

(First published in the edition of the “Expository Works”,
in two volumes, and printed for David Wilson, Edinburgh, 1748.)

EXPOSITORY LECTURES

ON

ISAIAH VI.

by

Robert Leighton, D.D.,
Archbishop of Glasgow

LECTURE I.

Ver. 1-5.

THE division of this chapter (were that to any great purpose) may be stated thus

I. The Prophet’s vision, from ver. 1 to 3. *In the year that king Uzziah died, I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and His train filled the temple. 2. Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. 3. And one cried into another, and said, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory.*

II. The effects of it upon him, relating to his calling, from ver.4-13. *And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the House was filled with smoke, &c.*

In the vision, besides the circumstances of time and place specified, ver. 1, we have a glorious representation of the majesty of God, ver. 2; a suitable acclamation, a voice of praise being joined with it, ver. 3, 4.

The effects of it on the Prophet towards his calling are three, viz., I. His Preparation. II. His Mission. III. His Message.

I. The Preparation, in these two particulars: 1. Humiliation; 2. Purification (ver. 6, 7): a deep conviction, and then, effectual removal of pollution.

II. In his Mission we have three things: 1. God’s inquiry for a messenger, ver. 8, former part. 2. The Prophet’s offer of Himself, the latter part of ver. 8. 3. God’s acceptance, ver. 9, former part.

III. His Message—a heavy commination, from ver. 9-12, yet, allayed with a gracious mitigation, ver. 13; the judgment very lasting and wasting, yet a remnant reserved.

Ver. 1. In the year that king Uzziah died, I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and His train filled the temple.

I saw.] Observe the freedom of God in His choice of men to be near Him and know Him. And in the measuring out of the degrees of discovery unto those men differently, some had extraordinary revelations; and though prophetic visions now cease, yet there are certainly higher and clearer coruscations of God upon some souls, than upon many others, who yet are children of light, and partake of a measure of that light shining within them. Thus we are not carvers

and choosers, and, therefore, are not peremptorily to desire any thing in kind or measure that is singular; that were pride and folly. But above all things we are to esteem, and submissively to desire, still more and more knowledge of God, and humbly to wait and keep open the passage of light; not to close the windows, not to be indulgent to any known sin or impure affection; that will soon obstruct it. Into a filthy soul, wisdom will not enter.

In the year that king Uzziah died, I saw the Lord on His throne.] There is another king named here, to denote the time by; but he was a diseased and a dying king, who lived some years a leper, and then died. Men may speak in a court style of vain wishes, *O king, live for ever*; but this king here on the throne, is indeed THE KING IMMORTAL, the ever living God.

God measures and proportions all His means to their ends. When He calls men to high services, he furnishes them with suitable preparations and enablements. Thus here with the Prophet: he was to denounce heavy things against his own nation, *a proud, stubborn people*; to deal boldly and freely with the highest yea, with the king himself, ch. vii.; and he is prepared by a *vision of God*. What can a man fear after that? All regal majesty and pomp looks petty and poor after that sight. Two kings together on their thrones in robes royal, (1 Kings xxii.) did no whit astonish him who had seen a greater: *I saw* (says Micaiah) *the Lord sitting on His throne, and all the hosts of heaven standing by*. Much like this is the vision of Isaiah here before us.

Eyes dazzled with the sun, see not the glittering of drops of dew on the earth; and those are quickly gone, with all their faint and fading glory, to a soul taken with the contemplation of God. How meanly do they spend their days, who bestow them on counting money, or courting little earthen idols in ambition or love! From how high a stand doth he look down on those, who looks on God, and admires His greatness, wonders at what he sees, and still seeks after more! These two are therefore joined together, *beholding the beauty of the Lord, and inquiring in His temple*. Psal. xxvii. 4. *One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in His temple*.

