

SERMONS CONCERNING THE THRONE OF GRACE

Robert Traill
1642-1716

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A LETTER from the late MR. JAMES HERVEY, Author of the Meditations, Theron and Aspasio, &c.

TO a RELATION of Mr. TRAILL's, Who was Editor of an early Edition of his Works.

Sir, I received your very valuable and no loss acceptable present, some weeks ago. I should have acknowledged the favour sooner; but I chose to stay till I had tasted the dish you set before me. And indeed I find it to be savoury meat, the true manna; food for the soul.

Your worthy relative was a workman that need not be ashamed. He knew how, clearly to state, and solidly to establish the faith of God's elect, and the doctrine according to godliness.—O! that my heart, and the heart of every reader, may be opened, by the eternal Spirit, to receive the precious truths!

The letter at the end of the first volume, is a judicious performance. It rightly divides the word of truth, and lays the line, with a masterly hand, between the presumptuous Legalist, and the licentious Antinomian.—I am particularly pleased with the honourable testimony bore to those two excellent books, Dr. Owen's Treatise on Justification, and Mr. Marshall's Gospel-mystery of Sanctification: books fit to be recommended by so good a judge!

If the Lord pleases to give Theron and Aspasio any acceptance in Scotland, I shall be sincerely glad; but if he vouchsafes to make them, not only welcome, but useful visitants, I shall exceedingly rejoice.—In case you should think them calculated to promote the honour and further the gospel of JESUS CHRIST, I hope

you will favour them with your recommendation, and accompany them with your prayers; which will be a fresh instance of kindness to, SIR,

Your obliged friend, and obedient Servant,
JAMES HERVEY WESTON, July 8, 1755

RECOMMENDATION TO THE SERMONS ON STEDFAST ADHERENCE,

Which were Published after the Author's Death. The subjects treated upon in these sermons, have been always esteemed, by well-grounded Christians, to have the greatest influence both upon our duty and comfort.

The promises of God are the matter of our faith, and ground of our hope. Faith in these precious promises, is that grace which conveys to us our interest in them, and draws forth the strength and sweetness of them.

An honest open profession of that faith, not only in words, or instituted solemnities of public worship, but in all holy conversation and godliness, is the distinguishing mark of the churches of Christ in the world.

And a steady adherence to that profession, in times of temptation and great backsliding, is the believer's unquestionable duty, interest, and honour.

These great points, of spiritual and practical religion, you have here opened and urged, with that plainness, gravity, and good judgment, by which the late Reverend Mr. Traill has been well known in his former evangelical discourses. If any thing here shall seem less correct, it will easily be imputed to the usual disadvantages of posthumous productions.

But surely great candour and tenderness will be thought due to such orphans, as are turned out into the world, destitute of those improvements which they might have received from the care and cultivation of their worthy parents, if they had not been by death deprived of them.

In compliance with some of the author's particular friends, who were desirous to have these sermons made public, we would recommend them to the perusal of all such as are desirous to live more by faith upon the promises of God, and to be just and true to their holy profession. That the God of all grace would make them effectual to these good purposes, is the earnest prayer of

Their servants for Jesus' sake:

WILL. TONGUE

JOHN NISBET

MATT. CLARK.

AN ACCOUNT OF THE LIFE AND CHARACTER OF THE AUTHOR.

The Rev. Mr. Robert Traill was descended of an ancient family, that had been in possession of the estate of Blebo, in Fife, from the time of Walter Traill, archbishop of St. Andrews, 1385, who purchased it, and gave it to his nephew. Robert Traill, son of James Traill, and father of our author, was minister first of Ely, in the east of Fife, afterwards of the Gray friars church in Edinburgh, and was much distinguished for his fidelity and zeal in discharging the duties of his function. He married Jean Annan, of the family of Auchterallan, by whom he had three sons and three daughters; William, who died minister of Borthwick; Robert, the author of the following sermons; James, lieutenant of the garrison in Stirling castle; Helen, married to Mr. Thomas Paterson, minister of Borthwick; Agnes, married to Sir James Stewart of Goodtrees, Lord Advocate of Scotland, and Margaret, married to James Scot of Bristo, writer in Edinburgh. At the restoration, Mr. Traill, with other ministers, was prosecuted before the Scotch council, and, in consequence of their sentence, was imprisoned seven months in Edinburgh, and banished from the realm. His answers to his libel do him much honour, as a man and a Christian. From these, and some of his private letters still extant, he appears to have been a judicious and holy servant of our Lord Jesus Christ. He afterward returned to Scotland, and died during the time of the persecution; we have seen nothing of his in print, but a letter to his wife and children, from Holland. His son Robert, the subject of this Memoir, was born at Ely, May 1642. After the usual course of education at home, he was sent to the university of Edinburgh, where he recommended himself to the several professors, by his capacity and diligent application to his studies.

Having determined to devote himself to the work of the ministry, he pursued the study of divinity with great ardour for several years. He was intimate with the Rev. William Guthrie of Finwick, and several others of the Presbyterian ministers; and was present when Mr. James Guthrie suffered death for his adherence to the peculiar principles of the Scottish church. His father being banished, had taken refuge in Holland; the family he left behind him were in great straits; in this situation our author had no settled residence. In 1666, he was obliged to lurk for some time, together with his mother and elder brother, because some copies of a book, entitled, *An Apologetic Relation, &c.* which the privy council had ordered to be publicly burnt, were found in Mrs. Traill's house. At that time the Presbyterians in Scotland were treated with great severity, and the privy council, in the execution of cruel laws that had been enacted by the legislature, at the instigation of the bishops, was continually harassing them by their tyrannical edicts, enjoining conformity to the established prelatical church, under most unreasonable civil pains and penalties, and enforcing their arbitrary and intolerant decrees by the terror of military quarter and execution. These harsh and unjustifiable methods provoked many of that oppressed and unhappy people; and inflamed their spirits to that degree, that they took up arms, and advanced the length of Pentland-hills, near Edinburgh, where they were totally defeated and dispersed in an engagement with the king's forces. Our author was suspected of being among those that were in arms; and a proclamation was issued by the council for apprehending him, which obliged him to retire to Holland, to his father, where he arrived in the beginning of the year 1667. Here he continued to study divinity, and assisted Nethenus, professor of divinity in the university of Utrecht, in the republication of Rutherford's *Examination of Arminianism*. In the preface to his edition of that book, Nethenus speaks of Mr. Robert Traill as a pious, prudent, learned, and industrious young man. Coming over to Britain in 1670, he was ordained to the ministry by some Presbyterian clergymen in London. Being in Edinburgh in 1677, he preached privately. Here, in the month of July, he was apprehended and brought before the privy council. To them, he acknowledged he had kept house-conventicles; being interrogate, if he had preached at field-conventicles, he referred that to proof, and declined to answer, it being criminal by law; upon which he was ordered by the council to purge himself, by oath, of preaching or hearing at them. This he peremptorily refused, as what, in justice, he could not be obliged to do in his own cause. He owned he had conversed with Mr. John Welsh, on the English border. He was on these accounts sent to the Bass. Here he enjoyed the company of Messrs. Frazer of Brae, Peden, and others, confined for their attachment to the testimony of Jesus. From this prison he was relieved, by order of government, in the month of October the same year. Afterwards he returned to England, and preached in a meeting house at Cranbrook, a small town in Kent. From this he removed to London, where for many years he was pastor to a Scottish congregation, there he laboured faithfully and successfully, performing the duties of his ministry, both on Sabbaths and in a lecture on week days; he modestly details his experience in the following words:—I have no name to come to God in but Christ. My own name is abominable to myself, and deservedly hateful in heaven. No other name is given under heaven, but that of Jesus Christ, in which a sinner may safely approach unto God. Since the Father is well pleased with this name, and the Son commands me to ask in it, and the Holy Ghost hath brought this name to me, and made it as ointment poured forth, Song 1:3, and since its savour hath reached my soul, I will try to lift it up as incense to perfume the altar and throne above; since all that ever come in this name are made welcome, I will come also, having no plea but Christ's name, no covering but his borrowed and gifted robe of righteousness. I need nothing, I will ask nothing, but what his blood hath bought (and all that, I will ask); I will expect answers of peace and acceptance only in that blessed beloved—beloved of the Father, both as his Son and our Saviour, and beloved of all that ever saw but a little of his grace and glory.

