

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 LXIII.

GLORIFYING GOD IN THE FIRE; OR, THE RIGHT IMPROVEMENT
OF AFFLICTIONS.

Wherefore, glorify ye the Lord in the fires.—Isaiah xxiv. 15.

You have oft, my dear hearers, let me tell you, met with affliction; and I believe you may persuade yourselves affliction is at hand, which makes such deep impressions, when sent and blessed by heaven, as to thaw the very heart. Faith, like some glasses to view objects near us, sets them in so strong a light, that we cannot help being affected with the weight of the impression; hence the prophets, when under a divine impulse, foresaw things at a distance; spoke and wrote of them as though actually present. “They sung both of judgment and mercy,” in such strong and persuasive strains, as to convince of the reality of their existence. Isaiah, who had a courtly education, being probably brother to a king, seems to excel in this kind of speaking; a person of good natural, as well as acquired abilities, which being tempered by the Holy Ghost, made him a kind of an angel of an orator, of a writer, and a prophet. When he penned this chapter, he probably foresaw the dreadful calamities coming on the land: and so strong was his persuasion, that he writes as though he saw the things taking place. “Behold, (says he,) the Lord maketh the earth empty, maketh it, waste, and turneth it upside down, and scattereth abroad the inhabitants thereof.” How much is expressed in a few words! “As with the people, so with the priests,” who, perhaps, on account of their situation in the church, might think they should be exempted; but if the priests sin with the people, they shall be punished with the people. “As with the servant, so with his master; as with the maid, so with her mistress; as with the buyer, so with the seller; as with the lender, so with the borrower; as with the taker of usury, so with the giver of usury to him.” So you see that the visitation would be universal; that it should fall on all sorts of people. Ver. 3. “The land shall be utterly emptied and utterly spoiled:” probably, by a foreign foe taking advantage of the domestic confusions, who shall destroy the fruits of the earth. Some may think, perhaps, that this will never come to pass; but saith Isaiah, “The Lord hath spoken it.” It pleased God the nation should be devoted to a dreadful stroke: “The earth mourneth and fadeth away, the world languisheth and fadeth away, the haughty people of the earth do languish,” whose crimes, one would think, would never be brought to punishment, on account of the eminence of their stations; they thought themselves out of danger, but they shall feel the common scourge: “For the earth also,” as in the fifth verse, “is defiled under the inhabitants thereof; because they have transgressed the laws, changed the ordinances, broken the

everlasting covenant.” God did not strike without a cause; for the earth groaned, as it were, under the sins of the inhabitants, for their neglect of religion, for disowning God, for turning their back on the Most High. “Therefore hath the curse devoured the earth, (ver. 6.) and they that dwell therein are desolate.” He does not say it shall be, but it is done. “The inhabitants of the earth are burned,” with dreadful fire of consuming vengeance, “and few men left.” All the merry-hearted, that minded nothing but jollity and mirth, even “they do sigh. The joy of the harp ceaseth; they shall not drink wine with a song, strong drink shall be bitter to them that drink it. The (very great) city (the metropolis) is broken down; every house is shut up, because desolation is left in it.” The inhabitants forsake it, their houses are left shut up, because they are afraid some foreign power should come to their destruction. “There is a crying for wine in the streets, all joy is as darkened, the mirth of the land is gone:” no plays, no routs, no assemblies now; “the city is left desolate,” the court not excepted; desolation herself takes her seat, and ravages there. “The earth shall reel to and fro like a drunkard, and shall be removed like a cottage; and the transgressions thereof shall be heavy upon it, and it shall fall, and not rise again.” What an amazing scene is this! enough to fill us with horror, even at this distance of time and place! But is there no way for escape? Is there no light breaking through this dark shade? Blessed be God, there is; look at ver. 13. you will find in the midst of dangers, God shall lend his presence. “When thus it shall be,” (pray mind that,) “in the midst of the land among the people,” what follows? “there shall be as the shaking of an olive tree, and as the gleaning grapes when the vintage is done;” there shall be a few godly people left, let the devil do what he will; but there will be but few. You know, after the people have gathered the fruits from the tree, they shake it to bring down the remainder; and after reaping of corn, there are a few gleanings: so the Lord says, it shall destroy most people, yet in so discriminating a way, that God’s people should be safe.