Ver. 2, 3. *Above it stood the seraphims; each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of His glory.*] These glorious courtiers, flaming spirits, are light and love, whose very feet are too bright for us, as His face is too bright for them; and they cry holy, holy, holy—thrice holy, most holy THREE, one God—*Lord of Hosts: the whole earth is full of His glory*. This they cry one to another, echoing it and returning it incessantly. They that praise Him most, come nearest their life. When we are to pray, or offer any worship to the great God in the sanctuary, especially in solemn worship there, let us think of Him as thus on His throne above, and the diffusion of His glory there, of His train filling the upper Temple, and so stoop low and fall down before Him. Holy, holy, holy. This is the main thing wherein He is glorious, and we are to know and adore Him in this view, and abhor ourselves as in His sight.

The whole earth.] So many creatures and various works and affairs, fruits and plants, and rich commodities, and so many calamities and miseries that kingdoms and people are afflicted with as by turns, and so many disorders, and such wickedness of men in public and private matters; and yet, in all these

varieties and contrarities of things, this one is the sum of all, and all is taken up in it, *The whole earth is full of His glory*. In framing and upholding, in ruling and ordering all, what a depth of power and wisdom.

Ver. 4. The posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke.

How true must that be, that at His voice *the earth quakes* and *the mountains tremble*, when, at the voice of an angel crying or proclaiming His name, the very threshold of the temple (the then holiest part of the earth) moves! This, in the vision, was intended to represent the dreadfulness of His great name, which vile men dare baffle in vain oaths, and can speak thereof without sense: but hearts that are indeed His *living temples* will find this emotion; when His name is proclaimed, or when they mention or think of it, *the posts will be moved* with an awful trembling.

And the house was filled with smoke.] This was here a symbol of the presence and majesty of God. See Psalm xcvi. 2. *Clouds and darkness are round about Him, righteousness and judgment are the habitation of His throne.*; not a signal of displeasure, as some take it. *He dwells in light that is inaccessible, and round about is thick darkness*, shutting out the weak eyes of men, which were not able to abide the brightness of His glory. Much of our knowledge here, lies in this, to know that we know Him not: and much of our praise, to confess that we cannot praise Him,—*silentium tibi taus*, as they read Psal. lxxv. 1.

Ver. 5. Then said I, *Wo is me!* for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of Hosts.

Then said I, Wo is me:] He is not lifted up with the dignity that he should be honoured with such a vision of God; but on the contrary, is struck with humble, holy fear: Oh, *I am undone!* This constitutes much of the exercise of souls admitted nearest to God, even this astonishment and admiration that such as they should be regarded and raised to that height, and holy fear in a sense of their unholiness. When the blessed Virgin heard a voice very much to her own advantage, (Luke i. 28, 29) instead of rising in her own conceit upon it, *she was troubled, and marvelled what manner of salutation it should be*, and was struck with fear, so that the angel found it needful to say, *Fear not*.

Illusions and deceits of spirit of this kind, cannot be better distinguished from true manifestations of God, than by this, that they breed pride and presumption in the heart, make it vain and haughty; while true senses, and joys, and discoveries of love, in what kind soever, do most powerfully humble. *Is est, qui superbire nova potest, cui Deus ostendit misericordiam suam*. Augustine.

For mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of Hosts 9.] The mother and nurse of pride, is ignorance of God. A small glance of Him will make the best of men abhor themselves, and still the nearer sight of Him, the lower conceit will there be of self, and the deeper sense of impurity and vileness. This tells us, though we hear and speak of God, alas! we know Him not.

I am a man of polluted lips.] He mentions this the rather because he heard that song which he would have joined with, but durst not., because of *polluted* lips. Thus we must confess we are polluted all over, but much of our pollution breaks out by the lips, yet, commonly, we think not on it.

I am undone.] We could not indeed bear much, could not see God and live; therefore He veils Himself. But surely we might see much more than we do, and live the better for it, the more humbly and holily. Our pollutions hinder and unfit us, as he implies when he says, *A man of polluted lips*. But oh, that we saw so much of Him as to see this pollution, which makes us so unworthy and so unfit to see Him.

He first cries, *I am a man of unclean lips*, and then adds, *I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips*. This is the true method; there can be no right sense of pollutions about us, but that which begins with a sense of those within us. Few men reflect much on themselves; or if they do, they view themselves by a false light.