In 1691, upon the republication of Dr. Crisp's works, a flood of legal doctrine seemed to break in among the Dissenting ministers and others in London—a sort of medium between Calvinism and Arminianism was proposed, and the doctrines of grace, as explained by the Reformers, were branded as Antinomianism.

2. In this controversy, Dr. Chauncy, Messrs. Thomas Cole, Nathaniel Mather, Thomas Goodwin, younger, and others, with much ability defended the doctrines of the Gospel; among these Mr. Traill appeared with much lustre, as a well informed and evangelical divine. In his sermons preached about that time, particularly on Galatians 2:21, he clearly illucidates the doctrines of grace; and in a letter to a country minister (afterwards published,) he plainly discovers his sentiments and spirit, and throws much light on the

controverted subjects. The late celebrated Hervey says of this letter, “This is a judicious performance, it rightly divides the word of truth, and lays the line, with a masterly hand, between the presumptuous Legalist, and the licentious Antinomian.”

This excellent man died May 1716, aged 74. During his life-time, he published a sermon in the morning exercise, on 1 Timothy 4:16, in answer to the question, By what Means may Ministers best win Souls to Christ, 1682; afterwards, **Thirteen Sermons on the Throne of Grace**, Hebrews 4:16; and Sixteen Sermons on the Lord’s Prayer, John 17:24; after his death was published a volume, entitled, Stedfast Adherence to the Professions of our Faith, from Hebrews 10:23. This is prefaced and recommended by the Rev. Messrs. Tong, Nisbet, and Clarke, eminent ministers in London. In 1778 and 1779, was published another volume, transcribed from Mr. Traill’s MSS eleven of these are from 1 Peter 1:1-4 and six on Galatians 2:21. He also wrote a short account of the Rev. William Guthrie, author of a small but excellent tract, The Trial of a Saving Interest in Christ; and a recommendation of Marshall on Sanctification. As a number of Mr. Traill’s writings have been so long before the public, and have met with the universal approbation of the judicious and serious, it will be unnecessary to say much in their recommendation. They breathe that spirit of piety for which the author was so distinguished. The subjects of which they treat are intimately connected with the Christian life here, in prospect of future glory; while they exhibit the supernatural doctrines and privileges of the gospel to faith; they are improved for the excitement of believers to duty, to conformity to Jesus, for their establishment in grace and abundant comfort in the world. Matter so solid, evangelical, and heavenly, treated in a manner so practical and savoury, is fit for edifying every class of Christians, and cannot fail to be acceptable to all who have a relish for the things of the Spirit of God. They are indeed void of superfluous and gaudy ornaments. The reader of modern taste will not find in them that laboured elegance, or pomp of words, the artificial structure of sentences, or the dry reasoning, the affected declamation, or the vehement pathos of address, which may be met with in so many works on religious topics, written at a more late period. But those who have some higher end in view in reading, than to amuse themselves with words, or the trifling gratification of a refined taste, will find precious truths, conveyed in a manner more becoming the simplicity of the gospel, and more adapted to general instruction. Of all the qualities requisite in discourses from the pulpit, or for the use of people at large, plainness of language, and perspicuity of manner, are among the principal and most needful: these characters are apparent in every part of these discourses. Considering the time in which they were composed, they are remarkably free of any thing, either in style or method, that might make them appear intricate, obscure, or offensive to Christian readers, even in this present refined age. The ministers of the New Testament, as the apostles were, are debtors both to the Greek and to the Barbarian, to the learned and unlearned; and are bound, no less than they were, to use great plainness of speech, without employing veils of any kind to conceal the revealed mystery and glory of the gospel,—that so light might be imparted to the understanding, and the truth at the same time brought home to the hearts and consciences of men. Thus did this faithful confessor and labourer in the vineyard of the Lord;—whose printed works, since his death, have been useful to many, and through a more extensive circulation, by the divine blessing, may still edify many more. The relations of Mr. Traill, in Scotland, still possess several volumes of his notes; it is also supposed, there may be in London some MSS sermons of this excellent author in the libraries of the religious. It would be highly gratifying, were these sought out, and delivered to those, who would actively engage in their publication. It is intended to publish a volume of these, if encouragement be given.

FOOTNOTES:

1. In the conclusion of his libel, he says to the Scottish Parliament, I must, in all humility, beg leave to intreat your Lordships, that you seriously consider what you do with poor ministers, who have been so long kept, not only from their liberty of preaching the gospel, but of hearing it; that so many congregations are laid desolate for so long a time and many poor souls have put up their regrets on their death-bed, for their being deprived of a word of comfort from their ministers in the hour of their greatest need. The Lord give you wisdom in all things, and pour out upon you the spirit of your high and weighty employment—of understanding, and of the fear of the Lord; that your government may be blessed for this land and kirk; that you may live long and happily; that your memory may be sweet and fragrant when you are gone; that you

may leave your name for a blessing to the Lord's people; that your houses and families may stand long, and flourish to the years of many generations; that you may have solid peace and heart joy in the hour of the breaking of your heart strings, when pale death will sit on your eye-lids, and when man must go to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets, for what man is he that liveth and shall not see death; or can he deliver himself from the power of the grave? No, assuredly, for even those to whom he saith, Ye are gods, must die as men, seeing it is appointed for all men once to die, and after death is the judgment, and after judgment an endless eternity. Let me therefore exhort your Lordships, in the words of a great king, a great warrior also, and a holy prophet. "Be wise, and be instructed, ye judges of the earth, serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice before him with trembling. Kiss the Son lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way; when his wrath is kindled but a little, then blessed will all those, and those only, be, who put their trust to him."

