

SERMONS

ON

IMPORTANT SUBJECTS;

BY THE

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LATE OF PEMBROKE COLLEGE, OXFORD, AND CHAPLAIN TO
THE RIGHT HON. THE COUNTESS OF HUNTINGDON.

WITH A MEMOIR OF THE AUTHOR,
BY SAMUEL DREW, A. M.

AND A

DISSERTATION ON HIS CHARACTER, PREACHING, &c.
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SERMON LXV.

THE FURNACE OF AFFLICTION.

I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction.—Isaiah xlvi. 10.

GRACIOUS words indeed! words worthy of a God! who has promised that “he will not always chastise, that he will not keep his anger for ever;” but, on the contrary, will take care in the midst of judgment to remember mercy, and if he strike with one hand, will uphold with the other.

I hope I need not tell you, my dear hearers, that these words were spoken to comfort the captives in Babylon, who, for their various sins and great backslidings, constrained the God of love, the God of mercy, their covenant God, to send them captives into a foreign soil; upon this, their enemies take occasion to insult them, “Where are now your songs?” say they; give us one of your temple songs, with which you used to pour out your hallelujahs; let us see now whether you can praise him in a strange land. The enemy of souls joining inwardly with them without, makes some that can sing, even afraid “that God hath forgotten to be gracious, that he hath shut up his lovingkindness in displeasure,” that the darkness in which they were now involved would not be a temporary, but a perpetual one; and notwithstanding the prophets were sent in mercy of God to comfort them in their trouble, yet many of them were tempted to say, “All men (yea the prophets) were liars;” it is very well if they stopped there, and did not say, God is a liar too. The enemy being thus suffered to break in upon them like a flood, it was high time for the blessed God to lift up a standard against him; and therefore the great Redeemer, the angel of the everlasting covenant, lets them know that he would some time or other, nay, very speedily, appear, to relieve his afflicted people: he assures them, that however for a while he might suffer them to be tried, he would cause a speedy deliverance, that should make them look upon him as their God; and this not for any merit found in this people, not for any good foreseen, but he says, “for my own name’s sake;” that the heathen might not say God had utterly forsaken them, he will appear for their relief, and “make them more than conquerors through him that loved them that however dark the season of affliction might be, yet he would let his own people know that all that happened, happened out of love; that it was so far from being true, that they were really cast off from God, that, on the contrary, he intended to overrule these troubles, both foreign and domestic, to bring them nearer to, and at last to lodge them safe in, the world above; well therefore for their comfort might it be ushered in thus, “For my name’s sake will I defer my anger, and for my praise will I refrain for thee, that I cut thee not

off.” And to fix their attention and gratitude, it is added, “Behold I have refined thee, but not with silver;” for this is so far from being contrary to the everlasting decree or purpose, hid in my bosom, that, on the contrary, it is the fulfilling it; for, saith God, in the words of our text, “I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction.”

Though the words are spoken in the singular number, yet they are of a complex and large import: the great God not only speaks to them as a people collectively considered, but particularizes them in this manner; not, “I have chosen you, but I have chosen thee;” for the word of God itself will never, never, never do us good, if it is not applied by the blessed Spirit of God to you and I. The wisdom and kindness of the Holy Ghost deserves our notice; had the prophet gone on and said, “I have chosen you,” unbelief might have said, Ah, this prophecy belongs only to the people of Israel, the words were addressed to those who were under the Jewish dispensation, what have I to do with them? or unbelief would persuade us to say so of such a general promise as this; but when it is said, I have chosen *thee*, and we know that no scripture is of private interpretation, but, like its blessed Author, is “the same yesterday, today, and forever,” there is no loop-hole, as it were, for unbelief to creep out at; but every believer may, in all ages, in the words of the text, say to himself, “God has chosen me in the furnace of affliction.” Perhaps, there is not a more comfortable passage in the whole book of God; I do not know of one that has a greater tendency to silence a complaining child of God, or to make a poor suffering believer happy, and to rest under the promise, to kiss the rod of God that strikes the blow.