I cannot well recollect how archbishop Usher applies this; but this I am sure he says, there will certainly come a time when the world will undergo the greatest scourge that ever it felt, which shall chiefly fall on the outward-court worshippers, upon those that know not God; God will take particular care of securing his own; and when the wicked are all destroyed, the Christians shall go to a little city, and there shall dwell in Goshen, till God shall call home his ancient people the Jews. So God will take care of his people, that they shall be safe: pray look to ver. 14. “they shall lift up their voice;” what, to cry? No, they have done with prayers, they have done with fasting; they have lifted up their voice, and often exhorted their neighbours to “flee from the wrath to come;” but now they shall sing for the majesty of God; when all people are mourning, they shall rejoice. And at the great day, when Jesus Christ pronounces the wicked damned, “Depart, ye cursed,” God’s

people will then lift up their voices with majesty and triumph; which made a good man say to his son, just before he died, I am afraid I shall never see thee any more till I hear Jesus Christ say unto thee, "Depart, thou cursed!" Some years ago, being present at the trial of a very vile person at the Old Bailey, and being in suspense whether he would be brought in guilty or no, when the word "guilty" came, and the people heard of it, they did in effect give an éclat to it; whether just or unjust, I thought it was an emblem of that awful day, when all the angels of God and his saints shall say Amen; when God consigns the wicked to hell. God grant this may not be any of your case! Says the prophet, "They shall cry aloud from the sea:" some of them may be on the other side of the water, gone abroad, while others stay at home; but whether at home or abroad, though they have been banished by persecution, though they have been driven to the other side of the water, which has been the case of many persons before now, "yet they shall cry aloud;" they shall find the same God abroad as they did at home. A judge said to a good old Christian that was persecuted in Charles II.'s time, I will banish you to America: says she, Very well, you cannot send me out of my Father's country. They shall cry aloud from the sea, "Wherefore glorify ye the Lord in the fires;" if this is the case, the prophet draws the inference: what must they do under these circumstances; why, they must study how to glorify God in the fires, not how to escape or run away from him, but how to glorify him; "wherefore," saith he, "glorify me," glorify me the Lord, "in the fires;" not the fire, in the singular number, but in the plural number, fires. We are, my brethren, very much mistaken, if we think we have but one fire to go through.

These words imply, in order to bring them home to ourselves, that all God's people must be put into the fires. Fire sometimes denotes the love of God, sometimes the work of the Holy Ghost, and very often it denotes affliction; therefore the apostle talks of a "fiery trial;" and let it be of whatever kind it will, let it be upon mind, body, or estate; whether it comes from friend or foe, or whether it comes immediately from the hand of God himself upon the soul, it may well be compared to fire, for you all know that fire scorches. God expects, when he strikes, that we should feel. Of all things in the world to be avoided, a stony heart, or a stupidity under God's afflicting hand, is most to be deprecated. I suppose you have heard of the Stoics,* with whom the apostle Paul disputed in the place of public traffic in Athens. Paul did not take a walk to 'Change to talk on trade, he went to talk about Jesus Christ, if he could meet with one to talk with. I wish the clergy took no other walks but these. Every thing is to be tried by fire; we may talk what we please, but we shall never know what metal we are made of, till God puts us into the

* They taught, that a wise man should be free from all affections and passions whatsoever.

fire. It is very easy talking what we can bear, and what we can do, but let God lay his hand on us, and we shall see what we are. We are apt to find fault, and be peevish with our friends and relations, under such circumstances; they are apt to say, you should be patient, and patient, and patient; ah! put these reprovers into the same furnace, and see how patient they will be: they say, there is no putting old men's heads upon young men's shoulders; and there is no putting old heads upon souls young in experience. The devil knew very well how it was, when he said, "Hast thou not made an hedge about Job, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side; thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land; but put forth thy hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face so we should all do, if God were to leave us to ourselves, and our faith is not of the right sort.