2. Almost the same controversy agitated in our own church, some years after, about the Marrow of Modern Divinity.

PREFACE.

What is in this book offered to your reading, was, some years since, preached, in the ordinary course of my ministry, on a week-day, with no more thought (that is, none at all) of printing it, than I had of publishing this way any thing I have preached these seven and twenty years, wherein I have been exercised in the ministry of the word, save one single sermon extorted from me about fourteen years ago. The publishing of such plain discourses, is singly owing to the importunity of some of the hearers, and to the assistance they gave me, by getting what I spake transcribed from two short-hand writers: without which I could not have published it; my own notes being only little scraps of heads of doctrine, and scriptures confirming them. In the same way I had brought to me what I spake from Hebrews 10:23, 24 and have it lying by me; which may also see the light, if the Lord will that I live: and if this be accepted of such whose testimony I only value; I mean such as are sound in the faith, and exercised in the life of faith. I know no true religion but Christianity; no true Christianity but the doctrine of Christ; of his divine person, (the image of the invisible God, Colossians 1:15); of his divine office, (the Mediator betwixt God and men, 1 Timothy 2:5); of his divine righteousness, (he is the Lord our Righteousness, Jeremiah 23:6; which name is also called upon his church, chapter 33:16); and of his divine Spirit, (which all that are his receive, Romans 8:9). I know no true ministers of Christ, but such as make it their business, in their calling, to commend Jesus Christ, in his saving fulness of grace and glory, to the faith and love of men; no true Christian, but one united to Christ by faith, and abiding in him by faith and love, unto the glorifying of the name of Jesus Christ, in the beauties of gospel-holiness. Ministers and Christians of this spirit, have for many years been my brethren and companions, and, I hope, shall ever be, whithersoever the hand of God shall lead me. Through the Lord's mercy to me, (as to many in London), I have often heard what is far more worthy of the press, than any thing I can publish. I have not been negligent in desiring such able ministers of the New Testament, to let their light shine this way; but have little prevailed. It may be this mean essay may provoke them more to that good work. Whatever you may think of my way of managing this subject, (and indeed there is nothing in that, either as designed or expected by me, or that in itself deserveth any great regard); yet the theme itself, all must judge, who have spiritual senses, is of great importance, and always seasonable. It is concerning the throne of God's saving grace, reared up in Jesus Christ, and revealed unto men in the gospel; with the application all should make to that throne, the great blessings to be reaped by that application, and men's great need of those blessings. This greatest of subjects is meanly, but honestly, handled in the same order in which it was preached, and mostly in the same words. Some few passages out of history are inserted, which were not spoken. May the Lord of the harvest, who ministered this seed to the sower, make it bread to the eater, and accompany it with his blessing on some that are called to inherit a blessing, and I have my end and desire; the reader shall have the benefit; and the Lord the glory; for of him, and through him, and to him, are all things; to whom be glory for ever. Amen.

ROBERT TRAILL
London, March 25, 1696

FOOTNOTE: 1. These sermons were published after the author's death. The book is intitled, A Stedfast Adherence to the Profession of our Faith.

SERMON I **Hebrews 4:16**

Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace, to help in time of need.

The main drift of the blessed apostle, the Holy Ghost's penman, in this excellent epistle, is to set forth the pre-eminence of our Lord Jesus Christ, first, in his divine person, far above all angels, who are bid worship him, even when dwelling in man's nature. If the god-head of our Lord Jesus Christ be hid from the readers of this epistle, it must be a special power of the God of this world on their unbelieving minds (2 Cor 4:3,4). Will blinded men forbear to call the Son God, when the Father speaks so? (1:8) Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever. Then the apostle speaks of his incarnation (2:11, &c). And therewith speaks of his priesthood (chapter 3). The apostle compares Christ with, and prefers him above Moses (chapter 3); then above Aaron as a priest, (chapter 7); and compares him with Melchizedec, an eminent type of Christ. By this epistle we may know what Paul's reasonings with the Jews were (Acts 9:22; 17:2,3) and what is the right way of dealing with the Jews at this day. Till Christ's divine person, and righteousness, and priesthood, have more room in the religion of the Gentiles, Christianity is not like to leaven the Jews. This doctrine of Christ's priesthood, and of the sacrifice of himself he offered in that office, the apostle doth often intermix, with suitable exhortations from it; as in the context (v 14). Seeing then that we have a great high priest, (all the Old Testament high priests were but types and shadows of him, and were but little high priests), that is passed into the heavens, (no high priest but Christ went farther than the holy of holies, for the people's advantage), Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. The dignity of Christ in his advanced state, as well as his grace in his humbled state, lays Christians under a strong engagement to cleave to him with stedfast confidence. Yet for as great as this person is, and for all that he is in heaven, and in unspeakable dignity and glory there, you must not think, that he in heaven, and we on earth, can have no communion: (v 15) For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; (Though now he hath none of his own, yet can he feel those of his people, and his feeling engageth speedy relief. The reason the apostle gives for this sympathy of Christ with his people, is from Christ's experience when on earth); but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. The apostle delivers the mind of the Holy Ghost about Christ's sympathy negatively, We have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities: in which manner of expression he reflects on the meanness of the Levitical priests, to whom it was impossible to know and feel all the infirmities of the people, for whom yet they appeared before God; and he implies the affirmative strongly, We have an high priest which can be (and is) touched with the feeling of our infirmities. How a sinless man as Christ ever was, can be touched with the feeling of the infirmities of sinners, and many of these infirmities sinful ones; how a glorified man, as Christ now is, exalted to, and possessed of the highest glory and bliss, can be, and is touched with the feeling of all the infirmities of all his people, is what the word plainly reveals to be believed; but it is not to be fully known till we come to heaven. But he is the head, and all his people are his body, his members, of his flesh, and of his bones (Eph 5:30). A marvellous word! Can the flesh be torn, and the bones be broken, and the head not feel it? Though he be glorified above what we can conceive, he is a living, sensible, and compassionate head; and as nearly and closely united to all his members now, as when they saw with their eyes, and heard with their ears, and with their hands handled the word of life (1 John 1:1). There is nothing ails a poor believer in Christ, there is no groan riseth from his distressed heart, but it is immediately felt at the tender heart of the Lord Jesus, at the Father's right-hand. We would groan and sing with the same breath,

if we believed this firmly. In my text, there is a most blessed exhortation, from this same ground of Christ's sympathy in heaven, unto a bold approaching to the throne of grace. The nativeness and strength of the inference, is obvious to the most ordinary attention. The exhortation is unto the improving of the greatest privilege, an erected and revealed throne of grace; and that in the practice of the greatest duty, believing approaching unto his throne, or unto God sitting on this throne of grace. What I would take up in, and handle, in speaking to these words, shall be the resolution of four weighty questions, which should be in the hearts of all worshippers of God.