Where shall I begin? where shall I end? The very first words open such a field, that eternity itself will be but just long enough for us to take a view of it; the time is come that even some good people, that have the grace of God in their hearts, have such muddy heads as to kick at the doctrine of election, and look upon it as having a tendency to make us bad in our heads, or Antinomians in our hearts; but if we have eyes to see, and ears to hear, and if our hearts are really informed by the Spirit, if we have been anointed with his eye-salve; O then electing, sovereign, distinguishing love flows in such a scene, such a transporting scene, as will make a believer’s heart leap for joy. For my own part, I know no other doctrine that can truly humble the man: for either God must choose us, or we must choose God; either God must be the first mover, or man must be the first mover; either God must choose them on account of some goodness, on account of some purity, or acts of piety, or God must choose them merely of his grace, for his own name’s sake, and to let us know that we have not chosen him, but he has chosen us. I verily believe, that the grand reason why such doctrine is so spurned at and hated by

carnal people, is, that it strikes at the very root of human pride, cuts the sinews of freewill all to pieces, and brings the poor sinner to lie down at the foot of sovereign grace; and, let his attainments in the school of Christ be ever so great, it constrains him to cry out, Lord, why me? why me? Our Master (and I think we should not attempt to be wiser than our Master was) speaks particularly of and to his own school, his little college of apostles: “Thine they were, and thou gavest them me; I have chosen you, but ye have not chosen me. Because I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.” Before they were fully enlightened, they were afterwards brought more to the light, two of them at first said, “We have found the Messiah yet, when they were sunk deeper in the knowledge of themselves, they changed their note, and said, The Messiah has found us. Observe the manner of the Redeemer’s addressing our first parents, when their guilt had caused them to hide themselves, “Adam, where art thou?” Pray who called first, did Adam call after Christ, or did Christ call after him; or do you think there is any difference between us and Adam, or that we have got better hearts than Adam had; do you think we are wiser and better now? Adam run away from God, and so should we to this very day, unless Jesus Christ had called us to himself.

Some persons, perhaps, may say, Well, I like your doctrine very well; God chooses us, you say, when we have had no regard to any good works at all, therefore I will go on sinning, because the fitter I shall be for God’s grace.—And the fitter thou mayest be for hell. Grace docs not destroy the use of the law; an honest heart will draw that inference from it, as a good woman once did when the devil told her, that either God had chosen her and she should be saved, or if she were rejected she should be damned, so, said he, you need not strive; she answered, if there were two to be saved, I would strive to be one of them: God help us to draw that inference.

Now this word *chosen*, refers us to God’s eternal election; it comprehends, and is the source of all that God has done for believers, for every individual believer in particular, when Jesus bowed his head and gave up the ghost. Hence the apostle, in the eighth of the Romans, mentioning this doctrine in the clearest manner, triumphs over the accuser by asking, “Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God’s elect?” And in the same chapter declares, “that it is God that glorifies for though glorification is the last thing done to us, yet it is the first thing God designs for us. What is the great thing for a natural man to hear? what is it? Why, not only that God has chosen us, but “chosen us in the furnace of affliction:” O that the Spirit of God may vouchsafe to transcribe these words into our hearts! God help thee to take it to thyself, O man; to take it to thyself, O woman; to take it to thyself whoever

thou art, that art either a Christian now, or desires or hopes to be a Christian before thou diest, "I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction." What can be the meaning of the words? Why, it is very plain that the import of them must be this; I have chosen thee, and it is my determination from everlasting to the end of time, and forever. I have chosen thee with this determination, that the way to heaven should be through the road of affliction: this is the believer's way, especially the ministers of Christ. When Paul was converted, pray what preferment did God promise him? Was it to be a great dignitary in the church? No, nothing about the church? Was it any more ease, was it to wear a triple crown, were persons to come and kiss his toe, what preferment did God choose him to? What? says God, "I will show him what great things he must suffer for my name's sake." I verily believe, that if we were to have no other preferment than this of Paul, there is not one in a thousand of the ministers that would ask for a living, if they knew they were to have such poor wages as Paul had. Ministers that hold the standard up, must expect the enemy will fire on them from every quarter; and if they happen to be instrumental in comforting others "with the same comforts wherewith they themselves are comforted of God," they must expect to bear their part, not only for their own purification, but for the benefit of those to whom they minister; and I believe audiences find that ministers minister best, and the bread comes best, when it comes out of the furnace of a minister's affliction.

