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## A SERMON

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## SERMON VIII.

THE COMPASSION OF CHRIST TO WEAK BELIEVERS.

MATT. XII. 20.—*A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench.*

THE Lord Jesus possesses all those virtues in the highest perfection, which render him infinitely amiable, and qualify him for the administration of a just and gracious government over the world. The virtues of mortals, when carried to a high degree, very often run into those vices which have a kind of affinity to them. Right, too rigid, hardens into wrong. Strict justice steels itself into excessive severity; and the man is lost in the judge. Goodness and mercy sometimes degenerate into softness and an irrational compassion inconsistent with government. But in Jesus Christ these seemingly opposite virtues centre and harmonize in the highest perfection, without running into extremes. Hence he is at once characterized as a Lamb, and as the Lion of the tribe of Judah: a lamb for gentleness towards humble penitents, and a lion to tear his enemies in pieces. Christ is said to *judge and make war*, Rev. xix. 11; and yet he is called *The Prince of Peace*; Isa. ix. 6. He will at length show himself terrible to the workers of iniquity; and the terrors of the Lord are a very proper topic whence to persuade men; but now he is patient towards all men, and he is all love and tenderness towards the meanest penitent. The meekness and gentleness of Christ is to be the pleasing entertainment of this day; and I enter upon it with a particular view to those mourning, desponding souls among us, whose weakness renders them in great need of strong consolation. To such, in particular, I address the words of my text, *A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench.*

This is a part of the Redeemer's character, as delineated near three thousand years ago, by the evangelical prophet Isaiah; Isa. xlii. 1-4; and it is expressly applied to him by St. Matthew: *Behold*, says the Father, *my servant whom I have*

*chosen* for the important undertaking of saving the guilty sons of men; “my Beloved, in whom my soul is well pleased;” my very soul is well pleased with his faithful discharge of the important office he has undertaken. *I will put my spirit upon him*; that is, I will completely furnish him by the gifts of my spirit for his high character; and *he shall show judgment to the Gentiles*; to the poor benighted Gentiles he shall show the light of salvation, by revealing the gospel to them; which, in the style of the Old Testament, may be called his judgments. Or, he will show and execute the judgment of this world by casting out its infernal prince, who had so long exercised an extensive cruel tyranny over it. *He shall not strive nor cry, neither shall any man hear his voice in the streets*; that is, though he enters the world as a mighty prince and conqueror, to establish a kingdom of righteousness, and overthrow the kingdom of darkness, yet he will not introduce it with the noisy terrors and thunders of war, but shall show himself mild and gentle as the prince of peace. Or the connection may lead us to understand these words in a different sense, namely, He shall do nothing with clamorous ostentation, nor proclaim his wonderful works, when it shall answer no valuable end. Accordingly the verse of our text stands thus connected: *Great multitudes followed him; and he healed them all, and charged them that they should not make him known. That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying, He shall not cry, neither shall any man hear his voice in the streets*; that is, he shall not publish his miracles with noisy triumphs in the streets and other public places. And when it is said, *He shall not strive*, it may refer to his inoffensive passive behaviour towards his enemies that were plotting his death. For thus we may connect this quotation from Isaiah with the preceding history in the chapter of our text: *Then the Pharisees went out, and held a council against him, how they might destroy him. But when Jesus knew it, instead of praying to his Father for a guard of angels, or employing his own miraculous power to destroy them, he withdrew himself from thence; that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet Isaiah, saying,—He shall not strive.*

The general meaning of my text seems to be contained in this observation: “That the Lord Jesus has the tenderest and most compassionate regard to the feeblest penitents, however oppressed and desponding; and that he will approve and cherish the least spark of true love towards himself.”

A bruised reed seems naturally to represent a soul at once feeble in itself, and crushed with a burden; a soul both weak and oppressed. The reed is a slender, frail vegetable in itself, and therefore a very proper image to represent a soul that is feeble and weak. A bruised reed is still more frail, hangs its head, and is unable to stand without some prop. And what can be a more lively emblem of a poor soul, not only weak in itself, but bowed down and broken under a load of sin and sorrow, that droops and sinks, and is unable to stand without divine support? Strength may bear up under a burden, or struggle with it, till it has thrown it off; but oppressed weakness, frailty under a burden, what can be more pitiable? and yet this is the case of many a poor penitent. He is weak in himself, and in the meantime crushed under a heavy weight of guilt and distress.

