

SERMONS,

PREACHED

IN THE PARISH CHURCH OF

HIGH WYCOMBE.

BY

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TO THE
REV. GABRIEL VALPY, A.M.

THIS VOLUME IS INSCRIBED,
AS A TOKEN OF THE ESTEEM AND AFFECTION
OF HIS GREATLY OBLIGED FRIEND,
THE AUTHOR.

High Wycombe, May 20, 1820.

SERMON II.

THE FORBEARANCE OF DAVID TOWARDS SHIMEI.

2 SAMUEL xvi. 13.

And as David and his men went by the way, Shimei went along on the hill's side over against him, and cursed as he went, and threw stones at him, and cast dust.

THE justice of God never perhaps appears so awful, as when he is visiting with judgments his beloved people. He makes his power to be known and his name to be feared, when he curses a Cain or overthrows a Pharaoh; but when we see him laying his hand on a David, and following year after year with his severest chastisements the man after his own heart because he has sinned against him, who does not stand in awe of his holiness, and tremble at the terrors of his justice?

But even “in his wrath, the Lord thinketh upon mercy.” Though he visits “the transgression of his children with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes,” yet, in the midst of their chastisements, he manifests the greatness of his love towards them, and his jealousy for their honour, as well as for his own. He makes their sufferings the means of calling their graces into exercise; and removes from them much of the shame of their guilt, by the patience with which he enables them to bear their punishment.

Thus did he act towards his servant David. He smote him fearfully, and pierced him through with the sharpest sorrows, but he strengthened him in his afflictions; and the troubled saint not only brought glory to his God by his submission and self-abasement, but covered himself with an honour which has made him the admiration of succeeding ages. Who can read the part of his history now before us without reverencing the man, and almost longing to share his injuries, so that he might be made partaker of his meekness?

In contemplating the bright example he has here left us, we may consider, first, the provocation he received; and, secondly, the forbearance he manifested.

I. 1. *The provocation which David received* on this occasion, was one of the most *irritating* by which the patience of man was ever tried. It was offered to a person of the most exalted rank, by one who was much his inferior; and it was continued without intermission till he was beyond the reach of his malice. And what must have given peculiar keenness to this insult, was the extraordinary respect with which the monarchs of the east were accustomed

to be treated. They were almost worshipped as gods by their subjects; and yet we here find one of the best and greatest among them, reviled and cursed to his face. "When king David came to Bahurim," says the sacred historian, "behold, thence came out a man of the family of the house of Saul, whose name was Shimei, the son of Gera; he came forth and cursed still as he came. And thus said Shimei when he cursed, Come out, come out, thou bloody man, and thou man of Belial. The Lord hath returned upon thee all the blood of the house of Saul, in whose stead thou hast reigned, and the Lord hath delivered the kingdom into the hand of Absalom, thy son; and, behold, thou art taken in thy mischief, because thou art a bloody man. And as David and his men went by the way, Shimei went along on the hill's side over against him, and cursed as he went, and threw stones at him, and cast dust."

The reason why God was pleased to allow this insult to be added to the other trials of David, is obvious. He wished to teach him how low his iniquities had sunk him, and to show him that the cup of the divine indignation was not even yet exhausted. The lesson it is calculated to teach us is equally plain. It tells us that *the servant of God must expect to meet with insults and provocations from his fellow-sinners.*

We are not dwelling among angels, but among men. We are living in a fallen world, in a world that has renounced the authority of the God of peace, and thrown itself under the dominion of the prince of discord. It would be madness then to think of passing through it, as though it were a world of love. The wonder is, not that there is so much selfishness, and malice, and wrong, amongst us, but that there is so little; not that so many thorns and briars are springing up on this accursed ground, but that we are so seldom torn by them. Instead therefore of looking with surprise and almost murmuring on the confusion which hatred and revenge are stirring up around him, let the Christian remember on what a world he is standing, and be thankful that his own hand is not lifted up against every man, and every man's hand against him; let him adore that grace which controls the raging passions of his fallen brethren, and leads so many amongst them to mitigate by their forbearance and active benevolence the evils of our state. While Shimei was cursing, David was surrounded by friends who were mingling their tears with his, and who would gladly have shed their blood for his sake; and where is the reviled and afflicted servant of God, who has not some eye to weep for him, some tongue to bless, and some heart to love him?

But let us not expect too much from the friendship of mankind. We have made our hearts the seats of malignant dispositions, and though God in his mercy restrains their violence, yet he is determined that we shall know something of their evil, and taste something of their bitterness. Hence he exposes every man, in a greater or less degree, to enmity and injustice; and as for his own people, he generally measures out to them a double portion of the

world's hatred. He acts thus that he may conform them to their despised and rejected Master; that he may manifest to angels and to men the ardour of their love to him, and the power of his grace; that he may remind them of their sins, wean them from the earth, and sweeten to them that world of harmony and rest, for which he is preparing them.

