

SERMONS
ON
IMPORTANT SUBJECTS,
BY THE LATE REVEREND AND PIOUS
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IN THREE VOLUMES.

THE FIFTH EDITION.

TO WHICH ARE NOW ADDED,
THREE OCCASIONAL SERMONS,
NOT INCLUDED IN THE FORMER EDITIONS;
MEMOIRS AND CHARACTER OF THE AUTHOR;
AND
TWO SERMONS ON OCCASION OF HIS DEATH,
By the Rev. Drs. Gibbons and Finley.

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SERMON XLIII.

THE VESSELS OF *MERCY* AND THE VESSELS OF *WRATH* DELINEATED.

Rom. ix. 22, 23.—*The vessels of wrath fitted to destruction. and—the vessels of mercy, which He had afore prepared unto glory.*

THE true notion of the present world is, that it is a state of preparation for another; and, therefore, such as we habitually are here, such shall we be for ever. Mankind are now forming, like clay in the potter's hands, some for honour and some for dishonour; some for wrath and some for glory. And as the potter does not put his vessels to their respective uses until they are finished and prepared for them, so neither are men removed from the present state, and fixed in their respective residences in the eternal world, until they are prepared, finished, and completely fitted for them. The vessels of mercy are prepared before-hand for that glory with which they shall be filled. And, on the other hand, the vessels of wrath are fitted to destruction, and fit for nothing else, before they are dashed to pieces by the iron rod of divine justice.

It is a criticism worthy to be mentioned, even in this solemn place, where I never choose to make a parade of useless learning, that the apostle uses a different form of expression, when speaking of these different sorts of persons. The preparation of the vessels of mercy for glory, he ascribes to God, as his work. Hence he uses an active verb, referring expressly to God as the agent—*the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory.* But the fitting or preparing the vessels of wrath for destruction, he does not ascribe to God, but intimates that it is their own work. Hence he uses a passive particle—*the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction*—fitted by their own wilful sin and impenitence, during the long-suffering of God towards them, which had a tendency to lead them to repentance.

Vessels of wrath.—How terribly emphatical is this phrase! Vessels dreadfully capacious of divine wrath! to be filled to the brim with that burning liquid! But how beautifully significant is the metaphor—*vessels of mercy!* vessels formed, prepared, finished, adorned by the gentle and skilful hand of divine mercy! vessels capacious of mercy, and to be filled, to overflow, with glory!

The gracious and sovereign God, who might justly have dashed these vessels of wrath to pieces as soon as ever they became marred clay in his plastic hands, endures or bears with them with much long-suffering, as well as with vessels of mercy. Bears with them, as he has with you, for days, for months, and years, notwithstanding their daring provocations, and ungrateful

abuse of his patience which nothing but divine patience could bear with so long. But all this time, they contracted more and more filth and pollution; they became every day less fit for their master's use, and rendered themselves more and more fit for destruction, and fit for nothing else.

And shall these vessels of wrath answer no valuable use in the great house of the universe? Will they serve to furnish out no apartment of this vast building? Will they be of no use in this numerous family of reasonable creatures? Yes, they will furnish out the regions of hell, a place as necessary and useful in the universe, as it is now constituted, as prisons and bedlams upon the earth. They will serve as public and terribly illustrious monuments of the divine power and justice, and the righteous resentments of heaven against sin. They will serve as loud warnings to all worlds, to deter them from that destructive evil. And thus they will answer a valuable, and even a benevolent end in the creation, and contribute to the public good; as the execution of criminals tends to guard the laws from violation, and so promote the good of society. They will serve, as my text informs you, "to show the wrath and make known the power" of God. Their destruction will illustriously display the glory of these perfections. The flames of hell will burn dreadfully bright, to reflect a terrible and yet amiable splendour upon them. And it is for this terrible but righteous end, among others, that God now endures them with so much long-suffering. that his perfections and the honour of his government may be the more illustriously displayed in the execution of deserved punishment upon them.