How shall we know if our faith is good? We often pray, Lord, give us Abraham's faith, but never pray, give us Abraham's trial at the same time. I was once in Scotland, at a great man's house, where several rich people were, that knew Jesus Christ. God having blessed my labours at a former visit, I was desired by the noblemen to pray; and I remember, I prayed the Lord to give us great faith and patience:—O, said Satan, as strong as if he had spoke to me, do not pray for that, for thou shalt have great trials. O, said I, if that be the case, I will turn the devil's prayer against himself; and I prayed, "O Lord, give us great grace, and never mind what trials." Often, when we are under temptations, God takes us at our words: O, says one, what a prayer I had, I prayed for faith and patience; I was upon the mount, and never thought of coming down, and feeling a storm again.

Fire, my brethren, not only burns and purges, but you know it separates one thing from another, and is made use of in chemistry and mechanical businesses. What could we do without fire? It tries metal, to purge it. God Almighty knows, we are often purged more in one hour by a good sound trial, than by a thousand manifestations of his love. It is a fine thing to come purified, to come pardoned, out of the furnace of affliction; it is intended to purge us, "to separate the precious from the vile, the chaff from the wheat;" and God, in order to do this, is pleased to put us into one fire after another, which makes me love to see a good man under afflictions, because it teaches something of the work of God in the heart. I remember, some years ago, when I first preached in the north of England, at Shields, near Newcastle, I went into a glass-house, and standing very attentive, I saw several masses of burning glass, of various forms: the workman took one piece of glass and put it into one furnace, then he put it into a second, and then into a third; when I asked him, why do you put this into so many fires? He answered, O, sir, the first was not hot enough, nor the second, and therefore we put it into the third, and that will make it transparent. Taking leave of him in a proper manner, it

occurred to me, this would make a good sermon. O, thought I, does this man put this glass into one furnace after another, that we may see through it. O may God put me into one furnace after another, that my soul may be transparent, that I may see God as he is. My brethren, we need to be purged; how apt are we to want to go to heaven upon a feather-bed; many go lying upon beds of pain and languishing, which is the King's highway, thither. You know there are some ways in London called the king's road, and they are finely gravelled, but the King's road to heaven is strewn with crosses and afflictions. We are all apt to think well of being Christians; it is very pretty talking of being Christians, till we are put into one furnace after another; "think it not strange," saith the apostle, "concerning the fiery trial which is to try you." What must I do? Why, since I must be in the fire, I must thank my corruptions for it; God will not put you or me into the fire, if there were not something to be purged away; the grand thing is, to learn to glorify God in the fire. "Wherefore, glorify ye the Lord in the fire."

When do we glorify him? when we endeavour to get such grace from the Lord, that we may not dishonour him when we are under the cross, and therefore we glorify God in the fire when we quietly endure it as a chastisement for our sins. If you keep watch now, and live near to God, you will never find that you are put into a fire, but you first brought yourselves into it; and I do verily believe from my heart, that our sin is always to be seen in our punishment. If any of you part from a child that he love's dearly, upon examination he will say, I find, now the creature's gone, that the ivy twined too much about the oak; and then he turns off; ah! says he, God has met with me now. And you will find in all the Old and New Testament, that the afflictions of God's people were suitable to their faults: Jacob was over-persuaded by his mother to get the blessing by a lie; but he was a simple-hearted poor creature. Some persons think nothing of a lie; if they can but get by it, they do not mind it; but an honest man will shun it. Jacob argues with his mother against it; O, says she, "the curse be on me, my son!" O dreadful! for a good woman to say so. Doubtless, she was persuaded God would give Jacob the blessing, but she took a wrong way to obtain it; she might have waited for the blessing to come with a blessing. How did God punish Jacob? Why, in a night afterwards poor Jacob was imposed upon by a wrong wife. He got a Leah instead of a Rachel. The poor creature was imposed upon there, and so all along almost to the end of his life, he had a furnace of affliction. Happy they who pray in the furnace, Lord, let me know why thou dost contend with me. Therefore God sends this message to Eli by Samuel, "The thing that thou knowest," seems to me to refer to his too great lenity to his sons: "the thing that thou knowest;" thou dost not act like a magistrate. These sons were the means of bringing a judgment on his house, and breaking their father's neck. God Almighty keep us from bringing a rod upon ourselves!

