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SERMON CCLXX.

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I WOULD NOT LIVE ALWAY.

JOB VII. 16.—*I would not live alway.*

It is, I suppose, universally admitted, that the love of life is natural to man; and there are certainly many things connected with the present state of existence to render life desirable. The world in which we dwell has been admirably fitted up for our convenience and comfort; and there are good gifts constantly coming down from the Father of mercies, to sustain and cheer us during our residence here. There are opportunities here for doing good; for administering relief to the needy and wretched; for aiding the cause of truth and piety; and thus glorifying God in our body and spirit. There are the means of working out our own salvation; of laying up treasure in heaven that will satisfy and endure; and even the afflictions of the present become a furnace in which the soul is prepared to shine with increasing beauty and brightness in the future. And there are some of the Christian graces, for the development of which this is the only theatre; for when injury ceases, there will be no occasion for forgiveness; and when suffering ceases, there will be no demand for patience. Indeed, there is good reason why every individual should be thankful for his present existence: even though he perverts it to his eternal ruin, yet the hours of life are golden hours; they are given to be a blessing, and praise is due to Him who bestows them.

There are reasons enough, then, why every good man should set a high value upon life. But there are reasons also why no good man could consistently desire to live alway. It is possible, indeed, that there may be, even in the true Christian, a criminal dissatisfaction with the world; a desire to die only because it is painful to live; and this spirit is certainly always to be condemned. It is not certain but that Job had a measure of this feeling when he made the declaration in our text. But there are other grounds on which the declaration MAY be made the Christian with perfect consistency. To exhibit these grounds is the design of the present discourse.

I say, then, the Christian does not desire to live alway, because he prefers,

Perfect light to comparative darkness :

Immaculate purity to partial sanctification :

Immortal strength to earthly weakness :

Cloudless serenity to agitating storms :

The fellowship of the glorified to the society of the imperfect :

The honors of victory to the perils of warfare.

I. The first reason why the Christian would not live alway, is HIS PREFERENCE OF PERFECT LIGHT TO COMPARATIVE DARKNESS.

I know, indeed, that when the old man is put off and the new man is put on, there is a sense in which the soul is brought out of darkness into marvellous light. The mind takes far more distinct and comprehensive views of divine truth than it ever did before; it has a spiritual discernment imparted to it, by means of which what had before seemed faint and shadowy, becomes substance and life. But even that marvellous light into which the new-born soul enters when he is delivered from the blindness of spiritual death is itself darkness, when compared with the radiant manifestations of Jehovah's glory in the upper world. Here the Christian, in his best state, sees through a glass darkly. How very little does he know of the plan of God's operations! How he is confounded at almost every step by the occurrence of events whose meaning he is utterly unable to explain! How many things, after his best efforts to comprehend them, he is obliged to resolve into God's mysterious and unfathomable sovereignty! And in his contemplations of God's truth, as it is revealed in his word, how frequently is he perplexed with doubt in respect to the actual meaning of the Spirit; and when he attempts to launch out at all beyond the Revelation, how quickly does he find himself sinking in a gulf of conjecture and uncertainty! How humbling to the pride of the intellect, how indicative of the narrowness of its conceptions, to find himself

obliged to receive different truths, which he knows must be consistent with each other, which yet he is perfectly inadequate to reconcile; to catch just an indistinct glance of some great field of truth, and then perhaps find his vision immediately obstructed by intervening clouds! But then how delightful the contrast when he reaches heaven; There, many a dark page in the history of God's dispensations on earth will be illumined by a clear and satisfying light. There he will know why he had anguish when he longed for rest; why his plans were defeated by which he would fain have glorified God; why Zion was left so long to mourn, and the chariot-wheels of her King were so slow in their approach, when God's people were upon their knees praying and watching for the dawn of a brighter day. And the mysteries of Redemption—oh, how they will unfold to his delighted eye; how the great and holy truths which he knew so imperfectly here will burst upon him in their full brightness, and in the harmony of perfect proportions! There, there will be no uncertainty, no confusion, no darkness at all. This seeing through a glass darkly is the business of earth; seeing face to face will be the business of heaven. There the vision will be perfect; and the Sun of the moral universe will shine with immortal splendor.

I bless God for all the light which he gives me now; but I would not live alway, because I have the assurance that a brighter light will shine hereafter. I love to bend over the mysteries of Providence and the mysteries of Redemption; and sometimes a field of glory opens suddenly upon me where thick darkness had always brooded before; but I own that I have my eye and my heart upon a world where I hope to live for ever amidst the brighter beams of immortal truth. I would not live alway, because I desire to get rid of this painful ignorance and doubt which now oppresses me; because I would fain behold my God as he is, and see light in his light.