1. The first great question is, Where may I find God? This was Job's question and wish: (Job 23:3) O that I knew where I might find him! that I might come even to his seat! And that this seat was a throne of grace to Job, is evident from verse 6. This text tells you, God is on a throne of grace: a fit place for God to be sought in, and where only he can be found graciously by a sinner.

2. The second question is, How should we come to God on this throne? Let us come boldly, saith the apostle. The original word signifieth, coming freely; with free, open, bold speaking, pouring out all our hearts and minds to him. Let us come, without making use of saint or angel to introduce us to this throne. Any poor sinner may come himself alone to this court, and that boldly, without fear of being repulsed.³ The third question is the hardest, What ground hath a sinner for this boldness? The ground the apostle gives for it, is hinted in the word therefore, which relates to verse 14, 15, because of Jesus the Son of God, our great high priest in heaven. If we had not such an high priest, ministering in glory at the high altar above, no sinner could come boldly to the throne of grace on earth. So he argues, chapter 10:19-22.⁴ The last question is, What shall we get, and for what may we come to this throne of grace? The apostle speaks fully to this in the text: Let us come, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need. These precious things, mercy and grace, are scattered round this throne. Any poor needy creature should come for a saving alms from this throne, and may have it for the coming.

HEAD. I. The first of these I would begin with. Where is God to be found?

The apostle tells us, on a throne of grace. The word is only here; no where else in the scriptures is the word to be found: but what is signified by it, is frequently in the Old and New Testament, as we shall hear. But though the phrase, The throne of grace, be only once named in this (Heb 4:16), yet the thing signified is so precious, and the expression of it so savoury, significant, and suitable, that this form of speaking, The throne of grace, is become famous, known, and used among Christians and will doubtless be till the end of time. As long as God hath a mind to give mercy and grace, as long as any of the children of men are sensibly needy of grace and mercy, and askers and receivers thereof from the Lord, (and that will be till the heavens be no more), this throne of grace will be plied and praised. I would first consider the proper meaning of this word, a throne of grace. It is obvious, that the apostle, in this epistle, doth every where (if I may use a much abused word) christen the Old Testament types, and gives them New Testament names, and applies them to the doctrine of Christ he is teaching the Christian Jews he writes to. The Old Testament church knew what a high priest was, what his institution, office, and performance were in the tabernacle in the wilderness, and in the temple of Solomon in Canaan: but both Aaron and his successors, and the tabernacle and temple, were but types and shadows of Jesus Christ in his person and office. There was the holiest of all, into which the high priest went alone, and only once a year; in this was the ark of the covenant, and the mercy seat, and cherubims covering it: whence these common expressions in the Old Testament, of God's dwelling between the cherubims, and of believers trusting in the shadow of his wings. Now, the holiest of all was their type of heaven; and the ark, cherubims, and mercy seat, were all but shadows (as the apostle calls them, Hebrews 10:1) of our Lord Jesus Christ, and of that peace with God, and access to God, that he hath wrought ought for men. More particularly, that most sacred of all things in the Jewish Old Testament worship, that was called the mercy seat, the apostle calls a throne of grace; thereby teaching us, that whatever of divine grace was revealed and tendered to, or perceived and received by the faith of the Old Testament believers, in their right use of these sacred old institutions of God to his church, the same, with great advantage, believers under the New Testament have in Jesus Christ, the body, antitype, and substance of them. We find three most solemn things in the Old Testament, in which the mercy seat (the type of the throne of grace in the

New Testament) was applied unto, 1. The most solemn approach was made unto God, in the high priest's going in once a year to the holiest of all, where the mercy seat was. This was made, not by the people in their own persons; nor by any ordinary Levite, who were privileged with a greater nearness to God than the people (Num 16:9), nor by any of the inferior priests of the house of Aaron, to which family the office of priesthood was by divine appointment confined; nor by the high priest himself, but only once a year, at a determinate time, and with many appointed ceremonies of preparation and performance. Some tell us of a custom in their worship, that music, by singing and instruments, was used by the people, to express their joy and praise, when the high priest returned safe out from that sacred and awful place, the holy of holies.

2. The most solemn atonement for the sins of Israel was made at the mercy seat. This was done in that yearly entrance of the high priest into the holiest of all (Lev 16:12,13, especially v 14). And he (Aaron the first of that order of priests) shall take of the blood of the bullock, and sprinkle it with his finger upon the mercy seat eastward: and before the mercy seat shall he sprinkle of the blood with his finger seven times. Verse 30 On that day shall the priest make an atonement for you, to cleanse you, that ye may be clean from all your sins before the Lord.

3. The most solemn answers were given by God to their high priest (Exo 25:17-22) where we have the institution of the mercy seat, and the form of it: And there (saith the Lord) I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee; and again, Exodus 30:6. What the Old Testament Urim and Thummim was, and what their Shechinah was, neither Jew now, nor Christian know, though they guess; only that they were special manifestations of the grace, and favour, and mind of God, which expired with, and some of them, it is thought, before the end of that ministration. But all these three glories, and dignities, and advantages of their mercy seat, are all to be found in Christ Jesus; who represents his people before God, and presents them to him; who hath made the perfect atonement for all his Israel; and who declares to his church all the saving will of God, which he heard and received of his Father. The apostle here in this epistle, and in this text, would have all believers in Christ to know, that the New Testament throne of grace is the same in substance with, and with great advantage above the Old Testament mercy seat. See Hebrews 9:4-8. The truth I would speak to is this:

DOCTRINE. That God in the gospel sits on a throne of grace, and from it calls and invites sinners to come unto him. Let us come to the throne of grace, certainly means, Let us now come to God sitting on a throne of grace; let us take both direction and encouragement to come to God, because he is on a throne of grace. In handling of this point of doctrine, I would shew three things:

- I. What this throne of grace is, and how distinguished from other thrones of God spoke of in the word.
- II. Why it is so called, a throne, and a throne of grace.
- III. What coming to this throne is.

I. What is this throne of grace, and how distinguished from other thrones of God spoke of in the word? These other I would first name, to prevent mistakes.