And what would become of such a frail oppressed creature, if, instead of raising him up and supporting him, Jesus should tread and crush him under the foot of

his indignation? But though a reed, especially a bruised reed, is an insignificant thing, of little or no use, yet a bruised reed he will not break, but he raises it up with a gentle hand, and enables it to stand, though weak in itself, and easily crushed in ruin.

Perhaps the imagery, when drawn at length, may be this: "The Lord Jesus is an Almighty Conqueror, marches in state through our world; and here and there a bruised reed lies in his way. But instead of disregarding it, or trampling it under foot, he takes care not to break it: he raises up the drooping straw, trifling as it is and supports it with his gentle hand. Thus, poor broken-hearted penitents, thus he takes care of you, and supports you, worthless and trifling as you are. Though you seem to lie in the way of his justice, and it might tread you with its heavy foot, yet he not only does not crush you, but takes you up, and inspires you with strength to bear your burden and flourish again.

Or perhaps the imagery may be derived from the practice of the ancient shepherds, who were wont to amuse themselves with the music of a pipe of reed or straw; and when it was bruised they broke it, or threw it away as useless. But the bruised reed shall not be broken by this divine Shepherd of souls. The music of broken sighs and groans is indeed all that the broken reed can afford him: the notes are but low, melancholy, and jarring: and yet he will not break the instrument, but he will repair and tune it, till it is fit to join in the concert of angels on high; and even now its humble strains are pleasing to his ears. Surely every broken heart among us must revive, while contemplating this tender and moving imagery.

The other emblem is equally significant and affecting. *The smoking flax shall he not quench.* It seems to be an allusion to the wick of a candle or lamp, the flame of which is put out, but it still smokes, and retains a little fire which may be again blown into a flame, or rekindled by the application of more fire. Many such dying snuffs or smoking wicks are to be found in the candlesticks of the churches, and in the lamps of the sanctuary. The flame of divine love is just expiring, it is sunk into the socket of a corrupt heart, and produces no clear, steady blaze, but only a smoke that is disagreeable, although it shows that a spark of the sacred fire yet remains; or it produces a faint quivering flame that dies away, then catches and revives, and seems unwilling to be quenched entirely. The devil and the world raise many storms of temptation to blow it out; and a corrupt heart, like a fountain, pours out water to quench it. But even this smoking flax, this dying snuff, Jesus will not quench, but he blows it up into a flame, and pours in the oil of his grace to recruit and nourish it. He walks among the golden candlesticks, and trims the lamps of his sanctuary. Where he finds empty vessels without oil or a spark of heavenly fire, like those of the foolish virgins, he breaks the vessels, or throws them out of his house. But where he finds the least spark of true grace, where he discovers but the glimpse of sincere love to him, where he sees the principle of true piety, which, though just expiring, yet renders the heart susceptible of divine love, as a candle just put out is easily rekindled, there he will strengthen the things which remain and are ready to die: he will blow up the dying snuff to a lively flame, and cause it to shine brighter and brighter to the perfect day. Where there is the least principle of true holiness he will cherish it. He will furnish the expiring

lamp with fresh supplies of the oil of grace, and of heavenly fire; and all the storms that beat upon it shall not be able to put it out, because sheltered by his hand.

I hope, my dear brethren, some of you begin already to feel the pleasing energy of this text. Are you not ready to say, Blessed Jesus! is this thy true character? Then thou art just such a Saviour as I want, and I most willingly give up myself to thee. You are sensible you are at best but a bruised reed, a feeble, shattered, useless thing: an untunable, broken pipe of straw, that can make no proper music for the entertainment of your divine Shepherd. Your heart is at best but smoking flax, where the love of God often appears like a dying snuff; or an expiring flame that quivers and catches, and hovers over the lamp, just ready to go out. Such some of you probably feel yourselves to be. Well, and what think ye of Christ? He will not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax; and therefore, may not even your guilty eyes look to this gentle Saviour with encouraging hope? May you not say to him, with the sweet singer of Israel, in his last moment, *He is all my salvation, and all my desire?* 2 Sam. xxiii. 5.