But the vessels of mercy are intended and prepared for nobler uses. On them God intends to display the glory, the riches of the glory of his more gentle attributes, his love and grace. With them he intends to furnish out the many mansions of his heavenly house. By them he intends to let all worlds see what glorious vessels he can form, not only of the dust, but of the shattered and polluted fragments of human nature, broken and polluted by the fall of Adam, and by their own.

The view in which I now consider my text leads me to confine myself to this practical inquiry,

Wherein does preparation for glory, and wherein does fitness for destruction, consist?

Some of you, perhaps, when you heard the text, were struck with horror, and ready to bless yourselves at the sound. For "now, you thought within yourselves, we shall have a sermon upon the horrible doctrine of predestination." But you see I propose to consider the text entirely in a practical view; and therefore your fears are imaginary. Nor do I choose to consider it in this view, to let you see with what dexterity I can evade the genuine sense of it, and make a mental reservation of a doctrine so unpopular; but because whatever else the text in its connection may mean, it does naturally lead me

to this grand inquiry; and because my present design is to speak to your hearts, about an affair which you are all concerned and capable to know, and not to perplex your minds with a controversy, of which not many of you are competent judges. I must own, indeed, I am not altogether a sceptic in that doctrine. It is not an entire blank in my creed; nor am I at all ashamed to declare my sentiments in a proper time and place. At present I shall only tell you, that I cannot be persuaded God has made such a world as this, without first drawing the plan of it in his own omniscient mind. I cannot think he would produce such a numerous race of reasonable and immortal creatures, without first determining what to do with them. I cannot think the events of time, or the judicial process of the last day, will furnish him with any new intelligence to enable him to determine the final states of men more justly than he could from eternity. But away with all controversial thoughts at present; and let an object of more importance engross all your attention. For you will find, I am not now going to plunge and drown you in this unfathomable depth. This you may be sure of, that if you have not made yourselves fit for destruction, and fit for nothing else, by your own wilful sin, you shall never be doomed to it by virtue of any decree of God. And, on the other hand, you may be equally sure, that he never decreed to admit you into heaven, unless you are prepared for it; nor to exclude you if you are so. I now proceed to the grand inquiry.

Wherein does preparation for glory, and wherein does fitness for destruction consist? This will naturally lead me to inquire into your habitual dispositions and behaviour. For it is by comparing these to the nature and quality of the regions of heaven and hell, that you can discover which you are fit for. If your temper and dispositions be heavenly and divine, you may be sure that you shall be admitted into these blessed mansions. But if, on the other hand, your tempers and dispositions be infernal and diabolical; if they be such as are prevalent and universal in hell, you may be equally sure, that unless they are changed, you will be doomed for ever to that dismal region. This must, methinks, appear quite evident to common sense. The righteous Judge of all the earth will always invariably do that which is fit. If you are fit for the enjoyments and services of heaven, you need not fear but he will admit you; never has such a soul been excluded. And what can you reasonably desire more? Would you have heaven encumbered with such as could not be happy, even in the very regions of happiness, for want of a proper relish for the enjoyments there? But, if you are fit only for the infernal prison, is there not a propriety, as well as justice, in your being confined there? The same propriety, as that madmen should be shut up in bedlam, or notorious criminals in a dungeon. Therefore,

1. Are you fit for heaven? do you love and delight in God—in a God of infinite purity? If not, the enjoyment of his presence, and the beatific vision