Polluted lips.] He says in regard of the voice he heard. . And with regard to the much irreverence with which we mention God, both ministers and people, as much of all our heart pollutions have their vent this way, so the promise of sanctifying His people runs much on this. Zeph. iii. 9. They of a *pure lip* shall offer. All are of the holy order, a *royal priesthood*, and through sanctified lips, as the censor, still they offer incense of prayer and praise. *He is a perfect man that offends not in word*. Jam. iii. 2. Commonly, by much speaking there is much pollution: *In many words there wants not sin*. Prov. x. 19. Therefore, *let your speech be always seasoned with salt*. Col. iv. 6. Now, many speeches need much salt, otherwise some part will be rotten, at least unsavoury. Much of the sin of the land consists in this: there are few companies where God is not dishonoured and provoked by your communication; and till this be laid to heart, judgments will multiply and grow instead of decreasing. Few, even of those *who fear the Lord, speak often, one to another*, in a strain that God delights, not only to hearken to, but to write down and register for their good.

And I dwell amidst a people of unclean lips.] We infect each other when we meet. There is little converse that a man returns the better by, yea, by the most he is the worse: he brings back often more pollution, more folly and vanity by most companies and discourses. But we see here, that impurity humbly acknowledged, is graciously removed.

LECTURE II.

Ver. 6-8.

Ver. 6. Then flew one of the Seraphims unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs off the altar.

IMPURITY well discovered to a man is half cured. Whensoever God graciously shews a man his own unsanctifiedness, there He goes on to cleanse and sanctify him: the light that discovers, is followed by a *burning coal* that purges away.

The Holy Spirit is that purifying fire: a touch of it cleanseth the hearts, and lips, and all, and kindles that affection in the soul which cannot die out, which not many, which no *waters can quench again*. It doth this to all that are sanctified, but eminently it doth it (or, at least, they desire it may) to those who are to be the instruments of enlightening, purifying, and kindling others. So in the resemblance of *fiery tongues* came down this Spirit on the Apostles; and thence they themselves were as *burning coals* scattered through the nations,

blessed incendiaries of the world, setting it on fire with the love of Christ: *tanquam ligna ardentia dispersa*, says Augustine.

Ver. 7. And he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips, and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin is purged.

Thine iniquity is taken away,—how impure soever before. This free grace is wonderful to make some who have been notoriously unclean, by the change wrought by this fire, the touch of a coal, to become eminently gracious, and messengers of grace to others, carrying this and spreading it. They, though originally of dark clay, are by this fire made transparent glass, through which the light of the Gospel shines into the Church.

This coal *taken from the altar*, may denote the deriving of the Spirit from Jesus Christ, our Priest, Altar, Sacrifice, and all, by which we are purified and made fit for His service. He is the fountain of light, and life, and purity, and all grace to His messengers, and all His followers. His grace is indeed a *live coal*, where heavenly heat is mixed with earth, the fulness of the Godhead with our nature in human flesh. Thereby we draw near; and especially they who bear His name to men, under a sense of their own impurity, entreat His touch, as devout Bernard, who, in a holy hyperbole, exclaims, “Had the Prophet need of a coal! Oh then, grant for me a whole globe of fire, to purge away my filthiness, and make me a fit messenger to this people!”

Thy sin, is purged.] The children of God are a wonder to themselves, when that Spirit comes in, who conquers and purges so suddenly and easily what they before groan under and wrestle with, very long to little or no purpose. It is a *change of the right hand of the Most High*, as the Vulgate reads that word in Psalm lxxvii. 10: *I said, This is my infirmity, but I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High—mutatio dextrae Excelsi*. A touch of that will cleanse and heal: the all-purifying virtue of His Spirit, whereof this baptism of the Prophet’s lips was a symbol, takes away the dross which by other means than that *fire* cannot be purged. So in metals, much pains may be taken, and strength of hand used with little effect; that at most does but scratch the superficies, makes the outside a little bright and shining, but severs not the dross from within: that cannot be done without fire. Have we not found how vainly we attempt while God withholds His hand? Yea, while a man fancies self-pureness, he is the more impure, as Job says, ch. ix. ver. 30, 31. *If I wash myself with snow-water, and make myself ever so clean, yet shalt Thou plunge me in the ditch, and mine own clothes shall abhor me*. Therefore, prayer is the great resource of a soul under a sense of uncleanness, begging a new creation, for such it is indeed: *Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me*;—following God with this suit, and resolving to follow Him till He grant it: for we well know He is able, and may say, *Lord, if Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean*.