1. We find a throne of glory much spoke of: a throne of the essential, incomprehensible glory of God. This no man can approach to. Of this the apostle speaks, 1 Timothy 6:16. He dwelleth in light that no man can approach to, whom no man hath seen, nor can see. Marvellous is this light. We find the more light there be in or about a person or thing, the more easily and clearly it is perceived: as the sun is such a glorious body, that though it be at a vast distance from the earth we dwell on, we yet can take it up with our eyes immediately. As soon as it shines, we can see it, because of its light. It is its own light, and nothing else, that doth, or can discover it. If the sun did withdraw its own light, all the eyes of men, and all the artificial fire and light men can make, would never help us to find it out. But such is the majesty of God, that he is clothed with it (Psa 93:1). Men are dazzled and confounded by a little ray of his glory: With God is terrible majesty (Job 37:22). This is not the throne we are called to come unto. They are but triflers in religion, that know not in their experience how overwhelming the views and thoughts of God's majesty and glory are, when he is not seen as on a throne of grace. I remembered God, and was troubled, saith one saint (Psa 77:3). I am troubled at his presence; when I consider, I am afraid of him, saith another (Job 23:15). No wonder Manoa

said unto his wife, We shall surely die, because we have seen God (Judg 13:22) when a view of the heavenly glory of Jesus Christ makes John, who was wont to lean on his bosom in his humbled state, to fall down at his feet as dead (Rev 1:17).² There is a throne of God's government of the world oft spoke of (Psa 9:4,7). On this throne God sits, and rules all things at his pleasure, and in infinite wisdom. This throne is to be believingly regarded by us; but it is not the throne of grace that sinners are called to come unto for grace and mercy.³ There is a throne of God's justice spoken of. This is that throne David deprecates his being brought before, (Psa 143:2) Enter not into judgment with thy servant: for in thy sight shall no man living be justified. If a man be wronged and oppressed by men stronger than he, he may appeal to this throne of justice, and expect redress. But if a man's business be with God, he should be afraid of this throne of justice. Men are oft proud and vain in their thoughts, and before others: but if the Lord call them before this high court of justice, they will surely be cast: (Job 9:2,3) How should a man be just with God? If he will contend with him, he cannot answer him one of a thousand. When God sits on a throne of justice, to judge men according to his law and their works, nothing but condemnation can justly be pronounced on sinners. Whoever he be of sinful Adam's seed that expecteth saving favour from God's throne of justice, will find himself woefully deceived.⁴ We find the throne of the last judgment. Before this all must appear (2 Cor 5:10; Rev 20:12). This is not the throne of grace in the text. No grace nor mercy is shown to any from this throne, but to them that have plied and sped at the throne of grace before. When our Lord comes, and sits on the throne of his glory (Matt 25:31) no sinner that hath despised his grace now, will find any quarter then (Luke 19:27). What then is this throne of grace? It is God in Christ dealing with men according to the grace of the gospel. It is God in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not imputing to them their trespasses (2 Cor 5:19). It is Christ set forth by God to be a propitiation (Rom 3:25). This is the true mercy seat, or throne of grace, or propitiation (1 John 2:2, 4:10). This is the new court or throne erected by God, and declared in the gospel, to which sinful man is invited to come.

II. Why is it called a throne and a throne of grace?

Passing what is said of the apostle's alluding to the mercy seat in the tabernacle and temple of old,

1. It is called a throne, because of the glory and majesty of God manifested here. God's condescending to display and dispense his grace and mercy to sinners, is no debasing of God, but an advancing of his glory. When he gives grace, he acts royally, and as a king, with majesty. Araunah's offering to David, is said to be like a king (2 Sam 24:23). He was no king, but a subject; but he had a free, noble heart. The Lord on this throne of grace, dispenseth all acts of grace with great majesty, and as a king; but not as a King Judge, and Ruler, but as a King Benefactor, and Giver. This royalty of grace shines, 1. In the greatness of the gifts, grace, and mercy; vastly above all that the creation can give.

2. In the manner of giving; free, sovereignly free. Grace and mercy is his own, and he doth with them as he will. When Moses prays, (Exo 33:18) I beseech thee, shew me thy glory, we cannot conceive what was in his holy heavenly heart. He was now just come down from the mount the first time; he is going up again to spend other forty days there, in such communion with God as never mere man enjoyed before or since out of heaven; he had prevailed with God for Israel, and hath a most gracious answer, (v 17) and the Lord said unto Moses, I will do this thing also that thou hast spoken: for thou hast found grace in my sight, and I know thee by name. What means Moses then by this prayer? (v 18). Whatever he meant, the Lord's answer is much to be observed, (v 19) And he said, I will make all my goodness (or beauty) pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before thee. (What is in this name that hath so much of glory and goodness in it, as should satisfy such a mighty hungerer for more of God, as Moses was?) I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will shew mercy on whom I will shew mercy. God's glory shines highly, in his being the sovereign disposer of his own grace and mercy; and happy is the believer that adores this glorious sovereignty. Paul in Romans 9:15-25 makes a deep improvement of it. (Jer 17:12) A glorious high throne from the beginning, is the place of our sanctuary. See then that you, in all your pleadings for grace and mercy, remember that you are before a high stately throne. Approaches to God on the throne of grace, should be managed with the deepest reverence and humility. So did the publican, when he came to it, (Luke 18:13) God be merciful (propitious) to me a sinner, (or me the sinner, the great singular sinner. So the Greek

runs, as Luke 7:37,39.) The deepest, profoundest adoration of the glorious majesty of God, is performed by a self-condemned sinner, pleading at this throne for the obtaining of the sovereign free grace of God. Lastly, It is called a throne, because grace reigns and is enthroned here: (Rom 5:21) Grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal life, by Jesus Christ our Lord. Blessed reign! and blessed are all that are under the reign and dominion of the grace of God. Sin reigns through the unrighteousness of the first Adam unto eternal death, if men be let alone, and if grace do not break this reign of sin. And grace reigns through the righteousness of the second Adam unto eternal life. And nothing can dethrone grace; it will prevail and reach its end, eternal life, in all it falls upon. O that captives to Satan, and slaves to sin and the law, would long to be under the reign of this stately power, the grace of God! and that believers themselves would give a more free and large subjection to it!

2. It is called a throne of grace,

1st, Because grace entered and reared it up: (Psa 89:2) Mercy shall be built up for ever. Nothing but grace and mercy framed the throne of grace. I may allude to the Lord's stately words to Job (38:4-6) speaking of the first creation, (but this throne of grace was fixed before, as the King himself saith, (Prov 8:23) I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was), Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth?—and, Who laid the cornerstone thereof? No creature was on the council; it is a divine contrivance. But, now it is revealed, our faith, on the ground of this revelation, may, and should go back, and take a refreshing view of this eternal contrivance. The Lord builds a house of mercy, that a company of sinners may dwell in, with him, for ever. What laid the cornerstone of this throne, but grace? What brings in the inhabitants, preserves them, and perfects them, but grace? For whom is it prepared, and by whom shall this house of mercy be possessed, and with whom shall it be filled, but with vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory (Rom 9:23). 2dly, It is called a throne of grace, because grace hath here, and here only, a glorious display and discovery. Till men get a sight of God in Christ, they cannot tell what the grace of God is. Search heaven and earth, you can never get a view of God's grace, till ye come to this throne. You may see God's infinite power, and wisdom, and goodness, written in great characters, in the great volume of creation and providence; but till ye come to know God in Christ on this throne, you can never see that divine dainty, and saving blessing, the free grace of God; grace, as an everlasting fountain in the heart of God, pouring down, streaming forth eternal salvation on ruined unworthy sinners. Men should make a visit to the throne of grace, if they had no other errand but to get a sight of this precious thing, the grace of God. A right sight of it is saving. Believers should long to be in heaven, if they had no other errand, than to see the spring-head of that flood of grace that came down from heaven, to drag them out of hell, and to draw them up to heaven.

