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Book

THE

NEW-JERSEY PREACHER:

OR,

SERMONS

ON

PLAIN & PRACTICAL SUBJECTS.

BY SOME OF THE MINISTERS OF THE GOSPEL,
RESIDING IN THE STATE OF NEW-JERSEY.

VOL. I.

Edited by

George S. Woodhall
1813

Woodhall
Editor

Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us; we pray *you* in Christ's stead be ye reconciled to God....2 Cor. v. 20.

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ZIX

SERMON XII.

ON RESIGNATION.

Psalm xxxix. 9.

I was dumb, I opened not my mouth ; because thou didst it.

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NEW-JERSEY PREACHER.

SERMON XII.

Psalm xxxix. 9.—I was dumb, I opened not my mouth; because thou didst it:

EVER since sin was introduced into our world, by the apostacy of our first parents, trouble has fallen to the lot of mortals. Some it is true have less than others; but none are exempted. Life is truly a chequered scene—many sorrows are interwoven with our joys. Now are we perplexed with cares and anxieties; again, we are disappointed and crossed in our pursuits; at one time we are called to undergo pain, and linger with disease, at another we are compelled to part with near and dear friends. Numerous and various woes beset our path through life. If we look abroad through the world we may see innumerable proofs of the declarations which Job made in anguish of soul, “Man is born unto trouble as the sparks fly upward,” Job v. 7. “Man that is born of a woman, is of few days, and full of trouble,” Job xiv. 1.

But the afflictions which befall man in this life, do not happen by chance. “Affliction cometh not forth of the dust, neither doth trouble spring out of the ground,” Job v. 6. Every trial which man experiences is sent by the overruling providence of God. However second causes may be employed in producing our trials, yet God is the great first cause, without whom, not even a sparrow falleth on the ground, and by whom the very

hairs of our head are all numbered, Matt. x. 29, 30. Second causes are but the instruments in his hands. But, alas! men are too apt to neglect this important truth, and to look no further, in the disasters which befall them, than second causes, or the instruments, by which they are inflicted. While the providence of God is thus neglected, our trials must be misimproved. But while the world at large, atheistically, look no further than second causes, and discern not the uplifted hand, and the operations of the Lord, the true child of God, in the exercise of grace, looks beyond all instruments, and acknowledges the hand of the Lord. Thus David did. When he penned the Psalm which contains our text, he was suffering some severe trial from wicked men. But notwithstanding they voluntarily and wickedly afflicted him, he viewed them as the instruments, and looking beyond them, eyed the hand of God in his trial. And while he beheld the hand of God afflicting him, he was filled with submission. "I was dumb, I opened not my mouth; because thou didst it."

In this conduct of David under his trials, we have marked out our duty in similar circumstances. It is our duty to see and acknowledge the providence of God, and to be submissive to his will, because he hath done it.

In speaking from the text I shall endeavour,

- I. To illustrate the duty of resignation under trials.
- II. To enforce the duty, from the consideration that our trials are sent by the Lord.

I. Let us attend to an illustration of the duty of resignation to the will of God under trials.

Resignation is something very different from a stoical insensibility under suffering. It by no means forbids us to *feel* afflictions; on the contrary, sensibility to

suffering is necessary to true resignation. Where there is no *feeling sense of trial*, there can be no resignation. When God lays his hand upon us, he intends we shall *feel*, that we may be led to make a useful improvement of afflictions. And afflictions will entirely fail of having the intended effect upon one who is insensible of them. This is that despising the chastening of the Lord, which the scriptures expressly condemn, Heb. xii. 5. This insensibility under sufferings is also condemned by the examples of the scripture saints—They keenly *felt* while they were examples of resignation. Job's heart was filled with sorrow, while he said, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away ; blessed be the name of the Lord," Job i. 21. For "he rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground," verse 20 ; and uttered this sentence, breathing a spirit of resignation. Again, he was sitting among the ashes, keenly sensible of his grievous sufferings, when he submissively said, "shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?" Job ii. 10. David was most sensibly alive to his sufferings, when he uttered the very submissive expression in our text, "I was dumb, I opened not my mouth;" for we hear him saying in the same Psalm, "my sorrow was stirred," ver. 2 ; "I am consumed by the blow of thine hand," ver. 10 ; "O Lord, hold not thy peace at my tears," ver. 11. But we have a still brighter and safer example, in Christ, who is proposed to us as our example, that we should follow in his steps. He most sensibly *felt* his trials in the garden of Gethsemane ; for we hear him saying, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful even unto death," Matt. xxvi. 38. And he prayed, "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me," Matt. xxvi. 39 ; "and being in an