In prosecuting this subject I intend to illustrate the character of a weak believer, as represented in my text, and then to illustrate the care and compassion of Jesus Christ even for such a poor weakling.

I. I am to illustrate the character of a weak believer, as represented in my text, by a bruised reed, and smoking flax.

The metaphor of a bruised reed, as I observed, seems most naturally to convey the idea of a state of weakness and oppression. And, therefore, in illustrating it I am naturally led to describe the various weaknesses which a believer sometimes painfully feels, and to point out the heavy burdens which he sometimes groans under; I say sometimes, for at other times even the weak believer finds himself strong, *strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might, and strengthened with might by the Spirit in the inner man.* The joy of the Lord is his strength: and he can do all things through Christ strengthening him. Even the oppressed believer at times feels himself delivered from his burden, and he can lift up his drooping head, and walk upright. But, alas! the burden returns, and crushes him again. And under some burden or other many honest-hearted believers groan out the most part of their lives.

Let us now see what are those weaknesses which a believer feels and laments. He finds himself weak in knowledge; a simple child in the knowledge of God and divine things. He is weak in love; the sacred flame does not rise with a perpetual fervour, and diffuse itself through all his devotions, but at times it languishes and dies away into a smoking snuff: he is weak in faith; he cannot keep a strong hold of the Almighty, cannot suspend his all upon his promises with cheerful confidence, nor build a firm, immovable fabric of hope upon the rock Jesus Christ. He is weak in hope; his hope is dashed with rising billows of fears and jealousies, and sometimes just upset. He is weak in joy; he cannot extract the sweets of Christianity, nor taste the comforts of his religion. He is weak in zeal for God and the interests of his kingdom; he would wish himself always a flaming seraph, always glowing with zeal, always unwearied in serving his God, and promoting the designs of redeeming love in the world; but, alas! at times his zeal, with his love,

languishes and dies away into a smoking snuff. He is weak in repentance; troubled with that plague of plagues, a hard heart. He is weak in the conflict with indwelling sin, that is perpetually making insurrections within him. He is weak in resisting temptations; which crowd upon him from without, and are often likely to overwhelm him. He is weak in courage to encounter the king of terrors, and venture through the valley of the shadow of death. He is weak in prayer, in importunity, in filial boldness, in approaching the mercy-seat. He is weak in abilities to endeavour the conversion of sinners and save souls from death. In short, he is weak in everything in which he should be strong. He has indeed, like the church of Philadelphia, a little strength, Rev. iii. 8, and at times he feels it; but oh! it seems to him much too little for the work he has to do. These weaknesses or defects the believer feels, painfully and tenderly feels, and bitterly laments. A sense of them keeps him upon his guard against temptations: he is not venturesome in rushing into the combat. He would not parley with temptation, but would keep out of its way; nor would he run the risk of a defeat by an ostentatious experiment of his strength. This sense of weakness also keeps him dependent upon divine strength. He clings to that support given to St. Paul in an hour of hard conflict, *My grace is sufficient for thee; for my strength is made perfect in weakness*; and when a sense of his weakness has this happy effect upon him, then with St. Paul he has reason to say, *When I am weak, then I am strong*. 2 Cor. xii. 9, 10.

I say the believer feels and laments these weaknesses; and this is the grand distinction in this case between him and the rest of the world. They are the weak too, much weaker than he; nay, they have, properly, no spiritual strength at all; but, alas! they do not feel their weakness, but the poor vain creatures boast of their strength, and think they can do great things when they are disposed for them. Or if their repeated falls and defeats by temptation extort them to a confession of their weakness, they plead it rather as an excuse, than lament it as at once a crime and a calamity. But the poor believer tries no such artifice to extenuate his guilt. He is sensible that even his weakness itself has guilt in it, and therefore he laments it with ingenuous sorrow among his other sins.

Now, have I not delineated the very character of some of you; such weaklings, such frail reeds you feel yourselves to be? Well, hear this kind assurance, Jesus will not break such a feeble reed, but he will support and strengthen it.