II. The Christian does not desire to live alway, because HE PREFERS IMMACULATE PURITY TO PARTIAL SANCTIFICATION.

Time has been when he was dead in trespasses and sins; when he had no discernment of spiritual beauty, no relish for spiritual objects. But in the renovating change that has passed upon him, both his views and his tastes have been corrected. He regards sin now as the most abominable of all evils; as tending to the subversion of Jehovah's throne; as the deadly seed from which spring all the calamities of the world and all the horrors of hell. And yet this evil and bitter thing in a measure still adheres to him. It often withers his best joys. It throws a barrier between him and the throne of grace,

when his Saviour bids him come, and his heart would respond gratefully to the invitation. It makes duty a burden, and prosperity a curse. And though it does not prevail ALWAYS to the despoiling of his joys, and the obscuring of his graces; though there are times when his devout affections are brought into vigorous and delightful exercise, yet often, very often, has he occasion to exclaim, "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" And when this burden presses him down, is it not natural that he should desire to be free from it; and that he should look with grateful expectation towards heaven, as the only region of perfect purity? Into that immortal residence nothing can ever enter that defileth or maketh a lie. There is the infinitely holy God. There are the perfectly holy angels. There every heart beats, every faculty operates, every harp is strung, in subservience to great and holy ends. At the gate of that world, the Christian lays aside all that is earthly, and puts on the robes of perfect holiness; and henceforth, even the scrutinizing eye of the seraph cannot discern upon him the least vestige of the curse.

I would not live alway, because I would not always be half a sinner and half a saint. I hate this body of sin and death, and in God's best time I would be glad to throw it down. I long to be delivered from these wandering thoughts; from these expressions of devotion into which my cold and reluctant heart will not throw itself; from this feebleness and inconstancy of effort in doing the will of Him who hath died for me. I would be conversant only with holy objects; I would be the subject only of holy exercises; I would be engaged only in holy employments; and I would not live alway, because then this sweetest, noblest desire of my heart could never be fulfilled.

III. The Christian would not live alway, because HE PREFERS IMMORTAL STRENGTH TO EARTHLY WEAKNESS.

I will not speak of this body now as it came originally from its Creator's hands; then no doubt it was strong and glorious; for it was a part of that creation which the great Framer of the whole pronounced "very good." But ever since sin entered to blight the beauty of Jehovah's works, the human body has been characterized by a tendency to decay. Look at the man writhing in bodily anguish; bending under bodily decrepitude; fainting from bodily exhaustion; and say whether sin has not mixed up its poison in the very blood that courses through our veins? And if the body is weak, so is the mind also. It is conscious, indeed, of having within itself a principle of greatness. It is sometimes surprised by the exercise of its

own faculties; but after all, many of its operations are exceedingly feeble and unsatisfying. And there is a proportional weakness in human virtue; for how frequently is virtue conquered and carried away captive in the war with temptation !

Since then the Christian, while he remains here, is comparatively feeble in his whole nature, how reasonable that he should aspire to a state in which he shall exchange his present imbecility for enduring and ever-growing strength ! At the threshold of heaven he will drop this crazy, corruptible, inglorious body, and ere long will receive in its place a body endued with undecaying vigor, and clothed with unfading beauty; a body which may mock at the power of death; and which can move as if upon the lightning to execute God's high commissions in other worlds. And the intellect—Oh, how it will brighten and expand; how it will rise to that which is lofty, and sink into that which is profound, and never tire either in the sublimity of its excursions or the depth of its researches ! And the moral faculties—with what incalculable energy will THEY operate, when God's Spirit has given them a perfect direction, and there is all the beauty and glory of the third heavens to call them into exercise ! I ask again, is it not reasonable that the Christian should hail the day when he shall be taken up to that region of immortal strength ?

I would not live alway, because I do not wish always to be an heir to these clustering infirmities of mortality. I would bear patiently the pains, the groans, the tossings, to which this poor body is subjected; but I would rather be beyond their reach, and wear a body that could bid defiance to disease; that could shine with an angel's beauty, and move with an angel's strength. I would not complain of the feebleness of my mental operations; and yet I would hail with gratitude the expansion of these powers into something yet greater and brighter: I would prefer the noble thoughts of glorified manhood, to the narrow conceptions of this infancy of my existence. I would be thankful for what God has made me; and humble for what I have made myself; but I would wait in exulting hope of a complete renovation of my nature, in which I shall have strength imparted to me to bear an eternal weight of glory.