The word affliction is of a very complex kind; it is like the word tribulation, which comes from the Latin *tributes*, signifying a pricking thorn, a scratching briar, or wounding spikes concealed in the way; and the word affliction arises from a word that signifies something that beats down, presses sore, and is very grievous and tormenting; it is a word of so general import, that it takes in all the trouble we meet with from men, all the wounds we receive from enemies, as well as in the house of our friends; it takes in all our domestic trials, all our inward struggles and dreadful temptations occasioned by the fiery darts of a watchful devil; and if I am not mistaken, when the great God said, "I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction," it implies, that this is really to continue with us even to the very end of our days: this is what young converts, in the time of their first love, do not see; that is, do not wholly see it; for if young Christians were to know all they have to suffer, it would dreadfully discourage them. God says, his people shall not do so and so, because at their first setting out they would be disheartened, and think of going back. It is our happiness God lets us know our trials but very little beforehand, very little notice of them have we before the time, and then, perhaps, gives us but little respite; but O when one trial is gone, God does with us as masters do with their scholars, turns over a new leaf with us;

and when one trial is over, teaches us another; hence our trials are not only new, but constant; hence many a believer is apt to say, "My trials rise out of the ground and many believers are saying, Who would have thought such a trial would have befallen me at such a time, from such a hand? This may, perhaps, open to us a gloomy scene; it would be gloomy indeed, if we were not living in a state of preparation; it would be gloomy indeed, if God were to afflict without a cause; but there is so much corruption, such remainders of indwelling sin, even in God's own children, that are to stand nearest to him in glory, that are the dearest to him, and who are to be blessed with being in his bosom, that if God were not to send them afflictions, there is not a child of God but would overset even with the comforts God vouchsafes to them. We find it so with our bodies, that if we live without exercise we are liable to have a variety of diseases, we therefore submit to various ways and means that a physician can prescribe; and if the disorders to which we are exposed in our bodies, make us willing to submit to a regimen prescribed by a skilful physician, does it not follow by a parity of reasoning, that we for our souls want sometimes lenitives and corrosives, and something like a caustic to eat off the proud flesh that cleaves to us? And it vindicates God's ways to man, that there is an hereafter appointed for us, that there is another world, to which, perhaps, we shall be called to go before the morning, "where the inhabitants shall no more say, I am sick." Believers know this, and if they cannot keep a ledger book, if they cannot post a merchant's book, they may learn so much of divine arithmetic, as to know that "the light afflictions which are but for a moment, work for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." The way to heaven, good bishop Beveridge says, is narrow, but it is not long; the gates are strait, but open to everlasting life; and therefore "God has chosen us in the furnace of affliction," because if we were not afflicted, we should never know what we were made of. Mr. Bohem, who was chaplain to the prince of Denmark, that was married to queen Anne, in one of his excellent sermons upon affliction, has this observation, "Afflictions and temptations are like sun-beams falling upon a dunghill; they do not bring vapours into the dunghill, but, exhale the vapours." So the afflictions do not bring the corruptions into us; we blame such and such a one for stirring up such and such corruptions in us, but these tend to draw out the vapours, and prepare us for the more lasting sunshine of a smiling God. God does not intend to destroy thee, but to refine thee, and to humble thee by it. The devil wants to sift thee as wheat; he thinks to let the grain go through the sieve, but Christ will only let the chaff fall through, and the sooner that is gone, the better: so, it is no ways derogatory to the honour of Christ, but agreeable to the state in which we are, agreeable to the state and the preparations to be

made for eternity, agreeable to the militant disposition that our graces must retain. Hence our Lord was content to be called God's servant, "Behold my servant whom I have chosen, mine elect in whom my soul delighteth.— Though he was a son, he learned obedience by the things that he suffered;" he was made perfect by his sufferings. We cannot avoid trouble as men, as Christians we should not attempt it: "man is born to trouble, as the sparks fly upwards;" and Christians, especially the man new-born. "If these things were done to the green tree, what shall be done to the dry?" The cross is the high-road to heaven, and so the King's highway: you know there is always a bar upon the king's road, the king has a particular road for himself; but the King of kings will make all bars to be removed, and then his people go the same road he himself went: this was the road of all the children of God; there is not an heir of God in heaven, but is now thanking God for his sufferings here below; there is not a child of God ever received into glory, but, I believe, as soon as he comes there, is made to know why he met with such a trial, and from such a quarter; why he was under such a rod, why under it so long; why it was shifted, why it was changed, why the whip sometimes was turned to a scorpion, and the furnace heated seven times hotter; then the believer sees the need of it: in heaven, it makes him wonder he was not afflicted seven times more on earth. I remember Virgil makes his hero in the *Æneid* to say, "twould all end well."* He comforts himself with this consideration under his trouble, that the discharge from it would be the better; and if a child of God would think of that, hereafter he will look with pleasure on what he suffered here; much more a Christian enriched with the grace of God, will be willing to die when he considers he is hereafter to sit in Abraham's bosom, and God says to him, "Remember thou in thy life-time received thy evil things." O my brethren, a fine school is the school of Christ! I never knew anyone of my acquaintance that were believers, and I have been acquainted with some these twenty-eight years last past, but what flourished most under the afflicting hand of God. I believe if the devil had his will, he would bid too high for every believer; he does not love money; a covetous man is worse than the devil, he loves that which the devil squanders away; but say they, we think we should be very good if we had a coach-and-six; so when they have it, they think they are too good to go to that chapel or Foundry; it was a good place when we walked afoot, but now we have a coach we will drive by. Happy is it for us that we are chosen in the furnace of affliction; that is a