But you perhaps not only feel you are weak, but you are oppressed with some heavy burden or other. You are not only a reed for weakness, but you are a bruised reed, trodden under foot, crushed under a load. Even this is no unusual or discouraging case; for,

The weak believer often feels himself crushed under some heavy burden. The frail reed is often bruised; bruised under a due sense of guilt. Guilt lies heavy at times upon his conscience, and he cannot throw it off. Bruised with a sense of remaining sin, which he finds still strong within him, and which at times prevails, and treads him under foot. Bruised under a burden of wants, the want of tenderness of heart, of ardent love to God and mankind, the want of heavenly-mindedness and victory over the world; the want of conduct and resolution to direct his behaviour in a passage so intricate and difficult, and the want of nearer intercourse with the Father and his Spirit: in short, a thousand pressing wants

crush and bruise him. He also feels his share of the calamities of life in common with other men. But these burdens I shall take no farther notice of, because they are not peculiar to him as a believer, nor do they lie heaviest upon his heart. He could easily bear up under the calamities of life if his spiritual wants were supplied, and the burden of guilt and sin were removed. Under these last he groans and sinks. Indeed these burdens lie with all their full weight upon the world around him; but they are dead in trespasses and sins, and feel them not: they do not groan under them, nor labour for deliverance from them. They lie contented under them, with more stupidity than beasts of burden, till they sink under the intolerable load into the depth of misery. But the poor believer is not so stupid, and his tender heart feels the burden and groans under it. *We that are in this tabernacle*, says St. Paul, *do groan, being burdened*. 2 Cor. v. 4. The believer understands feelingly that pathetic exclamation, *O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?* Rom. vii. 24. He cannot be easy till his conscience is appeased by a well-attested pardon through the blood of Christ; and the sins he feels working within him are a real burden and uneasiness to him, though they should never break out into action, and publicly dishonour his holy profession.

And is not this the very character of some poor oppressed creatures among you? I hope it is. You may look upon your case to be very discouraging, but Jesus looks upon it in a more favourable light; he looks upon you as proper objects of his compassionate care. Bruised as you are, he will bind up, and support you.

II. But I proceed to take a view of the character of a weak Christian, as represented in the other metaphor in my text, namely, *smoking flax*. The idea most naturally conveyed by this metaphor is, that of grace true and sincere, but languishing and just expiring, like a candle just blown out, which still smokes and retains a feeble spark of fire. It signifies a susceptibility of a farther grace, or a readiness to catch that sacred fire, as a candle just put out is easily re-kindled. This metaphor therefore leads me to describe the reality of religion in a low degree, or to delineate the true Christian in his most languishing hours. And in so doing I shall mention those dispositions and exercises which the weakest Christian feels, even in these melancholy seasons; for even in these he widely differs still from the most polished hypocrite in his highest improvements. On this subject let me solicit your most serious attention; for, if you have the least spark of real religion within you, you are now likely to discover it, as I am not going to rise to the high attainments of Christians of the first rank, but to stoop to the character of the meanest. Now the peculiar dispositions and exercises of heart which such in some measure feel, you may discover from the following short history of their case.

The weak Christian in such languishing hours does indeed sometimes fall into such a state of carelessness and insensibility, that he has very few and but superficial exercises of mind about divine things. But generally he feels an uneasiness, an emptiness, an anxiety within, under which he droops and pines away, and all the world cannot heal the disease! He has chosen the blessed God as his supreme happiness; and, when he cannot derive happiness from that source, all the sweets of created enjoyments become insipid to him, and cannot fill up the prodigious

void which the absence of the Supreme Good leaves in his craving soul. Sometimes his anxiety is indistinct and confused, and he hardly knows what ails him; but at other times he feels it is for God, the living God, that his soul pants. The evaporations of this smoking flax naturally ascend towards heaven. He knows that he never can be happy till he can enjoy the communications of divine love. Let him turn which way he will, he can find no solid ease, no rest, till he comes to this centre again.