agony, he prayed more earnestly : and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground," Luke xxii. 44 ; never was more *sensibility* to suffering manifested ; but at the same time never was more resignation displayed. " O my Father," is his language, " if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done," Matt. xxvi. 42. Hence we learn, that the highest resignation is consistent with the *most feeling sense of suffering*.

Again, I would remark, that resignation is perfectly consistent, with an earnest desire to avoid afflictions, or to have them removed. We cannot love afflictions, or be reconciled to them, considered in themselves, apart from the good effects which may result from them, or the glory of God which may be promoted by them. Human nature recoils at afflictions, and God never intended that we should contradict those principles of our nature which are not the effects of sin : and this repugnancy to afflictions is not the effect of sin. The example of David in the Psalm which contains our text, is a proof that a desire to avoid afflictions, or have them removed, is consistent with true resignation.—For, immediately after he had said, " I was dumb, I opened not my mouth," he prayed, " remove thy stroke away from me—hear my prayer, O Lord, and give ear unto my cry : hold not thy peace, at my tears. O spare me, that I may recover strength before I go hence, and be no more," ver. 10, 12, 13. The example also of our Saviour in the garden proves the same—while he was saying, " thy will be done," still he prayed, " if it be possible let this cup pass from me."

Thus it appears that it is consistent with true resignation to *feel* afflictions, to shew that we *feel* them, and to

desire and pray that we may avoid them, or be delivered out of them.

But while we *feel* and while we desire and pray that the Lord would remove his chastising hand from us, true resignation forbids us to reproach or censure God's dealings with us, or to speak or think dishonorably of God, however heavily he may lay his hand upon us. It forbids all impatience, fretfulness, and murmuring against God, and calling in question, even in thought, his justice, his wisdom, his goodness, or his faithfulness in his dispensations.

True resignation requires that our wills be bowed to the divine will. As has been observed, it is contrary to human nature for any man to chuse suffering for its own sake ; yet we may chuse that the will of God should be done rather than ours, even if it be his will that we should suffer. True resignation requires this. And when we have such a confidence in the wisdom, justice, goodness and faithfulness of God, that we can in sincerity of heart say with our divine Redeemer, Father not my will but thine be done : let thy will be done in preference to mine, whether it accords with mine or not ; and even though it be, that I should drink a bitter cup, at which my nature shrinks back and trembles ;—this is true christian resignation.

This is doubtless a very difficult duty, but it has often been performed. And that same grace, which has enabled others, possessed of the same nature with ourselves, to perform this duty, is also sufficient for us and can enable us to do the same. Our text presents a powerful motive to influence those under trials, to feel and exercise resignation.—“Thou didst it.”—This introduces the

Ind. Branch of our subject, viz. to enforce the duty of resignation, from the consideration that our trials are sent by the Lord—"I was dumb, I opened not my mouth ; because thou didst it."

The scriptures clearly teach, that the providence of God is concerned in every event, which taketh place in our world, insomuch that it may be said of every event, "Thou didst it."—They teach us, "his kingdom ruleth over all," Psalm ciii. 19. "I form the light, and create darkness ; I make peace and create evil : I the Lord do all these things," Isaiah xlv. 7. "Shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it?" Amos iii. 6. "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing ? And one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered," Matt. x. 29, 30. "The lot is cast into the lap : but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord," Prov. xvi. 33. These texts clearly teach us, that God exercises a providence over our world—that this providence extends to individuals as well as to nations—that it extends to the smallest as well as the greatest events : and even to those events which may appear to us to be casual or accidental.—Seeing then that all our trials are sent upon us by the Lord, what arguments may we draw from this consideration to promote resignation ?