This *fire* hath two effects: it works purity and activity; it takes away sin, and puts in spirit and life for obedience. And here *Thy sin is purged*, and then says he, ver. 8, *Here am I: send me*. And the former is effectual towards the latter: the more the soul is cleansed, the more alive and able it is made for service. The purging out of those sickly humours makes it more vigorous and able; whereas they abounding clog the spirits, and make the vital operations heavy and weak. A soul well cleansed from the love of sin, and the world, and self, is

in a healthful temper, and goes nimbly to any work. Outward discouragements and difficulties are then nothing. A feverish distemper within hinders and makes one lazy and unwieldy, unwilling and unable to labour: but that well purged and cured, he cares less for the hot weather without; strength of nature endures that more easily. Oh, how sweet to be thus actuated by love, a pure intention and desire of doing God service, and of bringing Him in glory! Other motives, or the mixtures of them, are base; and though God may make use sometimes of such, yet he sees within, and knows what spring makes the wheels go, and he gives them their reward here, somewhat possibly of that they seek, success, and credit, and a name; but the after-reward of faithful servants they need not look for in that work: for they receive their reward, and can they expect more? Many a *Here am I*, comes from other incentives than an *altar coal*; and so they may burn and shine a while, but they soon consume and die out in a snuff: the heavenly altar-fire alone keeps in, and returns to Heaven where it was kindled.

There is many a hot, furious march under the semblance and name of zeal for God, that loves to be seen; as Jehu, 2 Kings x. 16. *Come with me and see my zeal for the Lord*. Such persons may flatter themselves into that conceit in the heat of action, to think it is for God, while he sees through it, and judges it as it is, zeal for self and their own interest; and He gives them, accordingly, some hireling journeyman's wages, and then turns them off. But oh, where the heart is purely actuated by a desire of His glory, and seeks nothing else, for such remains that blessed word, *Well done, good and faithful servant, enter into thy Master's joy*.

This, then, is to be sought for by ministers and eminent servants in public affairs, yea by all that offer any service to God, a readiness from love. Something of this there is in all who are truly His, though held down in many, and almost smothered with rubbish; and in these there is some mixture of flesh drawing back. *The spirit is ready, buy the flesh is weak*, and a load to it, hindering its working; and this strife is often found as a horse to an unskilful rider, at once pricked with the spur and checked with the bridle. But where this spirit of love is, it doth prevail, and wastes that opposition daily, and groweth in strength, becomes more quick and ready, more freed from self, and more actuated by the will of God; attaining somewhat further in that conformity with Heaven, where shall be no will striving, but His alone where those glorious bright spirits stand ready for all commands, *who excel in strengths* and employ it all *to do His commandments*. Psal. ciii. 20. And the more like them we be here, the more lively hope have we to be shortly with them, and to be wholly as they are.

Ver., 8. Also, I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I; Here am I; send me.

THIS inquiry imports not a doubtful deliberation in God, but a purpose to send. He is represented as a king, advising with himself or his council. And this is by some conceived as an intimation of the mystery of the Trinity, as Gen. i. 26, *And God said, Let us make man in our own image.—Whom shall I send, and who will go for us*—But were there not ready, millions of these winged messengers? What need, then, of such a word? True; angels were ready, but a man was sought. God, vouchsafing to send an embassy to men, will send one that might speak their language to them, and might stay and treat

with them in a familiar, friendly way, an ambassador in ordinary, to lie still and treat with them. And in this condescension much wisdom and love appear. He will take met, subject to the like infirmities and pollutions with the people, as the Prophet here acknowledges, but one purged from these pollutions, made holy; though not perfectly, yet eminently holy. This is very suitable, were not men invincibly obstinate, more suitable than that God should send by angels, that one of themselves should come and deal with men for God, and bear witness of His graciousness and readiness to forgive so as to give Himself for an instance of it, and say, "I have found Him so." And they being changed and sanctified, shew really that the thing may be done; that it is feasible to sanctify a sinner; and so, sinful men appear to be fitter for this service than imbodyed angels.