Even at such times he cannot be thoroughly reconciled to his sins. He may be parleying with some of them in an unguarded hour, and seem to be negotiating a peace; but the truce is soon ended, and they are at variance again. The enmity of a renewed heart soon rises against this old enemy. And there is this circumstance remarkable in the believer's hatred and opposition to sin, that they do not proceed principally, much less entirely, from a fear of punishment, but from a generous sense to its intrinsic baseness and ingratitude, and its contrariety to the holy nature of God. This is the ground of his hatred to sin, and sorrow for it; and this shows that there is at least a spark of true grace in his heart, and that he does not act altogether from the low, interested, and mercenary principles of nature.

At such times he is very jealous of the sincerity of his religion, afraid that all his past experiences were delusive, and afraid that, if he should die in his present state, he would be for ever miserable. A very anxious state is this!

The stupid world can lie secure while this grand concern lies in the most dreadful suspense. But the tender-hearted believer is not capable of such fool-hardiness: he shudders at the thought of everlasting separation from that God and Saviour whom he loves. He loves him, and therefore the fear of separation from him, fills him with all the anxiety of bereaved love. This to him is the most painful ingredient of the punishment of hell. Hell would be a sevenfold hell to a lover of God, because it is a state of banishment from him whom he loves. He could for ever languish and pine away under the consuming distresses of widowed love, which those that love him cannot feel. And has God kindled the sacred flame in his heart in order to render him capable of the more exquisite pain? Will he exclude from his presence the poor creature that clings to him, and languishes for him? No, the flax that does but smoke with his love was never intended to be fuel for hell; but he will blow it up into a flame, and nourish it till it mingles with the seraphic ardours in the region of perfect love.

The weak believer seems sometimes driven by the tempest of lusts and temptation from off the rock of Jesus Christ. But he makes towards it on the stormy billows, and labours to lay hold upon it, and recover his station there; for he is sensible there is no other foundation of safety; but that without Christ he must perish for ever. It is the habitual disposition of the believer's soul to depend upon Jesus Christ alone. He retains a kind of direction or tendency towards him, like the needle touched with the load-stone towards the pole; and, if his heart is turned from its course, it trembles and quivers till it gains its favourite point again, and fixes there. Sometimes, indeed, a consciousness of guilt renders him shy of his God and Saviour; and after such base ingratitude he is ashamed to go to him: but at length necessity as well as inclination constrains him, and he is obliged to cry out, *Lord, to whom shall I go? thou hast the words of eternal life.* John vi. 68. "In thee alone

I find rest to my soul; and therefore to thee I must fly, though I am ashamed and confounded to appear in thy presence.”

In short, the weakest Christian upon earth sensibly feels that his comfort rises and falls, as he lives nearer to or farther from his God. The love of God has such an habitual predominance even in his heart, that nothing in the world, nor even all the world together, can fill up his place. No, when he is gone, heaven and earth cannot replenish the mighty void. Even the weakest Christian upon earth longs to be delivered from sin, from all sin, without exception: and a body of death hanging about him is the burden of his life. Even the poor jealous languishing Christian has his hope, all the little hope that he has, built upon Jesus Christ. Even this smoking flax sends up some exhalations of love towards heaven. Even the poor creature that often fears he is altogether a slave to sin, honestly, though feebly, labours to be holy, to be holy as an angel, yea, to be holy as God is holy. He has a heart that feels the attractive charms of holiness, and he is so captivated by it, that sin can never recover its former place in his heart: no, the tyrant is for ever dethroned, and the believer would rather die than yield himself a tame slave to the usurped tyranny again.

Thus I have delineated to you, in the plainest manner I could, the character of a weak Christian. Some of you, I am afraid, cannot lay claim even to this low character. If so, you may be sure you are not true Christians, even of the lowest rank. You may be sure you have not the least spark of true religion in your hearts, but are utterly destitute of it.