3dly, It is called a throne of grace, because all the acts and sentences passed at this new court, are all acts of grace. All the blessings given from this throne, are all of mere grace. Nothing is here but grace: (John 1:17) The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. Was there no grace nor truth under the law? Yes, a great deal; but it all belonged to Jesus Christ. There was grace under the law, but none but what related to Jesus Christ. There was truth under the law, but only as Christ was pointed at; otherwise all were but vain and beggarly rudiments, and empty dark shadows. The Jews see nothing of Christ in the Old Testament, and therefore find neither the saving mercy nor saving truth of God in it. And it is much worse with men (Christians I cannot call them) that see as little of Christ in the New Testament. Take the chain of salvation, and all the links of it, as the apostle names them (Rom 8:29,30) and all of them are of grace. We are chosen by grace; we are given to Christ by grace; redeemed by him by grace; by grace we are justified through that redemption; by the same grace we are adopted; by the same grace we are saved, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; and by grace we shall be glorified. And they that will not claim these blessings, and hold them by this tenor of free grace, I dare not say that they shall never have them, (for this grace can overcome its greatest enemies); but I may say, that they have at present no part or portion in this matter; and when they come to partake of grace, and to know the grace of God in truth, as Colossians 1:6, they will be of another mind, and count it the best tenor to hold all by, even by free grace: yea, after all the riches of grace poured forth on believers in this life, when they come to receive the crown of glory, they receive it as humbly, yea more than they did any former act of grace from this throne. The overcomer by the blood of the Lamb, will receive the crown from his glorious Redeemer, as humbly, and

with owning it as a gift of grace, as much as ever he did receive a pardon in that blood, when his head was on the block, and the ax of law and justice lifted up to cut him off for his iniquity. There may be proud pleaders for (or rather presumers and expecters of) the crown of glory, but no proud receivers of it. We must look for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life (Jude 21). Merit and worth are only for hell; and they have no room in heaven, nor in the way to it. Justice reigns in hell, and grace in heaven. So all will find that come to heaven; and so must they all know and believe that would be there. Sinners that are for merit, will find it sadly in hell. Men's merit makes hell, and Christ's merit makes heaven (Rom 6:23).

4thly, It is called a throne of grace, because the glory of grace is the last and highest end of the building of this throne, and of all the acts of grace dispensed at it, and from it. That proud monarch spoke vainly and wickedly (Dan 4:30) and was quickly by God punished severely for his sin. If we may be allowed to allude to such words, we may say of the throne of grace, Is it not that high throne that God hath built for the house of his kingdom, by the might of his power, and for the honour of the majesty of his grace? Are any chosen in Christ, and predestinated to the adoption of children by him? It is to the praise of the glory of his grace (Eph 1:4-6). Do they believe by grace? It is to the praise of his glory (v 12). Are they sealed, and at last possessed of heaven? That is to the praise of his glory (v 14). Are they quickened when dead in sin, and advanced in and by Christ Jesus? This is to the praise of his grace (Eph 2:4,7). All the blessings in time and eternity that the heirs of grace enjoy, are all to the praise and glory of that grace they spring from. We read in the word of none of the counsels of God before the creation of all things, but of his purpose of saving a company of poor sinful men by Jesus Christ; and of no other design in this purpose, but to magnify his grace in saving of them this way. So much of the signification of this word, a throne of grace.

III. What is it to come unto this throne of grace?

Though the prosecuting of the exhortation in this text will open up the nature of this coming more fully, yet I would speak somewhat of it in this place.

1. This coming implies a state of distance from this throne in them that are called to come. This is called being far off (Eph 2:13). And this state all men by nature are in. Men are in God's eye and hand: He is not far from every one of us: for in him we live, and move, and have our being (Acts 17:27,28); as the psalmist speaks excellently in Psalm 139 of the nearness of men to God, and of his omnipresence and omniscience. But his gracious presence, as on a throne of grace, is far from all men by nature, and they far from it. This presence is far from man's knowledge; there is no knowing of it but by revelation: far from men's attainment; for no man can come, unless he be drawn of God (John 6:44): far from their experience, and far from their love; for they are alienated from the life of God (Eph 4:18). And in his favour is life (Psa 30:5), and in nothing else.

2. It is also implied in this call to come, that there is a gracious provision made and revealed by God for the removal and making up of his distance, and getting of a gracious nearness to God. This is in the constitution and revelation of this throne of grace.

3. That the improving of this provision is men's duty, and should be their exercise, in order to possess and enjoy the privilege and advantage of this provision.

What then is this coming to the throne of grace?

1. It is in believing on Jesus Christ. This is the first approach to the throne of grace. He is the propitiation, and mercy seat, and throne of grace (1 John 4:10). Believing on him, is coming to him (John 6:35). It is coming to the Father by him (John 14:6). It is believing on God by him (1 Peter 1:21). It is believing on him, and on him that sent him (John 12:44). Believing on Jesus Christ, is an employing of Christ in way of trust, as to all his fulness of grace, and our utter indigence thereof. Whatever a man do, whatever exercises of religion he be taken up in, he never comes to the throne of grace, till his heart and soul go forth towards Jesus Christ for righteousness and life. The first right step heavenward, is saving faith in Christ. Nothing savingly good can precede it, and all saving good follows it: for faith unites the man to Christ, and all the fruits of holiness and righteousness spring from the virtue of the vine Christ; with whom the believer hath first union by grace, and then communion of Christ's grace, by which he lives, and works, and grows.

2. Coming to this throne, is acted in all acts of gospel worship, and in the use of all gospel ordinances. They all belong to the throne of grace, are the institutions of this throne, and appointed as means wherein we should approach to it; and which, when blessed by the appointer of them, do convey to us the blessings of this throne.

Of them there are several.

1. Prayer. This is coming to the throne of grace, if rightly managed. Though asking is not expressed in this verse, yet it is strongly implied, both in the commanded coming, and in the expressed obtaining of mercy, and finding of grace to help in time of need. All that make a fashion of prayer, do not come to the throne of grace; yet all that pray rightly, do come to it. And because this approaching to the throne of grace by and in prayer, is plainly hinted in the text, and is so commonly understood by Christians, I would have my eye principally upon it in handling this scripture.