* Dabit Deus his quoque finem,
 Forsan et hæc olim meminisse juvabit,
 Per varios casus, per tot discrimina rerum,
 Tendimus in Latium.

glorious petition in our litany, “That in all time of our tribulation, good Lord deliver us!” You may very well excuse me for preaching from such a text as this, because I have been in the furnace, and I find it is very sweet; it is very sweet walking in a burning fiery furnace, when the Son of God leads by the arm. In the account we have of the three children being in the fiery furnace, the king could say, “I see one walking with them:” what an emblem of the children of God! O, say you, does the Son of God walk with you in the furnace? I answer, yes; make the worst of it, tell them the enthusiast, the babler, says, God walks with his people in the furnace; he walks with all that walk with him, and never walks closer with them than when they are in the furnace. Daniel is generally painted young, but he was fourscore years old when he was thrown in among the lions; there he sits as sweet and easy, and no lion dare to touch one of his grey hairs. Nothing proves the truth of grace, and shows the love of God more, and you may be assured of it as you are of being in this place alive, that sanctified afflictions are the greatest evidence God can give you of his love; so that if we are chosen in the furnace of affliction, we are to expect it; and is it not a great shame for us, that the heathens out-do us? When one came and told one of the heathens that his son, a darling son, was dead, he said, “I know that I begot him mortal.” So Job said, “The Lord hath given, and the Lord hath taken away.” O that God may bless this poor preaching to the raising up some drooping soul. Underneath thee, O believer, O sufferer, are God’s everlasting arms; therefore “the beloved of the Lord shall dwell in safety,” because they dwell near him, and “he that toucheth them, toucheth the apple of God’s eyes.”

This may teach us, when one trouble is over to expect another; none of your requiems here. Abraham, I believe, thought when he had got his Isaac, he was to be tried no more; but “after these things God did tempt Abraham.” We know not what trials we are to have, but remember they are marks of our adoption: not that all afflictions do prove us children of God, because there are some afflictions that are not sanctified: God give us all to have sanctified afflictions!

If this is the case, let young believers know what they are to meet with; God forgive those, and visible churches are too much pestered with them, that daub with untempered mortar; formerly, when the church was under persecution, they would forsake father, mother, and all; but now, “blessed be God, we are for becoming Christians; we live in London, we live where the church is smiled upon, we may live where we are at ease.” My dear hearers, do you think that all the Londoners are converted? Do you think they all bring forth the fruits of the Spirit; or have you heard that the devil is converted? Can anybody prove to me that the devil is not the same? can you