2. The conduct of Shimei was *cruel* also, as well as irritating.

The condition of David at this period appeared calculated to disarm by its misery the most inveterate of his enemies. The hand of the Lord was heavy upon him, and had raised up evil against him out of his own house. One of his sons, after a crime which must have made the heart of his father sink within him, had been slain by his brother's hand; and now another of his family, his beloved Absalom, was heading a rebellion against him, and had already driven him from his throne. Attended by a few faithful adherents, he leaves Jerusalem, and passes on, weeping and barefoot, to seek a refuge from the violence of his own subjects in the wilderness of Judæa. Wherever he came, his humiliation and sorrows excited the compassion of all who beheld him; for who does not feel for a father, when oppressed by the cruelty of his children and mourning over their vices? But his afflicted condition moved not Shimei. David had offended him. He thought that now in his adversity he might gratify his resentment with impunity; and while others were following him with tears and blessings, he pursued him with reproaches and curses. The Christian therefore must not expect that the troubles of life will screen him from persecution. This history teaches him that *they will expose him in a peculiar degree to the revilings of the ungodly.*

We are ready to suppose in the hour of affliction, that every heart must feel for us, and that the malice of our bitterest enemies must now for a season be changed into pity. But experience proves that the most afflicted are generally the most persecuted. Their calamities leave their adversaries nothing to hope from their favour, and little perhaps to dread from their displeasure. The consequence is, that they indulge without restraint the enmity which before they suppressed. Many also are prone, as Shimei was, to ascribe the afflictions of the righteous to the divine indignation against them, and think that they are even furthering the design of God by covering them with shame. Thus David found it in the present instance, and in the time of his old age, when his strength failed him, he found it the same. His enemies spake against him, and they that laid wait for his soul, took counsel together, saying, "God hath forsaken him; persecute and take him, for there is none to deliver him." The Saviour himself experienced the same treatment. In the hour of his agony, he seemed to cry from the cross in the words of his prophet, "Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? Behold and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow which is done unto me, wherewith the Lord hath afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger." And what was the pity he obtained? "They

mocked and derided him.” “They gave him gall for his meat; and in his thirst, they gave him vinegar to drink.”

And *is not malice always cruel?* We may not be bowed down by those heavy calamities under which the insulted David was suffering, but where is the man whose condition does not give him a claim on the forbearance of his brethren? Innumerable evils are compassing us about. Disappointments and vexations, losses and troubles, pain and sickness, are day by day the portion of our cup; and when we have struggled through a few more years of care and sorrow, we shall lie down in the darkness of the grave. Shall we then, in such a situation as this, delight in harassing each other? Shall the mariners whom a raging hurricane is tossing, and whose vessel is already sinking, spend the few fearful moments that are left them, in mutual animosities and insults? Is man so happy and is his life so extended, that he needs our persecutions to remind him that he is fallen and guilty? Alas, no! So wretched is his condition, that the very God who is afflicting him, pities him in his sufferings, and calls upon his brethren to pity him also; to be tender-hearted towards him; to share his burdens, and weep with him in his sorrows. Let our common miseries then put an end to our contentions. Let us regard each other as suffering and dying, and be anxious to lessen, instead of aggravating, the ills which assail us. Let us not wound the criminal who is groaning on the rack, nor bruise today the worm that will be crushed tomorrow.

3. The provocation which David received, was also *undeserved*. There was indeed blood which cried from the ground for vengeance on his head, but he had never injured Shimei; and as for his having been guilty of the death of Saul and his family, no charge could be more unjust. He had repeatedly spared their lives when they were in his power: and when they were slain by the Philistines, he lamented them as though they had been his own brethren. But *the ungodly are always selfish*. They judge of others, not by the laws of impartial justice, but by the standard of self-interest. The man who upholds their opinions and furthers their schemes, though he trample under foot all that is virtuous and sacred, is applauded; while the most excellent of the earth, if they stand in the way of their interest or honour, are exposed to their insults. David was called a usurper, a man of Belial, a murderer; and why? Because he had made himself the slave of lust, and had cruelly slain the noble Uriah? No; because he had been elevated by God to the throne of Israel, and had thus marred the prospects of the ambitious Shimei. Innocence then is no protection against malice, neither can the most upright conduct always prevent us from being charged with those very crimes, from which we have been the most anxious to keep ourselves free. When the views of the ungodly are opposed and their passions inflamed, a devout David is a son of Belial, a blameless John has a devil, and the holy Saviour himself is a wine-bibber and a glutton.

II. But let us turn from the cruel and irritating conduct of this disappointed Israelite to a more pleasing subject of meditation, and consider, secondly, *the forbearance which David manifested.*

1. *He received the provocation of Shimei with the meekest silence.* He heard his accusations, and he knew them to be false; but he answered him not a word.

