

Prevailing Pleas, or the Hope and Saviour of Israel

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"O the hope of Israel, the Saviour thereof in time of trouble, why shouldest thou be as a stranger in the land, and as a wayfaring man that turneth aside to tarry for a night? Why shouldest thou be as a man astonied, as a mighty man that cannot save? Yet thou, O Lord, art in the midst of us, and we are called by thy name. Leave us not." Jeremiah 14:8, 9

With the exception of the Lamentations, parts of Job, and what are called the penitential Psalms, I scarcely know a more pathetic portion of the Old Testament than the early chapters of the prophet Jeremiah. They contain indeed much solemn warning, wise counsel, keen reproof, stern denunciation of sin addressed by the prophet to Judah and Jerusalem; yet, blended with these sharp rebukes, there is an affectionate spirit of exhortation, couched in language of the tenderest pathos. Dark indeed and gloomy was the cloud which at this period hung over Judah and Jerusalem; and that cloud was not to burst in genial showers, not to fall in drops of fertilising rain, as we have witnessed in the past week, but to burst forth in a very thunderstorm of the wrath and indignation of the Almighty against a guilty nation and a sinful metropolis. In fact, at that period the crimes of Judah and Jerusalem had risen to a fearful height, and both city and state seemed ripe for destruction. Idolatry in one of its worst forms was then prevalent; for Ahaz, through his intimacy with the king of Syria, had introduced a worship of the most licentious character. We read, for instance, in Ezekiel, of women "weeping for Tammuz." Tammuz was a Syrian idol, supposed to represent Adonis the lover of Venus, a heathen deity; and these women sat weeping for the lover

of Venus, who had been killed by a wild boar. What think you of Jewish women weeping over a Syrian idol, and that idol representing the lover of the heathen goddess of love? In the words of Milton,

"Thammuz came next behind,
Whose annual wound in Lebanon allured
The Syrian damsels to lament his fate
In amorous ditties all a summer's day."

In the temple itself men turned their backs on the sanctuary and worshipped the sun. At a somewhat later period, the women told Jeremiah that when they burnt incense to the queen of heaven—a name for Venus; when they burnt incense to the wanton goddess of love—and of course they practised all her other abominable rites, it was well with them; but when they had forsaken the worship of the queen of love, and ceased to sanction lust in all its abominations, they had wanted all things, and had been consumed by the sword and by the famine. (Jer. 44:18.) How blinded by idolatry, how low and debased as to all moral feeling, must they have been to proclaim thus openly their own shame. We wonder sometimes perhaps at God's stern denunciations of idolatry. But do we sufficiently bear in mind that idol-worship is not only an insult to the Majesty of heaven, but a worship of devils, and, as the apostle speaks, "a fellowship with devils" (1 Cor. 10:20), and that all such worshipers naturally imitate the sins of their idol gods—enmity, lust, and cruelty? Oppression also ruled in all its various forms, as we see in the case of Jeremiah and the persecution to which he was subjected for his faithful warnings and declarations of approaching judgments. But the worst feature of the whole was, that prophets abounded in that day who professed to be sent of God, and yet whose whole object was to counteract the solemn denunciations of the true prophets, and to lull the

people into a false security by assuring them that no ill should befall them, and that as they were the people of God all would be well with them and their beloved city. It was this peculiar feature which broke the very heart of Jeremiah.

"Mine heart within me is broken because of the prophets; all my bones shake; I am like a drunken man, and like a man whom wine hath overcome, because of the Lord, and because of the words of his holiness." (Jer. 23:9.)

The consequence of this crop of false prophets was, that they strengthened the hands of evil doers so that none returned from his wickedness. Instead of standing on the Lord's side and testifying against sin, they were by their words and conduct the chief promoters of it. "From the prophets of Jerusalem is profaneness gone forth into all the land." They hardened the people in their sins, for as Jeremiah testified, "They say still unto them that despise me, The Lord hath said, Ye shall have peace; and they say unto every one that walketh after the imagination of his own heart, No evil shall come upon you." (Jer. 23:17.) There is one verse which I have thought sometimes seems to couch in itself the very summit of abomination: "The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so." Now what could become of a nation where the prophets, standing up in the name of God, prophesied lies, where the priests made use of these lying prophets to carry out their own designs of covetousness or ambition, and the people were well pleased that the prophets should prophesy lies, and the priests should rule over them by craft and subtlety? Such a nation was only fit to be either swept away, as unfit to exist any longer as the professed people of God whom they thus dishonoured, or be purified by judgments, so as to remove these abominations out of God's sight. God took the latter course by carrying them to Babylon for seventy years' captivity, in which hard school they learnt to renounce their idolatry and to cease from their false

prophets, for after their return we hear no more of these prevailing sins. You will find the study of the prophet Jeremiah very profitable, as it throws a wonderful light upon many things in our day, such as a false, hypocritical profession, the deceptiveness of lying prophets, the bewitching snares of idol worship, and the end of all these things in destruction from the presence of God.