1. God is a being of perfect justice. He reigns in righteousness. "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" Gen. xviii. 25. We are his creatures, and he is our sovereign, and has a right to govern us, and dispose of us according to his sovereign pleasure. This consideration assures us that God will do us no wrong ; and that he hath done us no wrong in the heaviest trials,

which he has laid upon us. Yea, there is merey, in the heaviest trial which any of us has ever experienced. God would be just, he would do right if he were to strip us of every earthly comfort—if he were to take away all our property, deprive us of every mean of obtaining a support, and turn us beggars upon the world—if he were to suffer the tongue of calumny forever to blast our character—if he were to take away our health and leave us to drag out a wretched life under painful disease—and if he were to take away not merely one, but every relative and friend we have in the world. For we have forfeited every comfort, we deserve hell, and God would do right to send us all there. He would have done right if he had sent us all there many years since. Every trial which God sends upon us, in this world, is therefore not only right, but a merey, even if it produces no good effect upon our souls, as it is short of what we deserve. This consideration, certainly ought to silence every murmur ; to produce submission to the divine will ; and even make us thankful to God in the midst of our afflictions ; for the heaviest trials which he lays upon his sinful creatures in this world are less than they deserve. Besides, most generally, in the heaviest trials, he grants us many precious blessings. We are too apt to feel as though we had lost all our comforts, when God lays his hand upon but one that is dear to us ; when if we were duly to consider, we should find that while he has deprived us of one or a few, or impaired them, he has continued a great many. Hence, in our heaviest afflictions, God not only does right, but his judgments are mingled with multitudes of tender mereies, which ought to silence every murmur, and make us submissive and thankful.

2. God is a being of infinite love, "God is love," 1 John iv. 8. Hence it is certain that he cannot delight in misery for its own sake. Agreeably to this, we are told, "he doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men," Lam. iii. 33. If therefore he doth afflict, it must be for some good end. He designs and promotes his own glory and the general good by the afflictions which he sends. This should be a motive to resignation to the renewed soul, who aims supremely at the glory of God, and in connection with this, desires the general good. We know not what a great revenue of glory may accrue to God, nor how much good our fellow men may receive from our afflictions. By these trials we may be fitted to be far more useful in the world than we otherwise would have been—and perhaps our trials themselves may be the means of the conversion of some precious souls. Has God visited us with sore and unexpected judgments? Has he suddenly snatched away a dear friend? Others may hear and fear, and be excited to prepare for death. These considerations, certainly, afford to the renewed soul a powerful motive to resignation.

Further, God oftentimes afflicts even a careless soul, not only for the general, but for his individual good; to bring him to repentance, when other means have failed to produce this effect:—And afflictions have often produced this effect. They had this blessed effect upon the prodigal; and many a soul will have reason to bless God through eternity, for the afflictions with which they were visited while in a careless state. This should excite submission even in the unrenewed, and lead them, instead of repining, to endeavour so to improve their afflictions that they may have reason forever to praise God for them.

But this consideration, that God is a being of infinite love, ought to be a source of unspeakable consolation to the real child of God, under the heaviest trials with which he may be visited. The Being who afflicts him is his reconciled God and Father, and loves him with a most tender love. It belongs to the character of a good Father, who loves his child, to seek his happiness, and if he ever correct him, it must be intended for his good. Most assuredly, therefore, God, who loves his children far more than ever an earthly parent loved his child, will seek their best interest, and if he afflict them, will do it with a view to promote their best good. The character of God secures this to all his people. Are you then the people of God? His love presents a powerful argument to enforce resignation.