IV. The Christian would not live alway, because HE PREFERS CLOUDLESS SERENITY TO AGITATING STORMS.

The natural world has its tempests; and sometimes they are so violent as well nigh to shake the earth. The thick cloud lowers; the thunders roar; the lightnings flash; the whirlwind rushes by; and man himself is obliged to look out for a refuge from the war of elements. But far more to be dreaded are the storms that agitate

the moral world; and no man lives, no man ever lived, a stranger to THEM. Oh, how they sport with human hopes! How they carry away every thing earthly that we value, leaving hardly a wreck behind! Here they take the form of disease, and in an hour change the most vigorous into the most helpless of mortals. There they come in the form of bereavement, and the result is that the sepulchre is open, and the funeral procession approaches it, and there is a corruptible deposit made there which some at least cannot think of without bleeding hearts. And again they take the form of animosities and contentions either in public or in private, in church or in state; and under their influence Friendship bleeds and Peace becomes an exile. Contemplate the condition of our own country at this moment, no matter whether in its civil or ecclesiastical interests; and then look abroad, and note the signs of convulsion and revolution that are exhibited by other countries; and you will surely see enough to convince the most incredulous that this world was destined to be anything else than a place of ultimate rest.

But in heaven there will be an uninterrupted and eternal tranquility. The Christian looks forward to it as a sanctuary, a refuge, which no storm that may rise either on earth or in hell can ever reach. If the history of that world, from the time that the morning stars began to sing, could be submitted to us, we should find the record of only a single storm; and that was instantly hushed, by a dislodgement of the rebels with whom it originated. No, there are no dying scenes to break the heart in heaven. There is no party spirit, no rivalry, no unhallowed strife, in heaven. The glorified who range its fields of light never feel the blighting hand of disease, or the blasting breath of slander, or the mildew of an envious and malignant spirit. Why then should not the Christian wish to breathe that peaceful atmosphere? Especially when he has grown tired and sick of the strifes of the world, and feels that there is nothing dear to him here, which the next tempest that sweeps over the earth may not sweep away; and at the same time lifts his eye towards a sere-ner and brighter world, how reasonable that he should exclaim, "I would not live alway?"

I would not live alway, because I cannot bear the sound of dying groans; because I instinctively shrink back from the bedside where my beloved friend is going through with his last agonies. I would not live alway, because I choose stability rather than vicissitude; and even when my hopes of earthly good are the brightest, I never know but that it is the harbinger of dire eclipse. I would not live alway, because my spirit is offended by the scenes of discord and contention

which prevail around me ;—scenes in which I am compelled to mingle, and which, perhaps, in my weakness I may be left to promote. I would not live alway, because I see in the distance a region that is free from storms ;—a region in which not even a cloud lowers ; and I would breathe that balmy atmosphere : I would walk beneath the very throne of the Prince of Peace : I would be able to look around me, to look before me, and reflect that there is not an element of tempest in all that portion of God's dominions in which I am to have my everlasting home.

V. The Christian would not live alway, because HE PREFERS THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE GLORIFIED TO THE SOCIETY OF THE IMPERFECT.

In this mixed state of being, the best men are frequently brought into contact with the bad ; nay, even with the worst. It sometimes happens that a Christian has his lot cast in a family, one or more of whose members is openly vicious and profane ; and sometimes even the Christian parent is compelled to the reflection that his own child, whom he meets every day in the discharge of parental offices, is a blasphemer or a profligate. But in addition to this, even the fellowship of CHRISTIANS in this world is a fellowship of miserably imperfect men. What Christian has not had his heart wounded by the inconsideration, the wickedness, it may be the absolute treachery, of some one who has claimed to be acknowledged as a brother in Christ ? What Christian has not sometimes been ready to ask, while he has wept over the spectacle of a religious community arming themselves with the weapons of carnal warfare, " Is there faith on the earth ?" What Christian but has sometimes felt the need of sympathy and co-operation, when it has been withheld ; and when he would fain have opened his heart to the invigorating influence of a godly, fraternal fellowship, has found himself well-nigh chilled in the freezing atmosphere of indifference and formality ?

Not so in the world which christian faith anticipates. There all will be bound together in the cords of love ; all will be helpers to gether of each other's joy. ALL—and who will they be ? First, all the ransomed out of every nation, and kindred and tongue, and people. Every patriarch, every prophet, every apostle, every martyr, every saint of every age, and clime, and condition, will be there. Next, there will be the native inhabitants of heaven, who have always been loyal to their King : they will continue to be, as they ever have been, at home on the fields of immortality. Jesus the dying Lamb, the God and Hope of the world, the enthroned and all-gracious Savior, will be there, in mild and heavenly majesty ; carrying forward the vast purposes of his mediatorial reign, and pour-

ing forth endless benedictions over the whole host of the glorified. This vast assembly will constitute one glorious fraternity of exalted minds. And is it any wonder that the Christian should desire to be among them? Is it strange that when rivers of water run down his eyes because men keep not God's law; when his heart bleeds from wounds that have been inflicted by hands with which his own had been joined in the bond of covenant engagements—is it strange, I ask, that he should be more than willing, in God's best time, to join the eternal fellowship of heaven?

