these risings and sinkings,—"in all these things is the life of my spirit." By all this contrariety of feeling, grace in the soul, the life of God in the heart is nourished, strengthened, and revived. So far, then, are these trials, exercises, temptations, difficulties, and perplexities, from destroying or overwhelming the grace of God in the soul, that the very exercises and passing through them, is the life of the spirit. Grace flourishes amidst these afflictions; faith is in more lively operation by the weights and burdens that are put upon it; because God has so ordered it, that when we are weak, then we are strong. This is the grand secret of godliness, "my grace is sufficient for thee; for my strength is made perfect in weakness." (2 Cor.

12:9.) In order, therefore, that Christ's strength may be made perfect in us, we must come into trials and temptations, in order that our weakness may convince us of our deep need of him, and bring us into that spot where Christ's strength is made perfect. We are thus brought to feel that all these trials and deliverances are mercifully given to cause our spirit to revive and flourish; to show that the Lord had laid help upon one that is mighty; that in him dwelleth all divine fulness; and that out of that fulness we receive grace for grace. And thus the Lord secretly keeps up that life he has given; and by these very trials, and what comes out of them; by these very exercises and deliverances, he causes the new nature to revive and flourish, not only in spite of, but through and on account of these very trials and exercises that once seemed ready to overwhelm and almost destroy it.

What a mercy it is, to know that these trials and afflictions are sent by the hand of God! What a mercy, though painful in the extreme, to be stripped and emptied of all our lying refuges; to feel the truth of those words, "the hailstones shall sweep away the refuge of lies." (Isa. 28:17.) Those of us who know the plague of our own hearts, O what refuges of lies do we find there! and what a mercy it is to be brought to feel the sentence of condemnation applied with power to our conscience! What blessed results hang upon these trials! So that the very things we thought to be against us, we find are the very things that are most for us; and the things we thought to be most for us, we prove to be most against us. The very things we thought we had most cause to fear, are the very things we have most cause to be thankful for; and if we had those things which our carnal hearts most desire, they would leave the soul barren and empty. Thus, then, the soul finds, "By these things men live, and in all these things is the life of my spirit." So that in the hour of solemn meditation, we can bless God for the trials and exercises,

thank him for the furnaces, and praise him for emptying and stripping us; because we have found what occasion he has taken therefrom to teach and comfort the soul, and bring it into some measure of conformity to Christ's suffering image. And thus we find, as Hezekiah said, "In all these things," painful as they are, "is the life of our spirit."