3. God is a being of infinite wisdom. He sees the end from the beginning; he perfectly knows the consequences of every event; and he knows what is best for his people. As his love to his people will ever lead him to desire and seek their best good; so his wisdom will ever lead him to devise and pursue the best plans to promote their best good. An earthly parent, though he may tenderly love his child, and earnestly desire and seek his best good; yet he may mistake as to the best means to obtain the desired end; but the Lord cannot err on this subject. This also presents to the true child of God, a powerful argument for resignation to the divine will. We are short-sighted mortals; we know not what is best for ourselves, but are oftentimes ready to say with Jacob, "all these things are against me," Gen. xlii. 36; when at the same time they are all working together for our good, and the good of others. It is well for us that the Lord reigns, and that he appoints our lot in life. The

reasons of his dispensations, we very often know not now ; but we shall know hereafter ; and we shall then see that he led us by the right way, and shall adore and praise him even for those heavy trials which here wrung our hearts. Let us implicitly trust him for a future and satisfactory explanation of those mysterious providences which we cannot now understand ; and let an implicit confidence in his wisdom, lead us to acquiesce with resignation in the afflictive dispensations of his providence.

4. God is a being of infinite power. This is a further security to the real believer that his trials will issue in his best good ; for God has almighty power to execute the plans which infinite wisdom devises for the good of his people. An earthly parent may devise the best plans to promote the happiness of his child ; but he may want power to render his plans effectual. But the designs of infinite wisdom cannot fail on this account. No power in the universe can frustrate the plans of God. Hence, again, the believer has reason to be resigned to his will.

5. Once more, God is a being of infinite faithfulness—what he has promised his people he will perform. “Heaven and earth shall pass away ; but his words shall not pass away.” He has made many precious promises to his people under afflictions. Let us attend to some of them. “My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord : neither be weary of his correction. For whom the Lord loveth he correcteth, even as a father the son in whom he delighteth,” Prov. iii. 11, 12. “When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee ; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee : when thou walkest through the fire thou shalt not be burnt ;

neither shall the flame kindle upon thee," Isaiah xliii. 2. "If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons. He chastened us for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness. Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby," Heb. xii. 7, 10, 11. "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose," Rom. viii. 28. Such are the precious promises of God to his afflicted children; and he is a faithful God—his promises cannot fail—he will fulfil them.

The heaviest trials of his children are therefore blessings in disguise. Though grievous to the flesh, they are salutary medicines to the soul, having a purifying effect upon it. They promote the work of sanctification, and ripen the soul apace for eternal blessedness. The faithfulness of God in connection with his promises, certainly ought to give the believer much consolation under his trials, and lead him to bear them with resignation.

In the conclusion of this discourse, let us be exhorted to examine ourselves, whether we be the people of God, and have an interest in those precious considerations which have been presented, for the support of the believer under trials.

Brethren, we have all need to be interested in these supports; for we live in a world of trial. We have no security for the continuance of any earthly comfort which we may now enjoy, however dear it may be to us, and however necessary we may esteem it to our happiness. We may suddenly and unex-

pectedly be deprived of our dearest earthly comforts. Of this we have frequent proofs. We often see heavy trials suddenly and unexpectedly fall upon others. What, my hearers, would you do under such trials as you have sometimes seen others experience, without the supports and consolations of the gospel? If you have any feeling you must be wretched indeed. To similar trials you are constantly exposed. Therefore be exhorted to be reconciled unto God, that when tried you may be supported and comforted, and your afflictions be made blessings.

Further, you are not only exposed to have your dearest earthly comforts snatched from you in a moment; but you are liable every moment, without any previous warning, to be hurried away from life yourselves, and hurried to the bar of God. Are you prepared? If not, how awfully perilous is your situation! The eternal interests of your immortal souls may be suspended on a single week—a single day—a single hour; yea, on a single moment. And can you delay any longer to seek in earnest after preparation for death? Awake, flee to Christ, be reconciled to God; and then, let death come when and where and how it may, for you to die will be gain.

Christians, who may be now suffering trials, remember, it is the Lord's hand—the Lord hath done it.—He is righteous—he is your Father, and loves you with a most tender love—he knows what is best, and will do what is best for you—his wisdom is infinite, his power is almighty, and his faithfulness endureth forever.—Let these considerations resign you to his will, and support and comfort you under your trials.