We glorify God in the fire, when we bear it patiently. It is a dreadful thing when we are saying with Cain, "My punishment is greater than I can bear; but the language of a soul that glorifies God in the fire is this, Shall I, Lord, shall I, a sinful man, complain for the punishment of my sins? It is a glorious thing when we can say with a good man, one of whose particular friends told me more than once, that when he was racked with pain, and groaning all night with trouble, he would often say, Lord, I groan; Lord, I groan; Lord, I groan; but, Lord Jesus, I appeal to thee, thou knowest I do not grumble. Then we glorify God in the fire, when, though we feel pain and anguish, we at the same time say, Lord, we deserve this and ten thousand times more.—We glorify God in the fire also, when we are really and fully persuaded, God will not put us in the fire but for our good, and his own glory. I am afraid some people think God does as some cheating apothecaries, that bring five things when they need not bring but one, especially when they have some silly patients that love to be taking physic; they send one after another, when, perhaps, the best thing would be to throw them all away: so we think of God, but it is a mistake. He never sends one but what is necessary, and something to be purged away.—We glorify God in the fire, when we say, Lord, do not let the fire go out till it has purged away all my dross. Then we glorify God when we wish for the good of the fire, and not to have it extinguished; when the soul can say, "Here I am, my God, do with me as seemeth good in thy sight;" I know I shall not have one stroke but thou wilt give me a plaster, and let me know wherefore thou contendest with me.—We glorify God in the fire, when we are content to say, "I know not what God does with me now, but I shall know hereafter. Do you tell your children that are five years old the reason of things, no; and do you think God will tell us? "What shall this man do?" saith the disciples; "What is that to thee?" saith Christ, "follow thou me." You glorify God in the fire, when you are content to walk by faith and not by sight.—You glorify God in the fire, when you are not grumbling, but humbly submitting to his will; a humble spirit walks not in sulkiness and stubbornness: there are some spirits too stout, they will not speak. When that awful message was brought to Eli, what does he say, "It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good;" let my children be killed, whatever be done it is the Lord's doing; only, Lord, save my soul at last.—We glorify God in the fire, when in the midst of the fire we can sing God's high praises. Thus the children of Israel glorified the Lord. The song of the three children in the fiery furnace is a sweet song, as are all that are made in the fire: "O all the works of the Lord, praise and magnify him for ever!"—Then we glorify God in the fire, when we rejoice in him, when we not only think, but know it best, and can thank God for striking us; can thank God for whipping us; can bless God for not letting us alone; thank God for not saying, "Let him alone this is

to glorify God in the fire. “Not only so,” saith the apostle, “but we glory in tribulation, knowing that tribulation worketh patience.”

In a word, we glorify the Lord in the fire, when we have in exercise, patience, meekness, humility; learning more to distrust ourselves, having a deeper knowledge of our own weakness, and of God’s omnipotence and grace. Happy when we can look back and say, Thus have I been enabled to glorify God in the fire. Who can put his hand to his heart, and say, I have glorified God in the fire as I ought? instead of that, I am afraid the soul must say, that instead of being thankful and resigned, I have been fretful; and because I will not find fault with myself, nor let the world know I find fault with God, I find fault with all about me. Did you never find yourself in such a humour when your spirits were low? I heard a good man once speak on those words, “They shall bring forth fruit in old age.” O, the fruit, said he, is peevishness; I thought it was the infirmity of old age, the fruit of which ought to be heavenly-mindedness, deadness to the world, and a liveliness to God.