of his face, which is the principal ingredient of heavenly happiness, could afford no happiness to you. Do you delight in the service of God, in contemplating his glories, in celebrating his praises, and in the humble forms of worship in his church on earth? Do these afford you the most exalted pleasure? If not, heaven is no place for you; for these are the eternal exercises there. And to such of you as have no pleasure in them, the heavenly state would be an eternal drudgery. Do you delight in holiness? If not, what would you do in the region of holiness? Alas! to you it would be an unnatural element. Are the saints, those whom the world perhaps calls so with a sneer, because they make it their great business to be holy in all manner of conversation, are these your favourite companions? Is their society peculiarly delightful to you? And are they the more agreeable to you, by how much the more holy they are? If not, what would you do among the holy inhabitants of heaven? With what pleasure could you mingle in society with them, while your temper and theirs are so directly contrary? Are your hearts full of ardent love and benevolence to mankind? If not, how would you breathe in the pure element of perfect love?—Without such dispositions as these, you are no more fit for heaven than a sick man for a feast, a swine for a palace, or a blind man to view the splendours of the sun, and, therefore, you may be certain, that God, who will never do any thing that is unfit, will not admit you there, while you continue such as you now are.

You must also consider, that if you are fit for these pure and blessed regions, it is God that has made you so, by his own almighty power; *He that hath wrought you for this self-same thing is God*, 2 Cor. v. 5, and you have been deeply sensible that the work was indeed his, was divine and god-like, and beyond the utmost efforts of your degenerate nature. You are able indeed to fit yourselves for destruction; that you can easily do; and that, I am afraid, some of you have effectually done already. But it is God alone that can make you fit for the inheritance of the saints in light. And have you ever been the subjects of this divine operation? Have you ever felt the power of almighty grace opening your blinded minds—breaking your stony hearts, and melting them into floods of ingenuous sorrow, under the warm beams of a Saviour's love, like snow before the sun? Have you ever felt it subduing your favourite sins, and making them more bitter to you than death, and implanting and cherishing every grace and virtue in your souls? Has the Holy Spirit turned the prevailing bent of your souls towards holiness, so that you esteem it the principal ornament of your nature, and make it the object of your eager desires, and most vigorous pursuit? Does holiness appear to you amiable in itself, and not only a pre-requisite to your happiness, but the principal ingredient of it? And is heaven itself the more endeared to you by this consideration, that it is the region of pure, unmingled holiness, that no unclean thing can enter there, and that even the way that leads to it is holy?

If these things are not matters of experience to you, you may be sure you are not *afore prepared for glory*.

Let us now take a view of the opposite dispositions, and we shall make the same discovery.—Suppose your hearts are set upon the enjoyments of this life, as your principal happiness; suppose you are chiefly solicitous and laborious to heap up riches, or to indulge your sensual lusts and appetites; supposing this to be the ruling passion of your souls, are you fit for heaven? In heaven there are none of these low and sordid enjoyments. And what pleasure would you have there, who have a taste only for these things? You are indeed fit to dig in the earth, like moles, and steal the serpent's food. You are fit to scrape up riches; fit to wallow in the mire of guilty and debauched pleasures; fit to live in this world, could you always make your residence in it. This gross, impure, earthly element suits your depraved constitutions. But can you once imagine you are fit for heaven; fit to breathe in that pure salubrious air; fit to share in those refined and spiritual enjoyments; fit to join in the exalted employments of seraphs, while this is your prevailing temper? Surely, no. And what then will become of you? The impure and gross region of this world, so agreeable to you, will not always last, and you will not probably live in it as long as it does last; but death, ere long, will tear you away from all that is dear to you under the sun. And, alas! whither then shall you go? where then shall you take up your eternal residence?—I leave you to pause and think upon it.

Suppose the service of God to be a weariness to you, and the thoughts of Him unwelcome to your minds. suppose your hearts are full of angry malignant passions: in short, suppose you love sin more than holiness, can you flatter yourselves you are fit for heaven? Alas! it would be as unnatural an element to you as for a fish to live out of water, or you to live in it.—But the farther illustration of this will fall under the next head; therefore,