But there was doubtless a godly remnant, of whom we read in Ezekiel as the men who "sighed and cried for all the abominations done in the midst of the land." Now it seems to me that Jeremiah in our text personated this godly remnant, and that his words were intended to represent the lamentations and desires of the true people of God in that day. It is not unusual for the prophets thus to personate the godly remnant, and speak as it were for them. We have a signal instance of this in Isaiah 64., where the prophet speaks in the name of the people: "But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away. And there is none that calleth upon thy name, that stirreth up himself to take hold of thee: for thou hast hid thy face from us, and hast consumed us, because of our iniquities." (Isa. 64, 7.)

Now it is true that we are not altogether in the same circumstances, and yet in many points we greatly resemble what the people of Judah and Jerusalem then were. We are sunk into a very low state in the things of God. There is very little true religion or vital godliness in our midst. Sin runs down our streets like water, and false prophets abound on every side who cry, Peace, Peace, where there is no peace. The people of God are also for the most part full of complaints of their leanness, darkness, and barrenness. There is but little manifestation of the presence and power of

God as in days of old. The Lord seems much to hide himself from his people, and to have greatly withdrawn his gracious presence from them, both publicly and privately. We may thus find in our text, if the Lord enable me to open it up spiritually and experimentally, much that may be suitable not only to present circumstances but to our own particular case.

But by way of casting my thoughts upon those points from the words before us in an orderly form, I shall thus divide our subject:—

I.—*First*, the *titles* under which the prophet addresses the Lord: "O the *hope* of Israel, the Saviour thereof, in time of trouble."

II.—*Secondly*; the *expostulation* which he addresses to the Lord under these titles: "Why shouldest thou be as a *stranger* in the land, and as a *wayfaring* man that turneth aside to tarry for a night? Why shouldest thou be as a man *astonied*, as a mighty man *that cannot save*?"

III.—*Thirdly*; the *plea* on which he grounds his expostulation: "Yet thou, O Lord, art in *the midst of us*, and we are *called by thy name*."

IV.—*Fourthly*, the petition, "Leave us not."

I.—But you may say perhaps, "What bearing has all this upon our case? Doubtless it had a bearing upon the case of old, upon the peculiar state and condition of the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem which you have been describing, for neither would Jeremiah, as the prophet of the Lord, have used the words, nor should we find them recorded in the Bible. But those days are gone by and that state of things has passed away. We have amongst us no worshippers of

Tammuz, or of the queen of heaven. The text therefore does not apply to modern times and still less to us." I will not dispute the point with you as to particular instances of idolatry; but an idol is an idol, whether worshipped inwardly in heart, or adorned outwardly by the knee. But waiving this, have you thought for a moment what conclusion must follow from such an argument, and that it would set aside a large part of the word of God? If the words of our text have no bearing upon any other case or any other circumstances, except those when it was first delivered, why is it still a part of God's word? why does it stand, and why has it stood imperishable for ages in the inspired page but because it has a bearing upon the Church of God throughout all time? In this sense we may explain the words of the apostle, that "no prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation." (2 Pet. 1:20.) The word "private" means that it is not limited to, or exhausted by the peculiar circumstances (as the expression private signifies), under which the prophecy was first delivered, but has a public and more expansive interpretation. We may illustrate this explanation from a passage in the Epistle to the Hebrews, where we find the apostle thus speaking: "Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." (Heb. 13:5.) Now if you observe, he grounds his exhortation to contentment upon a promise. But to whom was that promise made? To Joshua; as we read, "I will not fail thee nor forsake thee." (Josh. 1:5.) He thus expands the promise given to Joshua, enlarges its private interpretation as first spoken to him, and makes it so far public as to embrace all the family of God. If it were not for this enlargement of the Scripture, and its application beyond the circumstances of the time when it was first delivered, the greater part of the word of God would be practically useless. But its grand characteristic is, that it is a "living" word ("the word of God is

quick," that is, living "and powerful" (Heb. 4:12); and the reason is, because it is the word of Him who liveth for ever and ever. But has our text no bearing upon our time? Was there ever a day when there was more practical ungodliness in the nation at large? Was there ever a day when there was more false religion rife and rampant on every side? Was there ever a day when vital godliness was lower in the Church? Was there ever a day when the truth of God was either more despised and trampled under foot, or more perverted and abused? I fully grant that good men in all ages have ever made similar complaints; but that very circumstance only proves the truth of what I have advanced as to the bearing which our text has upon all periods. It has then a bearing upon this day, and I trust I shall be able to show that it has also a bearing upon you now before me—a bearing upon your heart, and in some measure a description of the experience of your soul, so far as you are under the teachings of the Holy Ghost. There is no use preaching, as it were, outside the chapel walls, or upon outside matters, entertaining and amusing our hearers with tales and anecdotes, and old wives' fables. The grand point is to get into men's hearts and consciences, to speak to them personally and individually, as God speaks in his word, and thus to bring the very artillery of heaven to bear upon the inmost citadel, the stronghold of the heart, the grand seat of contest between Christ and Satan.

i. The first thing which I proposed to consider was *the titles* under which the prophet here addresses the Lord. These are two: 1, "the *hope* of Israel;" 2, "the *Saviour* thereof in time of trouble."