I would not live alway, because I would escape from a companionship with those who despise my Redeemer and his salvation; because I do not wish my ear to be always accustomed to sounds of blasphemy, or mine eye to spectacles of profligacy and crime. I would not live alway, because even the communion of saints on earth is imperfect and often embittered; and I never know what either I or those with whom I am associated may be left to do, to destroy each other's peace. I would not live alway, because I expect to meet in heaven those Christian friends whom I love below, purified from their dross, and advanced to a state of absolute perfection; because my bosom burns with a desire to mingle with the great and the good of other ages; because I would fain see Abraham, and Moses, and Paul, face to face; because I would hear the martyrs tell with their own lips the story of their sufferings and their triumphs, and would join them in a tribute of thanksgiving for all-sustaining and all-conquering grace. No; I would not live alway, because the society of heaven is better than the society of earth. I would rather see my Redeemer as he is, and gaze upon his unveiled glory, than to hold communion even with *HIM* through the channel of his ordinances.

VI. Once more: The Christian would not live alway, BECAUSE HE PREFERS THE HONORS OF VICTORY TO THE PERILS OF WARFARE.

Imperfectly sanctified as he is, surrounded by temptations as he is, it cannot otherwise be than that he should be subjected to perpetual conflict. The adversary is watching to make war upon him; and he is to be resisted. The ungodly world would fain lay snares for his feet; and their insidious efforts are to be defeated. Evil passions and affections inhabit his own bosom; and their clamor is to be hushed, and their power broken. Indeed, the religious life is one unbroken spiritual campaign: the enemies to be encountered are the most formidable which either earth or hell can turn out; and though grace is promised to the believer according to his day, and though God's word is pledged for his ultimate triumph,

yet he never knows but that, through his own infirmity or corruption, he may be temporarily overcome; and he is never safe if a single sentinel is withdrawn from any watchtower of his heart. Yes, he goes through the world as a combatant. He is required always to appear in arms. He fights his way up to the gate of heaven; and only resigns his armor in the act of putting off the garments of mortality.

The warrior endures with patience the hardships of the camp, and rushes fearlessly into the din of battle, not because he loves deprivation and danger, but because he connects with them the hope of victory. Victory, victory is the word that falls like music upon his ear—that burns in glory upon his heart; and when he looks around and finds himself in an army of conquerors, and feels that he is himself a conqueror too, how much more grateful is this than to be lying in ambush, or marching in the storm, or wading in blood, yet uncertain whether the fortunes of war may place him with the victors or the vanquished. He is resigned to his sufferings in view of the hopes which hang upon them; but he would not suffer always; he would hear the shouts of victory and bear the honors of victory, as soon as he can. And can it be otherwise with the Christian in his conflict? However patient he may be to wait God's time, must he not be comforted by the thought that his enemies will ere long lie prostrate at his feet; and must not his bosom sometimes kindle with strong desire to enter upon his eternal triumph? This is the place for wielding the sword of the Spirit, and wearing the shield of faith, and encountering the fiery darts of the adversary; but in yonder world the inhabitants bear palms, and wear crowns, and sit on thrones, in token of their being everlasting conquerors. Who would live alway in a world where fighting is the appropriate work; especially when there is a world in prospect where no hostile tongue shall ever move, and no hostile foot shall ever tread?

I would not live alway, because I would not always be harassed by spiritual enemies, and engaged in an eternal conflict. I would have this usurper within not only dethroned, but driven away. I would be beyond the reach of the devil's wiles. I would be able to lay my armor by, and feel that the contest had closed in glory. I would not live alway, because I long to feel that I have come off conqueror; I long to receive the blood-bought crown, and cast it at the feet of my enthroned Lord. I would not live alway, because I had rather my heart should thrill with joy than throb with apprehension: I had rather my lips should be used to songs of immortal

triumph, than even to supplications for God's grace to keep me from being overcome.

But I hear some one saying, "There is one thing which perhaps you have forgotten: there is a dark boundary—not a mountain, but a flood, that lies between earth and heaven; and that is to be passed before the Christian conqueror can be crowned." No, I have not forgotten that: I stand upon an eminence now, with that flood-rolling and raging beneath my feet; and even here I repeat, I would not live away. For I know that my Redeemer liveth, and I rely upon him to bear me over; and if I may only rest upon his arm, I can walk firmly, though the tempest howls above, and the waters roar around. No, I would not away—Rise, ye dark and stormy billows, to frighten my poor soul, as much as ye will: Rise, ye fiends of darkness, and make your last desperate effort to terrify and overwhelm; and in the courage of faith I dare say even to you, I would not live away.

"Jesus, the vision of thy face
Hath overpowering charms;
Scarce shall I feel death's cold embrace,
If Christ be in my arms.

"Then, when ye hear my heartstrings break,
How sweet the minutes roll,
A mortal paleness on my cheek,
And glory in my soul!"