2. Inquire, Whether your tempers and dispositions be not infernal and diabolical, and such as render you fit for destruction, and for nothing else? Are your hearts destitute of the love of God? “No, you answer; we thank God we have never been so bad as that comes to.” But if you love God, whence is it that you have so few affectionate thoughts of Him? that you do not study to please him in all things, and delight in his service? If you love God, how comes it that you do not keep his commandments, which is the grand decisive test of love? Alas! instead of loving him, are not your hearts disaffected to him? As evidences of this, may I not produce your dislike to serious thoughts of him, your aversion to his service, your disregard to his will as the rule of your conduct, and your headlong propensity to follow your own pleasure? Do not the murmurings and insurrections of your hearts against him and his dispensations, your uneasy, rebellious spirit under his providences, your aversion to his service, do not these show that you are really disaffected to

him? Now this is the very temper of hell; this is the constituent of a devil; the very worst ingredient in that infernal composition; and therefore, unless this temper be changed, you must dwell with devils for ever. It is fit all the enemies of God should be shut up together in one vast prison. It is unfit that rebels and traitors should always run at large, or mingle with loyal subjects. Alas! sirs, a soul without the love of God is devilized already, ripe for destruction, and fit for nothing else

Again, Are there not some of you who have no pleasure in devotion, no delight in conversing with God in his ordinances? The posture of humble worshippers at the throne of grace is not easy and agreeable to you; and hence that you have prayerless families and prayerless closets; and if you join in public worship once a week, it is a mere customary formality. You cannot bear to wean your thoughts and tongues from temporal affairs in the few hours devoted to the service of God, though they make up but one day in seven; you do not delight in religious conversation, but it strikes you dumb, like the man without the wedding garment. Well, in the infernal regions you will have as little of this exercise as you could wish. The patient will then be hopeless and incurable, and therefore no farther means will be used with him. Then you will no more be troubled with prayers, bibles, sermons, religious conversation, or the tedious hours of the Lord's day. And, since you have no taste for such exercises, is it not fit you should be sent into those ungodly regions, where you shall never be employed in them?

Again, Are not the minds of some of you defiled with all manner of sin and moral pollutions? And do not those render you fit only for that region of corruption and impurity? Do you not indulge an angry, contentious, unforgiving, malicious temper? Well, that is the very temper of hell, and renders you fit for it. Nay, these outrageous passions, when broke loose from restraint, will create a hell in your own breasts, and not only expose you to punishment, according to justice, but become the ingredients of your punishment, according to the course of nature. Do not some of you indulge yourselves in backbiting, and all the base malignant arts of defamation, and perhaps are firebrands in the neighbourhood where you live! Well, in hell you shall have enough of this work; and while you indulge this spirit, you are preparing yourselves for that land of universal hostility and revenge. Is not cursing and swearing the familiar language of some of you? Well, this is the language of hell; and you are now practising the infernal dialect, and preparing to converse with the ghosts below in their own style, in the region of imprecation and blasphemy. Do not some of you live in the practice of the works of the devil; that is, of those works to which he tempts you, and in which he has persisted, who was a sinner from the beginning? Are you not then fit for that everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels? Even the gentle lips of Jesus himself would tell you, as he did the Jews, that *you*

are of your father the devil, John viii. 44, since you habitually do his works. And is it not fit you should be doomed to the society of your infernal father?

Do you not find your hearts are habitually hard and insensible? Or if you have some kind of repentance, it is only a servile horror, extorted remorse, and involuntary pangs of desperate agony. This is the very kind of repentance in hell, where they still love sin, and yet cannot but upbraid and torment themselves, because they have ruined themselves by indulging it. Conscience tortures them with the keenest reflections; but they feel no kindly ingenuous relentings; no generous sorrows, proceeding from a sense of the intrinsic vileness and baseness of sin, and from a sincere disinterested love to God and holiness. Hence their repentance is only a punishment, but has no tendency to their reformation. And is not this the very nature of your repentance at present?