1. The first title under which the prophet addresses the Lord is, "*the hope of Israel.*"

You will often find in the Scriptures titles ascribed to God as if to meet certain cases, and to be made use of as prevailing pleas. Those titles are not such as we might choose to call God by, which would be but presumption, but such as God called himself by, and which he intended to be descriptive of certain relationships which he bears to his people, or such as are founded on what he has revealed of himself as full of goodness, mercy, and truth. Thus his general distinguishing title all through the Old Testament was "the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob." This title God most graciously gave to himself as significant of the covenant which he had made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, that he would be a God to them and to their seed after them through all generations. When, therefore, God spake to Moses at the burning bush, he said to him, "I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And though he then gave himself, so to speak, a new name, "I AM THAT I AM," yet this was the message which he sent by Moses to the children of Israel: "And God said moreover unto Moses, thou shalt say unto the children of Israel, the Lord God of thy fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath sent me unto you: this is my name for ever, and this is my memorial unto all generations." (Exod. 3:15.) This title gave them, so to speak, a claim upon God, who, as having made a covenant with their fathers, had thus virtually pledged himself to be a God to them at all times and under all circumstances. So sometimes he is called "the God of Israel," that is, of the children of Israel collectively, as being in a peculiar and distinctive form, not only the object of Israel's worship, but as having especially revealed himself to Israel, made himself known to that people alone of all the nations of the earth, and taken them to himself that they might be his peculiar possession and treasure. These were Old Testament titles, and under them he was worshipped by his chosen people of old. But in the

New Testament he has taken to himself a new title, for in that he is called "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ," that being his distinctive New Testament title, as "the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob" was his distinctive Old Testament title.

But some of his titles, both in the Old Testament and New, are taken from those gracious attributes which he has revealed concerning himself. Thus in our text he is called "the hope of Israel," and in the New Testament he is entitled "the God of all grace," to show that all grace flows from him and is given by him. He is called also "the Father of all mercies," as being their original Source, Author, and Giver. He is called also "the God of all comfort," as intimating that all real consolation flows out of his manifested goodness and love. He is called also "the Father of glory," because all glory is in him and comes from him. We see then that these titles are either such as God has given himself, or such as are drawn from his attributes of grace, and sometimes of his holiness, as in the Seraphims' cry: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts;" and our Lord's own words in his intercessory prayer: "Holy Father," and "righteous Father." (John 17:11, 25.) But there is this peculiar blessedness in these titles that they give us a foundation on which to stand, and put into our mouth a prevailing plea. Thus sometimes we may address him: "O thou God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, reveal thyself to me as my heavenly Father and eternal Friend;" sometimes, "O thou Father of all mercies, manifest thy mercy to my soul;" or, "O thou God of all comfort, speak a word of comfort to my poor, troubled heart;" or, "O thou Father of glory, reveal thy glory to my longing, waiting eyes."

But in our text God is called "the hope of Israel."

Let us endeavour to discover what this peculiar title unfolds

for our comfort and encouragement. And first, in what sense is he the hope of Israel? In this, that all Israel—and by Israel we understand here not Israel after the flesh, but Israel after the Spirit—all Israel hope in him. Every grace of the Spirit must have the Person of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost to be exercised upon and look[ed?] unto. Hope, as a grace of the Spirit, is not a vague, confused, undefined sensation of the mind, flying like a wandering bird hither and thither, without end, object, or home; but is a special acting of the soul under a divine influence, and is an abiding grace of the Spirit, which has a Person to look to, a Person to anchor in. David therefore said, "Hope thou in God." As if he would say, "Do not hope in thyself or ground thy hope upon anything in the creature, but hope directly and immediately in God himself. In him let thy soul anchor, and in him let thy expectations rest." Now this personal and peculiar hoping in God distinguishes "a good hope through grace" from all the vain hopes and vague expectations of those who know not the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent. How many are looking here and there, trying to hope in this or that good work or deed, this or that dim, confused idea of the general goodness and mercy of God, without any experimental knowledge or felt sense of his mercy as a manifested reality, without any true spiritual acquaintance with God, and therefore without any fixed object, or any firm foundation in God as revealing himself in his dear Son. How different from this is the hope spoken of in the Scripture as "an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and entering into that within the veil;" and which, as such, has a definite Object and a sure foundation. In our text, therefore, God is called the "hope of Israel," as implying that all Israel, the whole of God's spiritual Israel, take them in all their states, cases, and conditions, are hoping in God. Could you take a survey of the whole of the spiritual Israel, could you view them as a general body with a discriminating

eye, you would see that every true Israelite hopes in God; and that not simply as God, but as the God of all grace, the God of all mercy and of all truth, and especially as the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is this hoping in God, as distinct from all delusive, false hopes, which brings the soul to his feet, gives it special dealings with him on the ground of his promises and testimonies; and by so doing, practically renounces hope in everything else, as springing out of any other source or derived from any other quarter. With all this good hope through grace there may be much darkness of mind, and many tossings to and fro, as may be seen in our text, and yet there is a looking with a single eye to the Lord, and to the Lord alone, as if the soul would cast away every creature dependence, and hang itself wholly and solely upon the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ as its only hope. I especially name this, for if you watch the movements of hope in your own soul, you will find that they always have respect to the Lord Jesus Christ, and to what you have seen, known, tasted, felt, or experimentally handled in or of him. You cannot, you dare not hope in anything that you find or fancy in yourself, but your hope anchors within the veil, where Christ now is, and takes fast hold of his Person and work. I cannot now enter into the various ways by which that hope is given and sustained; I can only assume that you have been favoured with a "good hope through grace," that it is the anchor of your soul, and that by that hope within the veil you have ridden out many a storm—not casting away your confidence which hath great recompense of reward; but in your lowest spot, in the darkest hour, in the gloomiest season, still retaining the good hope through grace which God has planted in your soul, and riding at anchor, even though the port seem far distant, the wind high, the sea rough, and rocks ahead.