But some of you, I hope, can say, “Well, after all my doubts and fears, if this be the character of a true, though weak Christian, then I may humbly hope that I am one. I am indeed confirmed in it, that I am less than the least of all other saints upon the face of the earth, but yet I see that I am a saint; for thus has my heart been exercised, even in my dark and languishing hours. This secret uneasiness and pining anxiety, this thirst for God, for the living God, this tendency of soul towards Jesus Christ, this implacable enmity to sin, this panting and struggling after holiness: these things have I often felt.” And have you indeed? Then away with your doubts and jealousies; away with your fears and despondencies! There is at least an immortal spark kindled in your hearts, which the united power of men and devils, of sin and temptation, shall never be able to quench. No, it shall yet rise into a flame, and burn with seraphic ardours for ever.

For your farther encouragement, I proceed,

II. To illustrate the care and compassion of Jesus Christ for such poor weaklings as you.

This may appear a needless task to some: for who is there that does not believe it? But to such would I say, it is no easy thing to establish a trembling soul in the full belief of this truth. It is easy for one that does not see his danger, and does not feel his extreme need of salvation, and the difficulty of the work, to believe that Christ is willing and able to save him. But oh! to a poor soul, deeply sensible of its condition, this is no easy matter. Besides, the heart may need be more deeply affected with this truth, though the understanding should need no farther arguments of the speculative kind for its conviction; and to impress this truth is my present design.

For this purpose I need but read and paraphrase to you a few of the many kind declarations and assurances which Jesus has given us in his word, and relate the happy experiences of some of his saints there recorded, who found him true and faithful to his word.

The Lord Jesus Christ seems to have a peculiar tenderness for the poor, the mourners, the broken-hearted; and these are peculiarly the objects of his mediatorial office. *The LORD hath anointed me, says he, to preach good tidings to the meek; he hath sent me all the way from my native heaven down to earth, upon this compassionate errand, to bind up the broken-hearted, to appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.* Isa. lxi. 1-3. *Thus saith the LORD, in strains of majesty that become him, The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool: where is the house that ye build unto me? and where is the place of my rest? For all those things hath my hand made, saith the LORD.* Had he spoken uniformly in this majestic language to us guilty worms, the declaration might have overwhelmed us with awe, but could not have inspired us with hope. But he advances himself thus high, on purpose to let us see how low he can stoop. Hear the encouraging sequel of this his majestic speech: *To this man will I look, even to him that is poor, and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word.* Let heaven and earth wonder that he will look down through all the shining ranks of angels, and look by princes and nobles to fix his eye upon this man, this poor man, this contrite, broken-hearted, trembling creature. Isa. lxvi. 1, 2. He loves to dwell upon this subject, and therefore you hear it again in the same prophecy: *Thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is holy, —what does he say? I dwell in the high and holy place.* Isa. lvii. 15. This is said in character. This is a dwelling in some measure worthy the inhabitant. But oh! will he stoop to dwell in a lower mansion, or pitch his tent among mortals? yes, he dwells not only in his *high and holy place*, but also, *with him that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.* He charges Peter to *feed his lambs* as well as his sheep; that is, to take the tenderest care even of the weakest in his flock. John xxi. 15. And he severely rebukes the shepherds of Israel, *Because, says he, ye have not strengthened the diseased, neither have ye healed that which was sick, neither have ye bound up that which was broken.* Ezek. xxxiv. 4. But what an amiable reverse is the character of the great Shepherd and Bishop of souls! *Behold, says Isaiah, the Lord God will come with strong hand, and his arm shall rule for him: behold his reward is with him, and his work before him.* How justly may we tremble at this proclamation of the approaching God! for who can stand when he appeareth? But how agreeably are our fears disappointed in what follows! If he comes to take vengeance on his enemies, he also comes to show mercy to the meanest of his people. *He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young:* Isa. xl. 10, 11, that is, he shall exercise the tenderest and most compassionate care towards the meanest and weakest of his flock. *He hath looked down, says the Psalmist, from the height of his sanctuary; from heaven did the Lord behold the earth; not to view the grandeur and pride of courts and kings, nor the heroic exploits of conquerors,*