But I need not dwell long upon this inquiry. It is enough to tell you, in short, that if you are still in your natural state; if you still retain that temper which is natural to you as the degenerate sons of Adam, without any supernatural change; that estrangement from God; that disaffection to him; that carnality and earthly-mindedness; that blindness and insensibility about divine things; that presumption, security, and love of lawless pleasure. I say, if this be still your prevailing temper, you are not meet for the heavenly inheritance; for in order to be heirs of that, you must be born again of God. But you are fitted for destruction; for *by nature you are children of wrath*, Eph. ii. 3, and while you continue such, you must be *vessels of wrath*. Therefore bring the matter to a short issue, by this decisive inquiry: “Have I ever been born again? Have I ever experienced such a mighty change in the temper of my mind, as may, with propriety, be called a *new birth* or a *new creation*? For *if any man be in Christ he is a new creature; old things are passed away, and all things are become new*. 2 Cor. v. 17. Have I thus been renewed in the spirit of my mind? or am I still the same *old man*, with my old affections and lusts?”—This, my brethren, is the grand, decisive inquiry; for if you have been begotten again, St. Peter tells you it is to “an inheritance incorruptible, and that fadeth not away; reserved in the heavens for you.” 1 Pet. i. 4. But Jesus, the friend of sinners; Jesus, who never pronounced a harsh sentence, and who never will exclude from heaven one soul that is fit for it, nor doom to destruction one soul that is fit for any thing else; even Jesus himself has strongly assured you with his own gracious lips, that “except you be born again,” born of the spirit, as well as of water, “you cannot see the kingdom of heaven; for that which is born of the flesh is flesh,” John iii. 3, 5, 6, carnal, corrupt, unholy, and utterly unfit for that spiritual, pure, and holy kingdom.

Here I would enlarge a little upon an observation which I just hinted at before, namely, That these corrupt dispositions are not only criminal, and

therefore will bring upon you the penalty of the divine law, according to justice, but that they are, in their own nature, destructive, and therefore, according to the course of nature, will be your ruin. Suppose God had made no positive constitution to exclude you from heaven; yet while you have no relish for the employments and enjoyments of that state, it is impossible, in the nature of things, you should be happy there. As you must have animal senses, to render you capable of animal pleasures, so you must have spiritual senses to render you capable of the pure spiritual pleasures of paradise; and without these you can no more be happy there than a stone can enjoy the pleasures of an animal, or a beast those of reason. You would be miserable wretches in paradise itself. Do but consider in what things the bliss of heaven consists, and methinks you will rather fear, than hope and desire admission there. Is religion so pleasing a thing to you, that you might expect you should be completely happy if it were but perfected in you? Alas! are there not a thousand things more agreeable to some of you? But in heaven there are none of these things, and how do you expect to be happy there? There must be another heaven created for you, a Mahometan paradise of sensual pleasures, or else your temper must be changed. The paradise of saints and angels does not suit your vitiated taste.

Farther, Suppose God should not inflict any positive punishment upon you with his own immediate hand, but only suffer the course of nature to run on, and let your corrupt dispositions have full scope and range without restraint, would not these dispositions alone create a hell within you? Anger, malice, envy, and every wicked and turbulent passion against God and his creatures, will break out into outrageous hurricanes, when the kind restraints under which they now lie are taken off, and they will agitate and distract your souls for ever, and render you incapable of all peace, serenity, and joy. Then also, all temporal enjoyments, the objects of your love and desire, and the only things you have now to allay your raging thirst for happiness, will be for ever torn from you, and leave you to famish in a dismal void; and then you will pine away with eager, impatient, insatiable desires, which will gnaw your hearts, and prey upon your spirits like hungry vultures. Suppose you were now stript naked of every enjoyment, and nothing left you but bare being, with your usual capacity of enjoyments; suppose you were deprived of the light of the sun, the products of the earth, the comforts of society, and every imaginable blessing, and doomed to wander, forlorn and hungry, in some dismal desert, how consummately miserable would this privation alone render you! But this will be the doom of the ungodly, as soon as death breaks their connections with this world. They must leave all their enjoyments behind them, and yet carry their eager desires, their insatiable avarice of happiness, along with them; and these will make them capacious vessels of pain; for a capacity of positive enjoyment, not satisfied, is a dreadful capacity of

positive misery.—Thus, you see your destruction comes upon you according to the course of nature; and you will die eternally, though the hand of the executioner should never touch you, as the unavoidable result of your present temper, the deadly disease under which you labour.