2. The second title by which the Lord is appealed to is as the

Saviour of Israel. I have already observed that by Israel we must understand not Israel after the flesh but Israel after the spirit, though in a sense God was a preserver of Israel nationally as well as the Saviour of Israel spiritually. In that sense, therefore, he is also said in the New Testament to be "the Saviour of all men," that is, their Preserver literally and naturally, and "especially of those that believe," by taking signal care of their bodies as well as of their souls.

There is no title of our blessed Lord sweeter and more suitable to a believing heart than that of *Saviour*. His very name Jesus signifies a Saviour, as saving his people from their sins. (Mat. 1:21.) In that sense, therefore, he is peculiarly "the Saviour of Israel." But the appeal to him by that title is a renunciation of all salvation but that which he wrought out by his bloodshedding, sacrifice, and death; for this is the distinguishing characteristic of Israel, that it hangs upon the Lord of life and glory, as its only Saviour, and renounces all salvation but his.

But you will observe that he is spoken of in the text as the Saviour of Israel *in time of trouble*. Israel has often to pass through times of sorrow and trouble. Deep temporal and deep spiritual trouble is the allotted portion of many, if not of most of the people of God. But having found that the Lord is a Saviour, and the only Saviour who can support in trouble and deliver out of trouble, there is this conviction deeply implanted and firmly written upon their heart, that he is a Saviour in the time of trouble. It is the purpose of God to hunt us out of all lying refuges, that we may believe in Jesus to the saving of our soul; that we may prove that he is able to save to the uttermost all who come unto God by him; that we may learn what salvation is, and that we may know it for ourselves as a divine and blessed reality. Thus though he is always a Saviour, yet he is not experimentally a Saviour in

times of worldly ease, carnal prosperity, and seasons of carelessness. But in times of trouble, when none can do us any good or stretch forth a healing hand but the Lord alone, then to come to his gracious Majesty and find there and then how he can and does save in trouble and out of trouble,—this is that which endears such a Saviour to believing hearts. And observe the expression, "*time of trouble*," and how it includes not only every trouble which may befall us temporally or spiritually, but clearly intimates that there is not a single season or time when trouble comes that the Lord is not able and willing to save us out of it. How well this corresponds with those gracious words and that sweet promise, "Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me." (Psa. 50:15.)

II.—But I pass on to consider the *expostulation* of the remnant which Jeremiah here personates: "Why shouldest thou be as a stranger in the land, and as a wayfaring man that turneth aside to tarry for a night?" You will observe that this expostulation follows upon his address to the Lord as the "hope of Israel and the Saviour thereof in time of trouble." It is therefore as if he would engage the Lord upon his behalf, win him over, as it were, to his side by appealing to him under those titles; and not only so, but by the strengthening of his own faith to gain some larger measure of confidence in his own soul, and thus obtain stronger and firmer ground on which he could plant a praying foot and utter praying breath—for these two things are necessary to the power and prevalence of prayer. Having thus then appealed to the Lord, and got, so to speak, a firmer foothold for his own faith, he ventures onward in the language of expostulation. There is much wisdom and grace in this. He does not rush hastily and presumptuously into the presence of God as if he would take heaven by storm, but by appealing to him under those gracious titles by which the Lord had made himself known,

he engages the ear of God to listen to his cry, furnishes his own soul with some ground on which he can stand, and having obtained that, he goes on with all reverence and tenderness to expostulate with the sovereign Majesty of heaven.

i. But what is the first expostulation which he lays before his gracious Majesty? "Why shouldest thou be as a *stranger in the land?*" What a tender appeal to "the hope of Israel, and the Saviour thereof in the time of trouble." What a piteous inquiry! How he would as if ask of the Lord to reveal to him the mystery which had so deeply exercised his mind; that he would condescend to unfold to him the reason of a matter which had so much tried his soul. "Why shouldest thou be as a stranger in the land?" If thou art, as thou art, the hope of Israel; if thou art, as thou art, the Saviour thereof in time of trouble, why, O why should matters be at this pass, that at this moment of perplexity, in this season of difficulty, in this very time of trouble, thou shouldest be "as a stranger in the land?"