My brethren, let us humble ourselves tonight, and let us be ashamed and abashed before God, and wonder he hath not struck us into hell when we have been complaining the fire was too hot, that God sent us not to the devil. Let us weep, let us weep, let us weep for our stubbornness. Happy they who are used to be put into the fire betimes! “It is good for a man to bear the yoke in his youth.” Some years ago, when I was at the Ophan-house, they told me they were going to yoke two steers together, one sturdy and old, the other a little one; on which they no sooner put the yoke, but he kicked once or twice, and then bore it very well: O, thought I, it is a good thing to have the yoke betimes.

Are any of you now in the furnace, are any of you troubled, or can any of you say, I have no trouble? A calm is sometimes the forerunner of a storm; thank God, you are not in the fire; surely you have been in the fire. There is the devil’s fire, the fires of “the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life.” God help you to come out of these fires, lest they damn your souls for ever. You must be put either in the devil’s fire or God’s fire, and the devil’s fires are hottest, because there is no God to support under the trouble they bring upon the soul. O what a dreadful thing it is to be in the devil’s fire continually, and to go out of the fire of the devil here to burn with the devil in hell hereafter! If there are any of you in this case, Lord Jesus Christ shorten them. Lord Jesus Christ sanctify his afflictions to his people, as he did to one of the prisoners last Wednesday: how sweetly he behaved! while the others were cursing and swearing, tossing up who should sit on the right hand in the cart, he was glorifying God, thanking God he was sent there, and going to be executed. God, saith he, hath stopt me, I might have gone on in sin to ruin. O send to my father, go to him, warn him to “flee from the wrath to come.” Somebody went to his parent, and the father sent back this

loving message, Tell him to mind his own soul, and be damned! O dear Lord, what lengths has man gone! never was such a message sent to a son before; he bid him mind his own soul, and be damned! God grant none of you may ever have such a frame of mind as that! O remember, fire hardens as well as softens; and if you are not better by afflictions, you will be worse: and indeed you will know you cannot come out of the furnace as you went in, you will either be hardened or else be purified; and if this be the case, the Lord Jesus Christ help you to bear the fire now, that you may never be cast into the fire of hell. God haste you; hasten you that are out of the devil's fire, to flee; flee, ye weary souls, to Jesus Christ; fly to the Lamb of God, from hell to heaven, as far as you can from these hellish fires, to the fire of his blessed merit and love.

Happy you that have got into Christ's fire! happy you that have found his fires in your souls! I believe many souls have. O Lord Jesus Christ, help you to glorify him in whatever fires he shall be pleased to send you, and into whatever furnaces he shall be pleased to put you. We shall then sing "the church triumphant," much better than we sing tonight. We shall see Jesus Christ ready to help us when we are in the furnace. O that this thought may make every poor sinner say, By the help of God, I will be a Christian; by the help of God, if I must burn, it shall be burning with the love of Christ. I will say then, O Lord, glorify thyself by snatching me as a brand from the devil's fire. O that this might be the cry of every heart!

I am going to ask a favour of you tonight which I never did before, and perhaps, may not again for some time. I have had complaints made to me by the persons that take care of the poor, that the poor's stock is very low; though I cannot speak on Sunday night, yet I will speak a word to the poor on Wednesday evening. There are numbers of poor that are ready to perish, and if you drop something to them in love, God will take care to repay you when you come to judgment. We shall not only glorify God by a submission to his will, when he is putting us in the fire, but in doing any good, when we lay all the glory at the foot of Jesus, which God grant for Christ's sake. *Amen.*