And herein he acted wisely, as well as meekly. There are indeed cases, in which it becomes absolutely necessary to vindicate our characters at any risk from the calumnies of the ungodly; but these occasions do not often occur. When our enemies are much incensed against us, it will generally be found that to reply to their aspersions serves only to increase their violence, and perhaps to give them an advantage over us. And even were it not so, where is the man who is sure that he can bridle his tongue, when he has once suffered it to undertake his defence? We may begin with vindicating our own integrity, but we shall generally end with retorting the railings of our persecutors. Silence under provocation is safety. To govern our lips is, in most instances, to govern our hearts. How did the wise Hezekiah command his servants to act, when the officer of the haughty Sennacherib spake against him in the hearing of his subjects? "They held their peace, for the king's command was, Answer him not." And what was the conduct of a greater than Hezekiah, when "his enemies whetted their tongues like a sword against him, and shot forth their arrows, even bitter words?" "Many false witnesses testified against him, but Jesus held his peace." When they oppressed and afflicted him, "he opened not his mouth;" and when they led him forth to torment and crucify him, "he was brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth."

2. But there may be silence where there is no meekness. No angry word may proceed from the lips, while the deadliest revenge is cherished in the heart. It is necessary therefore that we should observe, further, that *David forgave the provocation of Shimei.*

His friends around him were incensed to the utmost, and were eager to vindicate the honour of their insulted monarch with their swords. "Why should this dead dog curse my lord, the king?" said Abishai. "Let me go over, I pray thee, and take off his head." But David censured, as well as repressed, his zeal. "What have I to do with you," he says, "ye sons of Zeruah? Let him alone and let him curse." Now this was not the language of insensibility or of cowardice. It was the language of self-denying greatness, patiently enduring the injuries it keenly felt, and rising superior to the insults it might with safety have revenged. It was dictated by the same spirit that afterwards led the exalted Son of David to rebuke those who were eager to call down fire from heaven on his persecutors, and to restrain the impetuous disciple who

wished to defend his beloved Master with the sword.

Would the conduct of David then have been either unlawful or sinful, if he had commanded his attendants to take immediate vengeance on Shimei? It might not have been unlawful, for the laws of Judæa would undoubtedly have condemned the traitor, and the power of carrying them into execution was vested in David's hands; but laws were not designed by God to gratify the vindictive passions of the human heart. It is as sinful to seek revenge by the arm of the law, as to seek it by the violence of our own arm. Not that every appeal to the tribunals of our country is necessarily sinful. God has erected them among us for the very purpose of redressing the injured; and the injured are warranted, under some circumstances, in demanding before them satisfaction for the wrongs they have sustained. But what is it that must lead us to the seat of justice? Malice and resentment? A desire of giving pain to the man who has wronged us, and of bringing down shame and vengeance on his head? God forbid! Our cause may be just; but in seeking justice with feelings like these within us, we are sinning against God. An earthly judge may sanction our conduct, but the great Judge of all will condemn us. Amidst the exultations of victory, and all the dreadful pleasure which satiated revenge can afford, this voice from heaven will be directed to our ears, "Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord."

But it is not enough that we admire the meekness of David; it is recorded here to be imitated. It may have arrested our attention, and even affected our hearts by the elevated spirit which it manifests; but if this be all, if we leave this house of prayer with minds as proud and revengeful as they were when we entered it, what will the most earnest attention, and what will the liveliest feelings profit us? A man parched with thirst does not rest contented with gazing on the clearness of the water before him; the hungry man is not satisfied with admiring the splendour of the banquet to which he is invited; neither does he who is hungering and thirsting after righteousness, content himself with merely contemplating the graces which the Holy Spirit has exhibited to his view. He desires to make them his own. He adds to attention and feeling, prayer and exertion. He strives, in dependence on almighty aid, to clothe himself with the beauty of holiness. Is this your desire, brethren? Let this then be your conduct. Pray that you may be numbered among the meek and long-suffering, the tender-hearted and forgiving; and show the sincerity of your prayers by your actions. Have you enemies? Give no rest to your eyes nor slumber to your eye-lids, till you have prayed for them who have despitefully used you; and before another sabbath has dawned, let some act of kindness convince them that you are determined to return them good for their evil. Remember the command of your Lord; "Agree with thine adversary quickly, whilst thou art in the way with him." There is no time for a protracted struggle with the workings of resentment. Pride must be conquered

today, or your offending brother may be sleeping in the dust before the victory is won. The time is not far distant, when the hand of death will be upon us, and all the friendships and hatreds of life come to an end. And when this period arrives, what shall we think of the jealousies and contentions which are now suffered to agitate us? We shall wonder at the weakness which has made us so liable to be affected by them; and supplicate pardon for the depravity which has rendered it so hard to forgive them. If then there be any root of bitterness springing up among us, this very day let it be plucked up; and if our enemies will not be won by our meekness, amidst all their reproaches and curses let this be the most revengeful feeling that is harboured in our breasts, and this the hardest saying that proceeds from our lips, "Father, forgive them." "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge."