2. There is the word read, preached, and meditated on, that is another principal means in which men should approach to the throne of grace. In prayer we pour out our heart before this throne, and express our desires to him that sitteth on it. In the word the King on this throne delivers his will and mind to us; and we should come to hear it, and receive the law from his mouth. Cornelius expressed an excellent frame for this ordinance, (Acts 10:33) We are all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God. This word is the word of his grace (Acts 20:32). It is the proclamation of his grace to men.

3. Praising of God, is a coming to the throne of grace. This is the sacrifice we should offer by our High Priest (Heb 13:15). Who minds this as they ought? If we want, we ask; and so we should. But where is the Christian that can say, Though I had nothing to ask, I would yet go to the throne of grace, that I might praise him that sits on it? 4. Receiving of the Lord's supper, is a coming to the throne of grace; to feast on the king of grace; to feed on that body broken for us, and that blood shed for us, that is given to us in the word for food to our souls, and is given to us by his command, in bread and wine at his table; that in eating and drinking of them, we may remember him, and shew forth his death till he come; glorying, and avowing, and boasting, that we have our salvation, and all our hopes of it, built and fixed on that man Jesus Christ, that was rejected by the builders in his time, and hath had little better entertainment since, because they knew him not.

APPLICATION. Is there a throne of grace; and doth God sitting on it invite and call men to come to it, or to him on it? We are called to admire, adore, and praise the grace that shines in this constitution of God, and call to men. That person is sadly out in his praises, (and such are never right in their prayers), that doth not deeply admire, and heartily praise for this mercy of a throne of grace. We account a man ill employed in prayer, that asks many things of God, but forgets to ask the one thing needful: Is he any better employed in praise, who gives thanks for many mercies, but neglects or forgets to praise for the greatest of all mercies, the throne of grace? before which all prayer and praise must come, if accepted, and for which highest praises should be given.

In order to the raising of more sense of this highest favour, that God now deals with us on a throne of grace, consider,

1. The deep condescendence of grace that appears in this dispensation. There is a glorious and stately stooping in it. The Lord had resolved in his own heart from eternity, to have the company of many of Adam's offspring for ever with him in heaven. He seeth them fallen into a deep pit, out of which they can never get out by themselves. God and man by sin are at a vast distance. Sinners cannot remove it, nor make so much as one step towards God. Saved they cannot be, unless the distance be removed; saved they must be, because of his unalterable purpose. In this case, saith the Lord of mere grace, if men cannot ascend up to me, I will descend down to them, and draw them up again to me. This condescendence of grace we should admire and praise. When David had got a gracious message and promise from God, (and Christ and the throne of grace was in it) (2 Sam 7), he sits down as a man amazed before the Lord, and most significantly expresseth his admiration and praise, Who am I, O Lord God? and what is my house? and is this the manner of man? and what can David say more? And what can David say better? To be swallowed up of wonder, is the best and highest praising. Who can forbear wondering at grace, that considers duly whose grace it is, where it finds us, and whither it brings us? When Paul speaks of it, (and it was his usual theme), how sweetly doth he discourse of it? (Eph 2:1). Where did this grace find him and the Ephesians? what was their

case and qualification for grace? They were dead in sin, walking after the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, working powerfully in them as children of disobedience; they were fulfilling the desires and lusts of the flesh, and of the mind; they were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. Who can be lower, viler, and baser, except they that are in hell itself? yet in this case and condition grace made its first visit to them. All that this saving grace falls on, are lost and undone sinners, men at the very brink of hell. An elect child of God is worst and most sinful the moment preceding his conversion. Paul was at his worst (Acts 9) when grace fell upon him. If there be nothing but the power of grace that can subdue the corruption of nature; if this corruption grow in its strength, till that subduing power of grace be applied; and if there be no middle state betwixt death and life, (and these have been reckoned gospel truths); how plains is it, that a sinner is at his worst when saving grace first comes upon him?

2. Whither did this grace bring Paul, and the Ephesians, and so all Christians? Out of the grave of sin, unto a new life, and up to heavenly places in Christ Jesus (vv 4-6). O what a mighty arm hath the grace of God! It is nothing for grace to pull a man out of hell, and set him down in heaven. When shall this arm of Jehovah be revealed? When will perishing sinners long for a saving pull of the grace of God?

3. What is all this great work of grace for? (v 7) That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace, in his kindness towards us, through Christ Jesus. As if the apostle had said, "You and I cannot sufficiently, in our time and age, admire this kindness, grace, and riches of grace through Christ Jesus, that we have received: but as long as this world lasts, and as long as there are receivers of this same grace in future ages, (and that will be as long as the world lasts; for the world lasts for the sake of the throne of grace, and for what God hath to do on it, and to give from it), there will be praisers of this grace; for every generation of receivers of this grace, owe praises for all the grace bestowed on all that have been before them. And when this world is at an end, there is a better world that shall succeed it, wherein better and higher praises will be given for ever. There is no other music, but the praises of free grace, in heaven; and none shall sing its praises there, but the happy receivers of it here."

2. Consider the infinites wisdom of this contrivance of a throne of grace for sinners. The Lord wisely consulted poor man's case, his sinfulness, his misery, and his infirmity. No where else can God and sinners meet in peace, but at this throne of grace. Here is the manifold wisdom of God (Eph 3:10). Grace abounds in all wisdom and prudence (Eph 1:8). Yet not according to the sorry rules of the wisdom of this world, nor of the princes (or great, leading men) of this world, that come to nought: but the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom (hid to them that are lost, 2 Cor 4:3) which God ordained before the world unto our glory: which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory (1 Cor 2:6-8). God and holy angels may meet in peace, whenever he is pleased to manifest his glory to them; though they be sensible of their meanness as creatures, and deeply humble before his majesty. But where God and angels meet comfortably, God and sinners cannot meet comfortably. That light and manifestation of divine glory that makes a holy angel happy, would confound and destroy a sinful man (Isa 6:1-5). The seraphims adore humbly and praise; Isaiah, a sinner, sinks; he is terrified with the sight, and with the song. And yet this was a sight of Christ (John 12:41); but his divine majesty and holiness as God was then represented to him, which terrified the prophet. But when sin is forgiven by an act of grace (vv 6,7) then, upon the Lord's saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Isaiah answered, Here am I, send me (v 8). Now I have tasted the grace of my Lord, I will run his errands; let him send me where and on what he pleaseth. 3. Consider how costly the erecting of this throne of grace was. It was a dear building. The throne of God's essential glory is in his own super-excellent being, and falls under no acts of the divine will. When he had a mind to rear up a throne of glory to his name, in crating a world, there was no more needful but his word of power, his almighty Fiat, Let it be, and all things sprung up out of nothing, in marvellous order, and beauty, and goodness. But when a throne of grace is to be erected for sinners, there is more to be done. Here God's own Son must be made man; in that nature must be charged with their sins; and must discharge that debt, by bearing the wrath of God, and curse of the law, even unto death. Romans 3:25, the apostle gives us a description of the throne of grace: God hath set forth Christ to be a propitiation, a mercy seat, a throne of grace. But his blood went for it: law and justice exacted it, and Christ paid it. On this comes forth the blessed proclamation of grace, "Whoever he be of lost mankind that will come to this throne of grace by faith, and will receive his justification in and by this blood, and will trust to it only, shall never