*but to hear the groaning of the prisoner, to loose those that, are appointed to death. He will regard the prayer of the destitute, and not despise their prayer. This shall be written for the generation to come.* Psalm cii. 17-20. It was written for your encouragement, my brethren. Above three thousand years ago, this encouraging passage was entered into the sacred records for the support of poor desponding souls in Virginia, in the ends of the earth. Oh, what an early provident care does God show for his people! There are none of the seven churches of Asia so highly commended by Christ as that of Philadelphia; and yet in commending her, all he can say is, “Thou hast a little strength.” *I know thy works; behold I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength.* Rev. iii. 8. Oh, how acceptable is a little strength to Jesus Christ, and how ready is he to improve it! *He giveth power to the faint, and to them that have no might he increaseth strength.* Isa. xl. 29. Hear farther what words of grace and truth flowed from the lips of Jesus. *Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest: for I am meek and lowly in heart,* Matt. xi. 28, 29. *Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out.* John vi. 37. *If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink.* John vii. 37. *Let him that is athirst come: and whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely.* Rev. xxii. 17. Oh, what strong consolation is here! what exceeding great and precious promises are these! I might easily add to the catalogue, but these may suffice.

Let us now see how his people in every age have ever found these promises made good. Here David may be consulted *instar omnium*, and he will tell you, pointing to himself; *This poor man cried, and the LORD heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles.* Psalm xxxiv. 6. St. Paul, in the midst of affliction, calls God the Father of mercies and the *God of all comfort, who comforteth us in all our tribulation.* 2 Cor. i. 3, 4. *God,* says he, *that comforteth those that are cast down, comforted us.* 2 Cor. vii. 6. What a sweetly emphatic declaration is this! God, the comforter of the humble, comforted us. He is not only the Lord of hosts, the King of kings, the Creator of the world, but among his more august characters he assumes this title, the Comforter of the humble. Such St. Paul found him in an hour of temptation, when he had this supporting answer to his repeated prayer for deliverance, *My grace is sufficient for thee; for my strength is made perfect in weakness.* 2 Cor. xii. 9. Since this was the case, since his weakness was more than supplied by the strength of Christ, and was a foil to set it off, St. Paul seems quite regardless what infirmities he laboured under. Nay, *most gladly,* says he, *will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities—for when I am weak, then am I strong.* He could take no pleasure in feeling himself weak: but the mortification was made up by the pleasure he found in leaning upon this almighty support. His wounds were painful to him: but, oh! the pleasure he found in feeling the divine physician dressing his wounds, in some measure swallowed up the pain. It was probably experience, as well as inspiration, that dictated to the apostle that amiable character of Christ, that he is a merciful and faithful High Priest, who, being himself tempted, knows how to succour them that are tempted. Heb. ii. 17, 18. And we

have not a high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities: but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Heb iv. 15.

But why need I multiply arguments? Go to his cross, and there learn his love and compassion, from his groans and wounds, and blood, and death. Would he hang there in such agony for sinners if he were not willing to save them, and cherish every good principle in them? There you may have much the same evidence of his compassion as Thomas had of his resurrection; you may look into his hands, and see the print of the nails; and into his side, and see the scar of the spear; which loudly proclaims his readiness to pity and help you. And now, poor, trembling, doubting souls, what hinders but you should raise up your drooping head, and take courage? May you not venture your souls into such compassionate and faithful hands? Why should the bruised reed shrink from him, when he comes not to tread it down, but raise it up?

As I am really solicitous that impenitent hearts among us should be pierced with the medicinal anguish and sorrow of conviction and repentance, and the most friendly heart cannot form a kinder wish for them, so I am truly solicitous that every honest soul, in which there is the least spark of true piety, should enjoy the pleasure of it. It is indeed to be lamented that they who have a title to so much happiness should enjoy so little of it; it is very incongruous that they should go bowing the head in their way towards heaven, as if they were hastening to the place of execution, and that they should serve so good a Master with such heavy hearts. Oh lift up the hands that hang down, and strengthen the feeble knees! "Comfort ye, comfort ye, my people, saith your God." "Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might." Trust in your all-sufficient Redeemer; trust in him though he should slay you.

And do not indulge causeless doubts and fears concerning your sincerity. When they arise in your minds, examine them, and search whether there be any sufficient reason for them; and if you discover there is not, then reject them and set them at defiance, and entertain your hopes in spite of them, and say with the Psalmist, "Why art thou cast down, oh my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God." Psalm xlii. 11.