A review of this history, as far as we have considered it, is calculated to leave impressed on us a conviction of *the power of true religion*; its power, not only to touch the fears and hopes of the soul, and to fill it with a train of varied and deep emotions, but the mighty power which it exercises over the dispositions, the temper, the heart. What, if the patience of a suffering Jesus prove nothing as to the efficacy of his grace? we have here "a man of like passions with ourselves," tried by insults and provocations to the very utmost, and yet silent in the midst of them all, unmoved by passion, and dead to every feeling of revenge.

Why then is the power of divine grace so often questioned and denied? Why are we so frequently told that the very constitution of their nature prevents some men from suppressing the risings of anger, and subduing the workings of resentment? The conduct of David disproves and condemns all such assertions. It shows us how much provocation divine grace can enable a man to bear; what a complete victory it can give him over that most powerful of all enemies, himself, his own proud and revengeful heart. It takes up the language of Paul, and while it commands us to forbear one another and forgive one another, it tells us that we "can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth" us; that his "grace is sufficient" for us; that it can control and subdue the most impetuous mind, and mould it into the image of a patient God.

When therefore we are commanded to love our enemies, to bless them that curse us, and to do good to them that hate us, instead of replying that nature forbids it, let us remember that God requires it. He suffers the brute beasts that have no understanding, to follow the law of nature; but he calls upon man to be conformed to a higher and nobler law. He points to the cross of his persecuted Son, and while we hear him praying with his dying breath for his murderers, he offers us his grace, and says, "Let the same mind that was in Christ, be in you." And what is the language of Jesus himself? Though

he is full of gentleness and mercy, he reminds us of the torments of destruction, and tells us in terms too plain to be misunderstood, "So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses."

This history reminds us also of *the dignity which a meek and forgiving spirit imparts.*

The Bible tells us that "it is the glory of a man to pass over a transgression," and it gives us in this chapter a confirmation of the saying. We have here two men differing almost as much as men can differ, in their dispositions and conduct; the one indulging without control the resentment he had long cherished, the other receiving the most irritating provocations in silence, enduring and forgiving them. Now could we have witnessed the scene which the Holy Spirit has here described, and been at the same time altogether ignorant of the character and rank of the persons before us, which of these two men should we have pronounced the most honourable? the cursing Benjamite or the patient David? If we have the feelings of men, we should have turned with pity and disgust from the one, and been ready to prostrate ourselves with admiration and reverence at the feet of the other.

Here then is a lesson for those who are striving to raise themselves to honour. You wish to be highly esteemed among men, and, in order to procure their respect, you imagine that no real or supposed insult must pass unnoticed, and that you must commence an unceasing struggle for superiority in rank and consequence. Is then the object of your wishes to be attained by such means as these? Will pride, anger, and turbulence, make a man honourable and great? Impossible. This would be to seek honour in a way which God has determined shall never lead to it; and all the fruit of such disquieting efforts will be the pity of the good and the contempt of the unfeeling. Cease then from the foolish attempt. Go and sit at the feet of David, and let him teach you that the readiest, the surest, the safest way to exalt yourselves, is to lie low and be humble, to be "meek and lowly in heart," to triumph over the pride and the folly which have hitherto been leading you captive. The path to real greatness is pointed out to you in this history. It is the path of self-denial and meekness. The indulgence of passion and resentment can lead only to shame. What being in the universe is the most degraded? That unclean spirit who is the proudest and most malicious. And in whom may be found the highest dignity and greatness? Even in him who is the most long-suffering, the readiest to forbear and the most willing to pardon. "The high and lofty One who inhabiteth eternity," esteems that spirit of patience and forgiveness which is so much despised upon earth, the chief glory of his name, and the brightest gem in his wonderful crown. "I beseech thee, show me thy glory," says Moses; and what is the answer which the Lord returns to his servant? Do we see him bowing the heavens and coming down in his

majesty; making the clouds his chariot, and flying on the wings of the wind? Do we hear the hosts of his angels proclaiming, amidst thunders, and lightnings, and blackness, and darkness, and tempest, that the Lord God almighty is a consuming fire? No; he takes no other symbol of his presence than the cloudy pillar by which he was protecting and guiding his people, and in a still small voice he proclaims from it the name of the Lord; “The Lord, the Lord God; merciful and gracious; long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth; keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin.” Where is the penitent sinner, who does not give his despair to the winds, as he listens to such words as these? And where is the persecuted Christian who does not long to forgive his enemies as freely and fully, as this glorious God has forgiven him?