And hence you may see, by the way, that it is no act of cruelty or injustice in the Supreme Judge, to shut you up in the prison of hell; for what else should he do with you, when you are fit for no other place? Is it cruel to exclude the sick from entertainments, or persons infected with the plague from the society of the sound and healthy? Is it cruel to confine madmen in bedlam, or criminals in prison? Certainly no. Therefore God and his throne will be guiltless for ever.

And now, my dear brethren, have any of you been convinced that this is really your case? That your temper and conduct is such as at once renders and proves you utterly unfit for heaven, and, as it were, naturalizes and seasons you for the infernal regions. Alas! this is a shocking and alarming discovery indeed: but, blessed be God, you have made it in time: you have made it while in the land of hope, and in a state of trial; and therefore there is reason to hope, that, if you now take the alarm, and earnestly use the means of grace, your condition, bad as it is, may be happily altered; and you, who are now fit for nothing but destruction, may yet be made meet for the inheritance of the saints in light. It is because there is some reason for this hope, that I have honestly exposed these alarming and unpopular things to your view. You must know them sooner or later; and if you should not know them until you fall into destruction, alas! it will then be too late. Believe me, my brethren, these things do not proceed from a morose, malevolent heart, nor are they intended to drive you into despair. I speak to you with melting and affectionate benevolence; and instead of driving you into despair, my design is to save you from it for ever, and bring you to have a good hope through grace. And as the evidence of what I have offered is so plain to common sense, do not pretend you cannot understand me, and do not know what I would aim at. I am only inculcating upon you this self-evident truth, that unless you are prepared for heaven, you shall not be admitted; and that, if you are fit for nothing but destruction, you must be destroyed. Can any mathematical demonstration be more plain than this? And are any of you so void of sense, reason, and faith, as not to understand and believe it?

I now presume, that such of you as have made this discovery with regard to yourselves, are also convinced, that you cannot possibly escape destruction, unless your present temper be changed, and quite a new frame of spirit given you.

And who, do you think, can work this happy change in your hearts! If you are so vain and ignorant as to flatter yourselves that you can effect it in your own strength, make the trial, and you will soon be undeceived. It is God

alone that can work in you both to will and to do. My text tells you, it is He that prepares the vessels of mercy for glory; it is his Holy Spirit alone that is equal to the arduous work.

But in what way is this influence to be expected? Is it in a course of impenitent sinning? of presumption and security? of sloth and negligence? No. to expect it in that way, is to tempt the Lord your God. But such of you as would escape the damnation of hell; such of you as have any desire to be for ever happy, hear me, seriously hear me, and I will tell you in a few plain words what you must do, if you would expect the aids of divine grace to prepare you for glory.

You must immediately think seriously of your condition. You must labour impartially to know the truth of your case. Pry into the dreadful secrets of wickedness in your hearts. Review your sinful lives. Reflect upon the purity and justice of God and his law, and what you have deserved for a whole life of unnatural rebellion against him. Read and hear the word of life with solemnity and attention, and use all proper means to furnish your minds with religious knowledge. It may pain you at first to confine your minds to such objects; but it must be done;—and there is no disputing against necessity; besides, the pain is medicinal; it will contribute to the recovery of your dying souls.

Again, You must accustom yourselves to frequent importunate prayer. If ever you be saved, or prepared for salvation, it will be in answer to prayer: therefore, engage in it, persevere in it, and never give over until you obtain your request.

Further, You must guard against every thing that tends to divert your minds from this grand concern; as excessive hurries and cares about earthly things, vain and vicious company, and every avoidable temptation.