Let me open up the figure. A stranger is one who does not speak our language or understand our customs. We know a foreigner at once by his appearance, his ignorance of our language and customs, and his strange bearing. He has little interest in us or we in him. There is therefore a mutual distance between us. Adopting this figure, and yet using it with all due reverence and humility, the prophet expostulates with the Lord, "Why shouldest thou be as a stranger in the land? We see, we all see, that thou art not as thou once wert, at home with us, one with us, interested in us, making our affairs thine own. A change has come over thee. Thou passest through our land as a stranger would, scarcely speaking to us, and keeping thyself at a distance from us." Now is not this the very description of a "stranger in the

land?" A stranger is one who keeps himself very much to himself. He does not speak our language, and if he can speak it, it is not with the fluency of a native. There is little or no intercourse between us. He does not visit our houses, nor is he upon terms of friendliness or amity with us; for being a stranger, this cuts off friendly and familiar intercourse. Now the prophet asks the Lord why he should be with his people as a stranger in the land; in other words, should hold so little intercourse with them, keep them so much at a distance, carry himself in so isolated a way, discover himself so rarely, and manifest so little friendliness to them. Now apply this to our own case. I hope we are not altogether strangers to God and godliness, and that God is not altogether a stranger to us; that we know what it is to speak to God and sometimes for God to speak to us; and that the language in which we speak to God is not a language unknown to him, and the language in which God speaks to us is not a language unknown to us. And yet with all this, there may have sprung up a strangeness, a distance, an alienation between God and us, that makes him carry himself towards us as if he were a stranger in the land; so that we rarely speak to him and he still more rarely speaks to us. From whatever cause it has arisen, it is painfully evident that there is that coldness, that distance, that want of friendly intercourse and spiritual communion which seems to be intimated by the figure of his being "a stranger in the land." Have you ever known anything of spiritual intimacy with God, sacred fellowship and holy communion with the Lord as sitting upon the mercy-seat? Then you know what it is when he is as a stranger in the land, keeps you at a great distance from him, rarely or never allows you to come into his company, and scarcely ever speaks a word to you from the throne of his grace. This is for God to be as a stranger in the land. And sad it is for any people, sad it is for any church, sad it is for any congregation; and sadder still for any individual soul when

"the hope of Israel" is as a stranger in the land. If God be a stranger here, a stranger to the church, and a stranger to the congregation, it must be mourned and lamented by those who know anything of intimacy and fellowship with him; and if it is not known, lamented, or mourned over, the worse case it is. When people begin to feel the misery of God being a stranger to them and they being strangers to God, and long for reconciliation, intimacy, fellowship, and communion, then we have some marks of the hand of God being at work. But when they are satisfied day after day that God should be a stranger to them and they strangers to God, matters indeed must wear a very sad and gloomy aspect. If God be as much a stranger to you as any foreigner whom you may meet in a railway carriage, who cannot speak your language or you speak his, and therefore no intercourse whatever can take place between you, and you are content it should be so, sad indeed must be your case, and sadder still because you know and feel it not.

ii. But the prophet adds: "And as a *wayfaring man* that turneth aside to tarry for a night." In the East, especially in ancient times, there were not usually inns or other public buildings to entertain travellers as in our more civilized country; and it was therefore the habit of hospitable persons to take strangers in whom they might see in the street, and evidently travellers unacquainted with the place. We see this very clearly in the case of Lot; he would not allow the two angels who came to Sodom to tarry all night in the street. Similarly the old man at Gibeah, when no one would entertain the Levite, who was travelling to the side of Mount Ephraim, would not suffer him to lodge in the street all night, but took him into his own house. (Judges 19.) Thus the wayfaring man in the text represents a traveller who turned aside from the road and took advantage of the hospitality of a friendly host, who kindly offered to receive him into his

house and give him a night's lodging. Now there would be some measure of friendly intercourse between these two persons, the host and his guest, but the latter would tarry only for the night. He would not live permanently with his host. Their intimacy could not therefore be very strong or of long duration; sufficient it might be to produce a degree of mutual interest and affection, but not sufficiently long or intimate to take a very deep and permanent hold on the heart. Under this expressive figure the prophet complains, or rather expostulates with the Lord, why he should be as this wayfaring man who turns aside to tarry for a night? who only speaks a few words now and then, gives a faint smile, and yet, being only a wayfaring man, does not use greater intimacy, as not being on the same footing as a wife, or mother, or child, but keeps up an understood distinction between host and guest, and remembers that he is only there for a night. Thus the Lord sometimes is as a wayfaring man to his people, pays a short visit, and condescends to tarry for a time with them, accepting the entertainment at which he is received. This corresponds to those words: "I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me." (Rev. 3:20.) There is, so to speak, a friendly meal, and a few friendly words between the Lord and his entertainer. But it is soon over; the morning comes and the wayfaring man takes his departure, and it may be weeks or months before he comes again. We often long for him and wonder when we shall see our guest again. "When will the wayfaring man come," we ask, "and turn aside again and tarry with us for another night? How sweet was his company; his words were not many, but they were weighty and powerful. We did not see much of his features, but what we saw was very beautiful and engaging; his voice melodious, and his language friendly, though in a measure distant. O when shall we see our wayfaring guest again? He has left

such an impression, such a recollection of his visit behind, that we long once more to see his face and hear his voice." Have not you sometimes entertained a guest, some favoured servant of God perhaps, whose words and conversation left upon your mind an indelible impression, making you long to see him again? Now this describes very nicely the language and feelings of the soul that knows something of the visits of the Lord, of his words dropping like honey and the honeycomb, of the gracious discoveries of his presence, and the drawing near of his word and promise, making it long for his return. But it may be weeks or months before the wayfaring man turns aside again for another night.