I said, Here am I: send me.] What a blessed change was wrought on Paul when cast to the ground! His own will was broken all to pieces, and now he is only for His service, whose name he so hated, and whose servants be persecuted. *Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?* Acts ix. 6. These are the very words and characters of a true convert. And thus, the soul turned to Christ may in some cases doubt what is His will, but that once resolved, there is no deliberation whether to do it or not. He says not, If the service be honourable or profitable, that is, carrying worldly credit or profit in it, then will I do it; no, but whatever it is, if it be Thine, and Thou appoint me to it, *Here am I*. And this makes the meanest work of his, station excellent.

Then said I, here am I.] A strange change in the Prophet; even but now an *undone man*, and here presently a ready messenger, and so turned to an angel. Something of this, most find who are truly called to this high work of delivering messages from God: sometimes a sense of pollution benumbs and strikes them dead, and anon again they feel the flame of love kindled by that coal, quickening them to such a readiness, and such free offers of themselves to service, as, to those who understand not the reason of it, would seem presumptuous forwardness. And there may be in some minds, at one and the same time, a strange mixture and counterworking of these two together; a sense of unfitness and unworthiness drawing back, and yet the strength of love driving forward, thinking thus, How can I, who am so filthy, so vile, speak of God? Yet he hath shewn me mercy? How then can I be silent?

Send me.] Moses's reluctance, this same Prophet would have vented too, before the touch of the coal, while he said, *Wo is me, I am undone*, or *struck down*, as the word may signify; he cannot speak with such unholy lips of so holy a God. Isaiah cries out of *polluted lips*, as Moses complained of *stammering lips*. And this is fit to precede, first, a sense of extreme inability and unworthiness, and then, upon a change and call, ready obedience. A man once undone and dead, and then recovered, is the only fit messenger for God. In such a one love overcomes all difficulties both without and within, and in his work no constraint is he feeling but that of love; and where that is, no other will be needed. The sweet, all-powerful constraint of love will send thee all-cheerful, though it were through fire or water: no water can quench it, nor fire out-burn it; it burns hotter than any other kindled against it. After the touch of that *coal*, no forbearing. So Jer. xx. 9. *But His word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, I could not stay. Feed the flock of God which is among you, says St. Peter, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre,*

but of a ready mind. 1 Pet. v. 2. Yet the Prophet says, *Send me.* Though he had so ardent a desire and readiness to go, yet he will not go unsent, but humbly offers himself, and waits both for his commission and instruction: and how awful are they!

LECTURE III.

Ver. 9. And He said, Go and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not.

10. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed.

His message, you see, is most sad, and so he is put to it, put to the trial of his obedience, as men usually are according to the degree of their fitness. Nothing is more sweet to a messenger than to have good news to carry. Oh, it is a blessed sweet thing to convert souls! But how heavy to harden them by preaching! Yet thus it is to many at some times, and almost generally to all. Certainly, before this, much had been heard and despised: they had been hardening their own hearts, and now they shall have enough of it; their very sin shall be their plague, a plague of all others the most terrible, yet, as was said above, there are times of the height of this plague, as of others, and this was one of those times of its raging mortality. The Prophet did nothing but preach, and yet they were stupefied by it. And indeed, wherever the word does not soften and quicken, it hardens and kills; and the more lively the ministry of the word is where it works this effect, the more deeply doth it work it.

This was verified on the Jews: though then God's own people, yet it was verified on them to the utmost. And this context is often cited against them in the New Testament; no place so often. So excellent a preacher as Isaiah, and so well reputed amongst his people, yet was sent to preach them blind, and deaf, and dead. And this same does the Gospel to most of many a congregation in Scotland; and the more of Christ that is spoken the more are unbelievers hardened. Isaiah the most evangelical of all the prophets, was yet brought to that, *Who hath believed our report?* Yea, this was fulfilled in the preaching of Christ himself; as the hotter the sun, the more is the clay hardened.