prove that God is not the same? can you prove that the world is not the same, that the human heart is not the same? If you can prove that neither of these are what they were when Christ came into the world, I will give up the point; but if they are the same, we must expect the same trials our forefathers met with, if ever we hope to meet with them in glory; “God forbid I should glory, save in the cross of Jesus Christ.” Therefore, if any of us have a mind to set out for heaven, expect trouble. Indeed, if we have enlisted under the devil’s banner, he shows you the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them. When Peter said to our Lord, concerning his sufferings, “Far be that from thee;” after having shown his displeasure at it, as a suggestion of Satan’s, he says to all his disciples, “If any man will come after me, let him take up his cross, and follow me.” And I remember Mr. Law, who was a great man, notwithstanding some great blunders and mistakes, told me, thirty-two years ago, all principles, all doctrines, are comprehended in these few words. “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me.” And if you do not choose the furnace of affliction, if you are too nice to enter in, you forsake the Lord, and are only preparing to be company for the damned in hell. This was the case with Dives; “Son, thou in thy life-time receivedst thy good things:” and for a man that fares sumptuously every day; for a man that is clothed in fine linen, to be tormented by the devil; to see God, Christ, heaven, with all he had, lost; and the torments must never cease. One moment’s thought of this is very awful! God grant this may not be the lot of any of us! Come, my dear hearers, may God of his infinite mercy grant this night, that some poor soul may be rescued from the devil, and enlist under Christ’s banner! I have borne the cross thirty-four years; I never wore it long, but I found to my great comfort it was lined with the love of God. “My yoke is easy, my burden is light,” saith our blessed Lord. Suffering grace is given for suffering times; the reason we have not more comfort is, because we have not more crosses; happy they that say in this visitation, my Jesus, my Lord, I give up all for thee; my life, and all things, I cast behind.

“A heart that no desire will more,
But still to adore, obey, and love,
Give me, my Lord, my life, my all.”

I wish you joy that run this course; do not be weary of it, do not think hard of God, do not say, Never was anybody tried as I am, never was anybody tempted as I am, for if you were to go and tell your cross, there are a thousand in the congregation would, perhaps, say, Dear, I have had that, and ten times worse. One Mr. Buchanan, a Scotchman, who died the other day, having lost his last child, said, “I am now childless, but, blessed be God, I

am not Christless.” A noble lady told me herself, that when she was crying on account of one of her children’s death, her little daughter came innocently to her one day, and said, Mamma, is God Almighty dead, you cry so? The lady blushing, said, No; she replied, Madam, will you lend me your glove? She let her take it, and after that asked for it again; upon which the child said, Now you have taken the glove from me, shall I cry because you have taken away your own glove? And shall you cry because God has taken away my sister? “Out of the mouths of babes has God perfected praise,” and will for ever. O glorify God in the furnace?

If any of you are saying, Do not tell me of your afflictions, I will live, I will drink, “tomorrow shall be as today, and so much the more.” If there be any of you that say so, take care, take care; God himself cannot issue out a worse sentence against you than this, “Let him alone, let him alone whom the Lord loves, he chastens. What a pretty creature would you make in heaven, if you were to go there, without one of Christ’s crosses on your back, you would be turned out; no, there are none such there.

Christians, endure the cross; happy ye that are tried, and happy they that are gone to glory. Where is Mr. Middleton now? Where is my dear fellow-labourer, that honest, that steady man of God? Oh! he was thanking God for the gout in his head, in his feet, in his stomach, all decays; thanking God for that last trouble that cut the thread of life, and gave the soul a passage for heaven; if, in the midst of that torture, he could answer his daughter and say, “heaven upon earth, heaven upon earth,” and went to heaven but a little after; now surely he must say, “heaven in heaven;” must he not, now he sees God, and sees Christ? And by his comfort, though in such great pain, it shows that God was kissing away his soul, he died at the very mouth of God. O may the blessed God bless his parents and children that are here tonight; I believe you may be glad that God has chosen him in the furnace of affliction. I am glad to hear that so many are desirous that something may be done for his family, and Mr. —— and Mr. ——, and Mr. ——, are willing to take in the subscriptions that any may be inclined to send them. May God bless the family, and grant that his children may not disgrace the memory of their father; that they may live as followers of his faith, who is now gone to inherit the promises of God. You know not how your children may be left by you, though there is not one of you here but may be called that have children, to say, By and by my children must be left to the goodness of God: and it is a great happiness to see so many fatherless children provided for of late; there was never a time when persons were more beneficent to the distressed; let it not be said that believers in London live on bread alone, but may they be continuing to lay up treasure in heaven! when we plead, not by way of merit,

Remember me, O Lord, I did so and so when others were in trouble. Lord Jesus, I plead thy promises, if thou hast chosen me in the furnace of affliction; O Lord, help me to lay hold on thee: O that this may be your and my lot. I am hastening to the grave; I am astonished that I have again an opportunity to preach the word of God. May God prepare us to follow those that have gone before us, “where the wicked cease from troubling,” and the weary soul enjoys everlasting rest with thee, O Father, with thee, O Son, and with the Holy Ghost; to whom, three persons but one God, be all honour and glory, now and for evermore. *Amen.*