iii. But there is something more expressive even than this; for our text seems to rise and its exhortation to increase on us. "Why shouldest thou be *as a man astonished?*" Observe the word: "astonied." It is not "astonished," but "astonied," which is a stronger word, and seems to be the old form of the modern word "stunned." We have in our present English two words: the word "astonished" and the word "stunned." Now "stunned" is a stronger expression than "astonished," for it implies such a degree of astonishment as benumbs a man's faculties. You might be astonished by seeing some accident in the street. But suppose it was your own wife or child upon whom the blow had fallen, you would be more than astonished: you would be stunned. So the Lord is not merely astonished, or rather as a man astonished, but "astonied" or stunned.

But we may well ask, what could embolden the prophet to use language like this? Jeremiah was sometimes led to use stronger, we might almost say more daring language, than any of the other prophets; as for instance, in that remarkable expression, "Why shouldest thou be to me as a liar, and as waters that fail?" Scarcely any of the prophets use language

of so bold, so daring a character, and yet in his mouth it had a certain characteristic feature: it was pressed out of him by the weight of circumstances. Thus though the language, as of Job's, deserved reproof, yet not being a wilful word against the Lord, but pressed out of his heart by the force of circumstances, it is not to be condemned as it would be in the case of a man who spoke the same words deliberately, and as it were in cold blood. But what spiritual meaning can be gathered up from the expression here made use of, "Why shouldest thou be as a man *astonied*?" Take the word in two senses, first "astonished," then "stunned."

1. It seems as if the prophet would represent God as astonished at the desperate case and state in which he finds his people. Not that God is astonished. The prophet does not say so, for there is the qualifying word, "as" "why shouldest thou be *as* a man *astonied*?" It is as if graphically he would represent God as himself struck with astonishment at the awful case and state in which he finds his people. Sometimes we are so astonished ourselves at what we are, at what we have been, or at what we are capable of, that we may well think that God must be astonished too. We stand sometimes and look at our heart, and see what a seething, boiling, and bubbling is there; and we look at it, if I may use the expression, with indignant astonishment, as we should look into a pool of filthy black mud, all swarming and alive with every hideous creature. We stand and look at such a sight naturally with a sort of astonishment, at the same time of loathing. So when a man takes a view of his own heart, its awful hypocrisy, its vile rebellion, its dreadful deceitfulness, and its desperate wickedness, of what his heart is capable of plotting and contriving if unrestrained by grace, what it can conceive and imagine, it is as if he stood looking down upon a filthy pit and saw with astonishment, mingled with self-
abhorrence, what the human heart is as the fountain of all

iniquity. When he sees also who God is, his holiness and purity, and especially what he is as the God of all grace, of all truth, and of all love, what he has done for him and been to him, and then sees what his heart is capable of against a God so pure, a God so good, it is as if he seems horror struck with double astonishment; stunned it may be, not knowing what to do, what to think, or what to say. Have you not sometimes had such a view as I have just described of what you are as a sinner before God? Then you transfer your feelings to God as if he felt as you feel. "Why shouldest thou be as a man astonied?" As if viewing the Lord from yourself, and measuring him by your own feelings, the Lord was so astonished at the horrid wickedness of man, it seemed as if he himself did not know what to do. You will bear in mind that this is the language of strong and intense feeling. But a man must have some knowledge of his own heart to read it in this looking-glass, and to understand such language as this. You that are so exceedingly pious and so extra good, and from whose heart the veil has never been taken away to show you what you are, will perhaps think that I am drawing a caricature of human nature, and painting it as it is in the back slums of St. Giles's, or some court or alley in Whitechapel, the resort of thieves and prostitutes. And yet could you have the veil taken off your heart, you would see that you were capable—mark my words, *capable*, God forbid that you or I should do the things of which we feel the workings—but that you are capable of doing all that human nature has done, or can do. If you think that human nature is not so bad as I have described it, let me ask you this one question. Why does there surge up every year, month, week, and day, crime after crime of most dreadful description? Unless crime were deeply seated in human nature, why should men poison their wives, mothers strangle their children, London contain a whole army of desperate characters, and that we should hear constantly of the vilest

abominations, unless human nature were a seed bed of all these horrid crimes? And how does *our* nature differ from the nature of men justly gibbeted by public fame, or hurled out of life by public execution? It is when we see what we are ourselves that we come to know what human nature is.