Go tell this people.] Observe the mighty power of the word, to whatsoever it is sent. As it is wonderfully efficacious for softening, melting, reducing to God, so, if it be sent to harden, to seal to judgment to bring in and hasten it; and therefore it is spoken of as effecting the things it speaks: as in Jer. i. 10 *See, I have this day set thee over the nations, and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build and to plant.* So Ezek. xliii. 3, and Hos. vi. 5. Therefore, despise it not. Spiritual judgments are the heaviest of all: though least felt for a time, yet they stick closest, and prove saddest in the end. The not feeling is a great part of the plague: in this is the nature and malignity of the disease, that it takes away the sight and sense of other things, and of itself. The plague is a disease seizing on the spirits, and therefore is so dangerous; but this seizes only on the spirit of the mind: and is any thing so dreadful? Oh, any plague but that of the heart. People think it a good thing not to feel the word, not to be troubled. Well, as they love this, they are filled with it and shall have enough of it. So in self-love, *sui amator sibi dat.* God is righteous and pure in this. There are

many cavils about His working on the heart to harden, which arise from an ignorant, low conceit of God, as of a dependent being, or tied to laws, or to give account. We ought rather to tremble before Him. *He doth no iniquity*, and we shall be forced to confess it. Many ways of His are obscure, but none are unjust. Find we not this people sit under the sound, and are many of them as if absent, as if they had never heard such things spoken of; so grossly ignorant of all these? Hearing, *they hear, but understand not*. Others are yet worse: they get a kind of knowledge, but it is dead, and works nothing. These *see*, and yet *perceive not*, and know not even what they know. Most are of this sort, and they are of all others the worst to convince. When they are told of Christ and forgiveness of sins, and are entreated to believe these mysteries, they cry out, Oh! we do, we know them, and can answer, if you ask us, what these doctrines are. But the heart is not changed, no sin is forsaken, no study of holiness, no flame of love. This *not perceiving*, is the great judgment of this land; this the great cause of lamentation, that Christ is so much known, and yet known so little. People do not think whither it tends, and what the importance of this message is. They hear it as *a passing tale*, or, at the best, as for the present, a pleasing sound, a lovely *song*, Ezek. xxxiii. 32; and if by an able minister, as sung by a good voice; but no impression is made, it dies out in the air, it enters not into their hearts to quicken them, and so their evil is the more deadly. Oh! bemoan this, beg the removal of it above all judgments, and the sending forth of that Spirit who causes *the mountains to flow down*, Isa. lxiv. 1. Many of you, my brethren, may be under somewhat of this, as there are divers degrees of it ere it comes to be incurable. Oh! pray to be delivered, lest it grow so far that it be in vain to bid you do so. Better to be cast into extreme terrors for a time, than to continue thus: better to fall into a fever, than into this lethargy, which makes you sleep to death.

Convert, and be healed.] These two go together: all miseries are healed, and grace and favour flow forth, when once the soul is stirred up to seek after God, and turn unto Him. Other courses of healing public or private evils, are but mountebank cures, which vex and torment, as unapt physic does, and do no good; yea, make things worse than before. See Hosea, v. 13, compared with ch. vi. ver. 1. *When Ephraim saw his sickness, and Judah his wound, then went Ephraim to the Assyrian, and sent to King Jareb; yet could he not heal you, nor cure you of your wound.—Come and let us return unto the Lord for He hath torn, and He will heal us; He hath smitten, and He will bind us up.*

There is much in a custom of fruitless hearing, to stupefy and make hard,—to make men sermon-proof. And the hearing of the most excellent hardens most, both against them, and against all others that are their inferiors; for being accustomed to hear the most moving strains unmoved, makes them scorn, and easily beat back that which is less pressing. A largely endued and very spiritual minister is either one of the highest blessings, or heaviest curses, that can come upon a people.