Finally, You must persevere in this course, if you hope to succeed; and never rest until you feel the dispositions of heaven wrought in your souls. A pang of remorse, a serious fit, a transient prayer, will not suffice, but you must hold on your way to the last. You may expect difficulties in this new course, and you will probably meet with more than you can now foresee or expect. But you must break through all; for your immortal interest, your all is at stake.

This is the course I would advise you to, if ever you hope to be prepared for glory. I cannot give you any the least encouragement in any other way. If any other can show you a more easy, and yet safe course, and produce sufficient authority for it, you may take it; but, for my part, if I teach you what I learn in my Bible, I can give you no other direction; nor do I expect to be saved in any easier way myself. And, therefore, if you will choose another, you must be answerable for it. Remember, I warn you against it, and would not be accessory to it for ten thousand worlds.

Now, if this course must be taken. I ask, when, do you think, must it be begun? Will you appoint tomorrow, or next year, or old age, or a sick bed, for that purpose? Alas! you may never live to see that time. Before then you may drop into destruction, as rotten fruit fall to the ground by their own weight. Therefore now, this present fleeting now, is the only time you are sure of; and, consequently, this is the only proper time to begin this course. Now then, now, while my voice is sounding in your ears, form the resolution, and carry it into immediate execution. Bear it home upon your hearts to your houses, and there let it dwell until the great work is done. O! that you did but know its importance and necessity! then you could not delay it one moment longer.

And now, if you have any regard for the God that made you, for the Lord that bought you, or for your own everlasting happiness, take this course immediately.—If you have any need of excitements, take the following.

1. Consider your present dangerous situation. You hang over the pit of destruction by the slender thread of life, held up only by the hand of an angry God, as we hold a spider, or some poisonous insect, over a fire, ready to throw in it. You are ripe for destruction, and therefore in danger every day, every hour, every moment, of falling into it. You are as fit for destruction as a murderer for the gallows, or a mortified limb to be cut off. Such polluted vessels of wrath must be thrown out of the way into some dark corner in hell, that they may no more encumber or disgrace the more honourable apartments of the universe. And is this a situation in which it becomes you to be merry, and gay, and thoughtless, and eager after the trifles of time? O does it not become you rather to be on your knees at the throne of grace, and vigorously pressing into the kingdom of God?

2. Reflect with how much long-suffering God has endued you, notwithstanding all your audacious and repeated provocations. One would think one day's sinning against so holy and gracious a God, by a creature so deeply obliged to him, would make your case desperate, and that the evening of such a day would be the hour of your execution. But he has patiently borne with you for days, for months, for years, perhaps for scores of years. And all this time he has followed you with his blessings every moment, and granted you the means of preparation for glory. And yet you have been thoughtless, disobedient, ungrateful, rebellious still. How justly then may he inflict punishment upon you! And how industriously will his goodness and severity, his mercy and justice, be displayed in his treatment of you! What could you have desired more, in point of time, opportunity, persuasives, than you have enjoyed? Will it not then appear evident, that your destruction is entirely of yourself, and that, as I have told you before, God and his throne will be guiltless for ever?

3. Consider how dreadful will be your punishment, if you should perish

at last by your present wilful negligence. My text tells you what will be the design of your punishment; it will be to show the wrath of God, and make his power known. Such will be your punishment, as will be fit to show that it is almighty power that inflicts it, and that it is an almighty God who is angry with you. It will be his professed design to display the dreadful glory of his vindictive attributes upon you, particularly his justice, as the supreme Magistrate of the universe. and even his justice deserves to be displayed; for justice is not that ugly, grim, horrible thing, which criminals imagine. In a ruler, especially in the supreme and universal ruler, justice is not only a majestic and terrible, but it is a lovely, amiable, ingratiating attribute, essential to his character, and to the public good, and so it appears to all competent judges; that is, to all who are not self-flattering criminals, and therefore parties. The display of this attribute, therefore, upon proper objects, is necessary, to give a full view of the Deity to the world; to represent him as he is.