2. It was this also which made the prophet say, "Why shouldest thou be as a man astonished," or stunned, that is, at a loss what to do to remedy such a desperate case, or heal a disease so thoroughly inveterate? You must bear strictly in mind, that the prophet does not ascribe to God this deficiency of wisdom, but in the strong feelings of his soul asks him why he should stand aloof just as if he were baffled by the difficulty of the case. We must carefully guard this point lest we tread with unhallowed shoes upon holy ground; and we must carefully bear in mind not only the extremity of the case, but the strong feelings of the prophet himself.

iv. But he adds another expression almost as strong, if not stronger: "*As a mighty man that cannot save?*" He views God as a mighty man, armed with all the strength of a giant, full of power and might, so that nothing could stand in the way of the execution of his purpose; but still the case with which he had to grapple was so deep and so desperate, that it was as if he stood in the midst of his people as a mighty man armed with all power, and yet their peculiar case was beyond the reach of his arm. He thus represents in the strongest possible way that matters had come to that pass, that not only the wisdom of God seemed to have failed, but even that his power was insufficient to save the people whom he had designed to save. I grant that this language is very strong, but I think not stronger than our own experience warrants. Have you not felt sometimes there was that in your case and in your state so peculiar, that you were the subject of such temptations, had committed such sins inwardly or outwardly,

and that your heart was such a compound of villainy and hypocrisy that it seemed to put you out of the reach of ordinary cases; that yours was a case in itself so peculiar and so strange, that it seemed as if it would baffle all the wisdom of God and defeat all the power of God; nay, if you did not know by some sweet experience that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin, your case had in it that peculiarity that it seemed to put you out of the pale of God's salvation. Now this seems to be just the spot where the prophet was when he speaks of God as a mighty man that cannot save. A man must get into these spots before he can know them, and be exercised by these feelings and this experience before he can justify the language of the prophet, or in any way adopt it for his own. But if he know these things as personal matters, and they have been wrought, I might say, burnt into his very heart by a living experience of their truth and reality, then, though the language is strong, it will be found not one whit too strong for him to make use of. But are no profitable lessons ever learnt in this painful school, for it is a painful school when once our eyes are opened to see the solemn realities of eternity, and how we stand as affected toward them? Yes; there are two profitable lessons which we are taught in this school. 1. First, we obtain thereby some experimental knowledge of the depth of the fall, of the nature of sin, and of our own sad case as so deeply involved in actual and original transgression. It may seem at times as if our case were desperate; that look where we may, or consider whatever scriptural characters may present themselves to our view, still there is something in our own case different from and worse than any one. But we are thus cut off from all creature help or hope, and at times it may be almost from the very power of grace itself. But 2, secondly, we learn what a wonderful God we have to deal with. We are led to admire his forbearance and long-suffering to us; whilst every now and then a sense of his goodness

softens and melts the heart into repentance and to lie at his feet, bewailing and lamenting our sad state, confessing our sins with all their aggravations, and made truly willing to do anything, bear anything, or be anything if he will but make our heart right and keep it right, and above all things manifest to us a sense of his love and mercy. Surely none so highly prize the grace of God as those who are most led into a knowledge of the fall, and the havoc and ruin which it has made in every one of Adam's race, and the guilt and misery which it has brought into our own hearts.

III.—But to pass on to our third point. Now comes the *plea*: "Yet thou, O Lord, art in the midst of us."

What a strange intermixture there is in a believing heart of everything to cast down and yet of everything to encourage. How there is everything on the one side to perplex, to confuse, and put the soul to its wits' end, and yet how on the other there is everything to hold up its head, strengthen its faith, support its hope, and encourage it to hold on to the last gasp. Now this is that very trial of faith which is more precious than of gold that perisheth, for faith is not a dead, sluggish grace, and is never more active than when it is being tried as with fire. In what a commotion is the gold when it is in the crucible; and yet in that commotion what a separation from it of the dross and tin. Thus even in the sharp exercises which I have been describing, wherein the soul was almost brought to say that God himself could scarcely save it, and in the very power of his might looked on as if astonished at the depth and extremity of the case, yet, with all that, faith maintained its own, and, relying upon his word, could still say to him, "Yet thou, O Lord, art in the midst of *us*." O what a blessing it would be for this place if we could say, in the same assurance of faith, "Yet thou, O Lord, art in the midst of us." If God is in the midst of us this

morning, your case and state, though you may feel it almost desperate, is not beyond the reach of his favourable eye, his healing hand, and his outstretched arm. The grand thing to be decided is this, Is God in the midst of us? But how shall we know this? He is in one sense in the midst of us by the preaching of his gospel, by virtue of his ordinances, by our meeting together in his name according to his revealed will, by the solemnity of his manifested presence, by the gathering together of a praying people, members of the church and congregation, and by the promise of his being amongst his assembled worshippers. But he may be all this in our assembly, and yet not be all this to you personally and individually. How then, in the best sense, shall you know this? I will ask you one question, Is God in the midst of your heart? Has he ever come down in power and authority into your soul to take possession of you, so that though you are what you are, yet this you know, or at least in times past have known, that you are his? O what a strange intermixture, that a man should be in his feelings such a desperate wretch, such a vile sinner, and yet retain so firm a hold of God, should not let the Almighty get out of the grasp of his arm, but still hang on, and that to the very end upon God as having done something for his soul. Satan, though the father of lies, spake truth when he said, "All that a man hath will he give for his life." (Job. 2:4.) You cannot give up from what you have felt and experienced, for that is the grand evidence, that you have the life of God in your soul, and compared with that how worthless and valueless all other things seem to be in your eyes, because to give that up is to give up all your hope. Here, then, is the grand mystery, to hang and hold on, to hold out, and not suffer oneself to be cast away, but the more the Lord would seem to put us away, the more to cling to him. Was not this the faith of the Syro-Phenician woman, who, so to speak, would not take "No" for an answer? or, like the faith of Ruth, "Entreat me