Hearing, hear not.] This even the ministers themselves may fall under: speakers may have no ears, as the Italian proverb says of preachers, they do not hear their own voice. They may grow hard, by custom of speaking of Divine things without Divine affection; so that nothing themselves or others say, can work on them. Hence it is that so few formal dead ministers are converted, that one said, *Raro vidi clericum poenitentem*; so hardened are they against the means of conviction, in which they have been so long conversant, and not

converted by them. They have been speaking so often of Heaven and Hell, and of Jesus Christ, and feeling nothing of them, that the words have lost their power, and they are grown hard as the skin of leviathan, *esteeming iron as straw, and brass as rotten wood*. And this, by the way, besides that God's dispensation is so fixed, may be a reason why that sin mentioned in the sixth chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews, is unpardonable: it is, in the nature of things, without such a miracle as God will not exert, *impossible*, that they who have stood out such things in vain, *should be renewed*. This should make us who are ministers especially to tremble at an unholy life, or at the thought of declining from those ways of religion, of which we have known so much, and for which we have so many means of improvement.

Ver. 11. 'Then said I, Lord, how long? And he answered, Until the cities be wasted without inhabitant, and the houses without man, and the land be utterly desolate.

12. And the Lord have removed men far away, and there be a great forsaking in the midst of the land.

Now this judgment fastening, we are sure to draw on all other judgments. Therefore, the Prophet, touched with compassion, inquires, *How long?* and receives a very sad answer, *Until the cities be wasted*. God is sovereignly free in this; but usually He keeps that course, that long continued and spared sinning, makes long continued calamities when they come. Judgments, as the ancients thought comets to be, are as lasting as the matter is they are kindled with; and truly, upon this account, we may justly apprehend that *our* troubles are but just beginning, rather than near their end. Yet, repentance might prevail for the shortening of them: those sweet showers soonest lay the stormy winds.

And this consideration may have something hopeful in it, that in these latter times, things move something more speedily, as natural motions do towards their end; for *a short work will God make upon the earth*, as the Apostle's word is; and we see in our particular straits that were greatest, that the Lord hath made them short even beyond our expectation; and what remains is in His hand. I trust He will hasten the defeat of the plots and power of His enemies; and doubt not all the late and present commotions of these poor kingdoms, are the birth-pangs of a happy deliverance and peace, and when they grow thickest, it is nearest the birth.

How long] Observe the compassion of the messengers of God, not desiring the evil day, but mourning for it, pitying those they denounce judgment against, and melting for those they harden.

Till the cities be wasted.] This intimates there would be no relenting under all these judgments, but that these, as well as the word, and together with it would harden them more, till they were almost quite consumed. And this is usual. Men think it would be otherwise, but it is found that times of great plagues and judgments are not times of great conversion: men are then more hardened both against the word and the rod; their spirits grow stiff and obdurate in a kind of desperation. But mercy, coming as the spring sunshine, mollifies, and dissolves, and makes fruitful; therefore, such a day is to be longed for. I suspect we shall not see much done by the Gospel till then; and before that, we may suffer yet more dismal things, and be wasted with pestilence, sword, and famine. Yet there is comfort in this, the Lord will not make a full end of us: *a tenth* shall be left; and if not we, yet at least our posterity shall

reap the sweet fruits of our bitter calamities, which are the just fruits of our iniquities.

Ver. 13. But yet in it shall be a tenth, and it shall return, and shall be eaten; as a teil-tree, and as an oak, whose substance is in them when they cast their leaves, so the holy seed shall be the substance thereof.

THERE is still a remnant holy to God, the preservers of a land from utter ruin. Profane persons despise the children of God, and know not that they are beholden to them for the subsistence of the land, and of the world: they are as those oaks, whose roots did bear up the earth of that highway that went between the king's house and the temple, as the resemblance is taken by some.

In judgments, the Lord remembers that. *Destroy it not, there is a blessing ire it.* As for the personal condition of believers, there may be a great decay, a winter visage may be upon it; but yet, the holy seed abideth in them, and is their stability, and still that word is true that is borrowed hence, *Semen sanctum, statumen terroe: The holy seed, the subsistence or establishment of the earth.* When their number is completed, time shall end, and this visible world shall be set on fire. And this day is hastening forward, though most of us think but little, if at all, of it.