Now, whatever attribute of his he intends to display in any of his works, he always does it in a manner worthy of himself. When his design was to display and glorify his creative power, wisdom, and goodness, see! what a stately, well-furnished universe he spoke into being! What a magnificent, God-like building! When his design was to show the riches of his grace towards our guilty race, what wonders did he perform! What inimitable exploits of condescension and love! His only begotten Son must become a man, must struggle with all the calamities of life for three-and-thirty long and painful years, must expire in torture upon an ignominious cross, and redeem the guilty with the blood of his heart. This was Godlike love and grace indeed, beyond all example. O! *Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity?* Micah vii. 18. He is as much distinguished from all other beings by the wonders of his love and grace, as by the eternity of his existence, or by that wisdom which planned the universe, or that power which produced it out of nothing. When in prosecution of the same design, he intends to give a farther display of the riches of his glorious grace upon the vessels of mercy, what godlike provisions hath he made for them! *Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor has it entered into the heart of man to conceive, the things he hath prepared for them.* He hath prepared for them a city, such a glorious residence, that he is not ashamed to be called their God. He is not ashamed to own the relation, because he has acted up to the character, and worthy of himself. Heb. xi. 15. And when his design is to show his avenging wrath, and make his punitive power known; when it is to show what Godlike punishments he can inflict, such as may, by their terror, declare him to be the author, and serve as loud warnings to all present, and perhaps, future creations, to deter them from the breach of his sacred laws; and when the subjects of the punishment are strong capacious vessels of wrath, fit for

nothing but destruction; I say, when this is the case, what Godlike vengeance will he execute! what signal, unexampled punishment will he inflict! The design of punishment, which is not the reformation of the criminal, but the benefit of others, and the display of his perfections, require that he give a loose to all the terrors of his power. And what miracles of misery, what terrible illustrious monuments of vengeance will that perform and erect! As far surpassing all the punishments inflicted by mortals, as the creation of the world out of nothing exceeds all the works of human art.

And are you proof against the energy of such considerations as these? Then you are dreadfully fitted for destruction indeed! For the strongest persuasives to deter you from it, which God himself can reveal, or the human mind conceive, have no weight upon you!

But may I hope that I shall succeed at least with some of you this day to fly from this tremendous destruction, into which you are this moment ready to fall? Alas! it is hard, if even a stranger cannot prevail with so much as one soul, in so large an assembly, and in a point so reasonable, and so strongly enforced by your own interest. But I must leave this warning with you, and if you do not remember it now, you will remember it millions of ages hence, when the remembrance of it will torment you with intolerable anguish.

There are sundry in this assembly, I doubt not, who, by comparing their dispositions with the nature of heavenly happiness, may make the welcome discovery, that they are, in some measure, prepared for it. To such happy souls I have time only to say, that if this be your character, you may be sure that immense happiness shall be yours. your present heavenly temper is a certain pledge and earnest of it. You may be sure God would never make you fit for it, and then exclude you from it.

And, on the other hand, if you find that the dispositions of hell are subdued in you, assure yourselves God will not doom you to it. Can you think he would gain your hearts and allure your love, and then bid you depart from him, to languish and pine away with the eager anxious pantings of disappointed bereaved love? Will he doom you to reside for ever among those whose works you detest, and whose society you abhor? No; he will thoroughly prepare you, and make you holy, and then advance you to dwell for ever in that presence which you love, in the element of holiness; to breathe in that clear refined air; to live in that wholesome climate, so agreeable to your constitution; to be employed in those services in which you delight; to enjoy that sublime and delicate happiness which you relish, and to converse in that society which you affect, and which is of the same temper and spirit with you.—And for that blessed region may we all be prepared, and there may we all meet at last, to enjoy that endless felicity which awaits those who firmly put their confidence in God, through Jesus Christ! Amen.