not to leave thee?" or, like the faith of Hannah when "she was in bitterness of soul, and prayed unto the Lord, and wept sore?" Does not this faith resemble that of Heman's, when he cried out, "Wilt thou show wonders to the dead? Shall the dead arise and praise thee?" and that of Asaph, when his feet were almost gone and his steps had well-nigh slipped? Such a faith is almost like the heartbroken wife, who, when her husband, after long endurance of her trying temper and thoughtless expenditure, says to her, "I cannot, I will not live with you any more: your temper is so bad, your extravagance so great, that we must separate. I must leave you." But she will not let him go. O how she clings around him. "Don't put me away; do not leave me. I will not be so extravagant; I will be more mild. Don't put me away; I shall die, I shall die, if you put me away, and will not let me live with you any more." The more he puts her away, the more she clings to him, and will not let him go till he relent. So Milton represents Adam overcome by the tears of Eve:—

"Soon his heart relented
Towards her, his life so late, and sole delight,
Now at his feet submissive in distress."

Thus in grace; the more the Lord seems to put us away, the more we cling to him. The viler we are, the more we need his grace; and the very magnitude of our sins only makes us hang more upon his atoning blood and cling more closely to his word and promises as suitable to our case. Nor will anything induce us to give up our hope or relinquish our hold of his mercy.

If then the Lord has ever been in our soul to manifest there a sense of his goodness and mercy, we can then make use of this as our plea, "Yet thou, O Lord, art in the midst of us."

But are there no other marks and tokens that he is in our midst? Yes, surely. If he has ever heard your prayer, he is with you; if he has ever given you a promise, he is with you; if he has ever touched your heart with his finger, he is with you; if he has ever favoured you with a smile, he is with you. And though taking the general run of your experience, he may be a stranger in the land and as a wayfaring man that turneth aside to tarry for a night, or though even, as it may seem, as if he were astonished at what you are—a mighty man that cannot save, still every token for good encourages you to cling, to cleave, to hang round him, to catch hold of his feet, as the Shunammite caught Elisha by the feet, and would not be thrust away; for you cannot but feel that, with all that you are and have been, you dearly love him, and have a good hope, if not a clear testimony, that he loves you. Can you not sometimes look up to him, may I not say, almost look at him in the face and say, "Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee? And though my abominable sins have often made thee a stranger to me, yet in my heart of hearts, in the very depths of my soul, thou knowest that I love thee." I know that I have had such feelings myself as these when my heart has been turned towards his glorious Person and finished work. Here then is the plea: "Thou art in the midst of us." And if you can look at the Lord in the face and appeal to his heart-searching eye that you do love him, depend upon it he loves you, for the word of truth declares, "we love him because he first loved us."

2. "*And we are called by thy name.*" This is the second plea. Why am I called by my name? Because it was my father's name. We all bear the name of our father. So, if we are called by the name of God, it is because God is our Father. His name is called upon us, as the Hebrew expresses it, because, as in nature so in grace, as sons we bear the name

of our Father. The tie of father and son is a tie which cannot be broken. No power in earth or heaven could make me not to be my father's son. Change of name would not do it; for the change of name is not the change of nature, nor could it alter a past fact. If then we are called by God's name, he having adopted us into his family, whatever we are, may be, or feel ourselves to be, God is still our Father. And surely, if ever we have felt any measure of the Spirit of adoption, so as to call him Father, he will never deny the title, never cut us off or disinherit us, but still be a Father and a friend in time and to all eternity.

IV.—Now for the last point, the *petition*, "*Leave us not.*"

How much is summed up in those three words; for what would it be for God to leave us? What would become of us? What would be our case, what our state, if he left us and that for ever? We should fall at once into the hands of sin, of Satan, and of the world. We should be abandoned to our own evil hearts, abandoned, utterly abandoned to the unbelief, the infidelity, to all the filth and sensuality of our wicked nature, to fill up the measure of our iniquities, till we sank under his wrath to rise no more. So was it with Saul when God left him, and an evil spirit from the Lord troubled him. He went from worse to worse, till at last he died in misery and despair. Indeed, I may say what and where should we be if God left us for a single hour? However therefore God may seem to bear himself coldly toward us, we cannot endure to think that he should leave us fully and finally, and abandon us to what we are and what we know we should be if left of him. "Leave us not therefore to the just desert of our sins; leave us not to reap the fruit of what we have sown," must ever be our cry. "Still let us cleave to thee, and do thou still cleave to us."

I think we have seen in our text real faith and hope and love at work, and yet its language is such as is only spoken out of the depths of an exercised soul. This subject I have therefore brought this morning before you, in the hope that it may meet some of your cases and reach some of your hearts, as it describes what has been often mine, and thus, by the blessing of God, the bread cast upon the waters may be found unto profit after few or many days.