come into condemnation.” This Paul preached (Acts 13:38,39). What is this grace revealed for? (Rom 3:26) To declare at this time God’s righteousness; that he might be just, and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus. We all know that God is just, and the condemner of transgressors of his holy law: but how the gospel is framed so as that God’s justice may appear in justifying of a believing sinner, is far deeper, and more hardly known and believed. But take in but these three things, and it will appear, 1st, God was just, and the punisher of the sins of the elect laid on Jesus. God’s sending of his Son, and laying of the sins of his people on him, was an act of amazing grace and mercy. But the exacting the debt of sin of him, when the Father laid it on, and the Son took it on him, was of justice, and strict glorious justice. Never did justice shine so in its glory and purity, as in bruising the Son of God for the sins that were laid on him. The sending of millions to hell for their sins, (and all must go thither that have them to answer for, [and all such have them all to answer for, who offer to pay their debt with their own coin], and have no interest in Christ’s undertaking), is a display of divine justice, that men may grumble at, but cannot hinder. The praise of spotless justice will rise up to eternity by the torments of the damned. But he that is ignorant of God’s righteousness, can far less conceive the glory of justice in bruising a sinless man, who was also in the form of God, and counted it no robbery to be equal with God (Phil 2:6) (though some in our days think it blasphemy to say so), a person beloved of the Father above all creature-thought; and that for the sins of others, and they also the beloved of the Father in his eternal purpose. 2dly, God is just in not exacting the same debt of sin twice; both of his Son, and of his people, in whose stead he paid it. 3dly, God is just in discharging of his Son, from whom he hath received the full and covenanted satisfaction for sin; and he is just in discharging them for whom this satisfaction was given. He is just in raising Christ from the dead; and he arose for our justification (Rom 4:25,26). We are justified freely by his grace; but this free, free grace flows to us through the channel of redemption by the blood of Christ. And both this grace and this blood is set forth in the gospel to our faith; and must be applied unto by faith, and applied to us in believing. Whatever the thoughts of men be of these things, free grace and dear blood are the stay of all the redeemed on earth, and the everlasting song of all the glorified in heaven. 4. And lastly, To raise your thoughts of the greatness of this favour, of having a throne of grace to come to, consider what rich provisions are made at this throne for sinners. This the text speaks of, and we shall in order handle them, We shall only now say a few words. There is no court in all God’s dominions that a sinner can come to, and find any mercy or grace, but only at this throne of grace. If you talk of law, or justice, or equity, these are all frightful courts to sensible sinners. They know their cause and case is bad; and that if they come to any bar but that of the throne of grace, they must be cast. But at this throne of grace, they that have nothing, may get all things; they that deserve nothing, may get every thing; they that deserve wrath, may obtain mercy; they that are cast and condemned at the court of justice, may be acquitted and freed from all sentences, and be adjudged to eternal life, by the grace of God in Christ Jesus. All that is needful to salvation, is dispensed at this throne. Yet all that is given, is old in the purpose of grace from eternity, old in the everlasting covenant, old in the purchase of Jesus Christ: only it is newly given according to the sinner’s necessity: (2 Tim 1:9) Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, (this was done as yesterday; but how came we by this saving and this calling?), not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, (Paul still opposeth works to grace, and grace to works, in the matter of justification and salvation; and so doth his Lord and Master that taught him, and so do all that know either grace or works rightly), which was given us in Christ Jesus, before the world began. Let this be still kept in mind, that whatever you can need, there is a suitable and abundant supply to be had at this throne of grace. I shall conclude this exercise, with naming two sorts of people that will be specially welcome to the throne of grace. 1. They that come to the throne of grace soon and early; I mean, young people, children, that begin betimes to be courtiers and attendants at this throne: (Prov 8:17) I love them that love me; and those that seek me early, shall find me, saith the King on this throne of grace. O that young people would try and use this throne of grace betimes! They would find Christ very gracious to them. He would discover his beauty, and give them of his love, that would cool their thirst after sinful pleasures. They might grow rich and strong in grace, before they be old; or if they die young, they should be transplanted to a better soil, and be nearer the Sun of Righteousness, than they can be in this world. Never did a saint get safe ashore in heaven bewail his arriving there too soon. 2. They that come to the throne of grace to get, and not to give. Take heed to your spirits in this matter. When you come to the throne of grace, come to receive out of Christ’s fulness, and

come not to bring grace with you to add to Christ's store. He loves to give, and glories in giving; but he scorns to receive grace from you; and in truth you have none but what he gives. Bring your wants to him to supply, but bring not your fulness to brag of. Spread your sins before this throne with shame and sorrow, and plead for a gracious pardon; but take heed you bring not your sorrow, tears, and repentance, nay, nor your faith itself, as a plea for that pardon. How abominable is it to Christians' ears, and how much more unto Christ's, to hear a man plead thus for pardon: "Here is my repentance; where is thy pardon? Here is my faith; where is thy justification?" I know men abhor to say so. But take good heed, lest any thought bordering on it enter into thy heart. Faith is the tongue that begs pardon? faith is the hand that receives it, it is the eye that seeth it; but it is no price to buy it. Faith useth the gospel-plea for pardon; but itself, neither in habit nor act, is the plea itself. That is only Christ's blood. Christ's blood goes for the remission of your sins, if ever they be forgiven; and is the only plea to be heard at the throne of grace. There are too many like the Pharisee (Luke 18:11). It would seem by Christ's words (v 14) that both came for justification. The Pharisee stood, and prayed thus with himself: God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are,—or as this publican. Poor wretch! The publican was a far better man than he, as Christ testifieth. He came to the throne of grace, like a man that would carry something away. It is a rule of this court, (Luke 1:53) He hath filled the hungry with good things, but the rich he hath sent empty away. According to this rule, the Lord dealt with the Pharisee and the publican; and so will he deal with you, as you are like the one or the other, in your approaches to, and pleadings at the throne of grace.

SERMON II Hebrews 4:16

Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.

I did take up this exhortation, as containing an answer to four considerable questions that usually are in the hearts of them that draw near to God seriously. 1. Where may we find him? On a throne of grace. Seek him no where else; for no where else is he to be graciously found. 2. How shall we come to this throne? Boldly, with confidence. 3. What is the ground of this boldness? It had need be a great and solid ground on which a sinner may build boldness in his approaching to God. This ground is hinted by the apostle in the word therefore. Wherefore? Because of our great High Priest, the Son of God, in heaven (vv 14,15). Though there be nothing more commonly said and owned, than that all men are sinners, and that all the acceptance of a sinner with God is through Jesus Christ; yet I can assure you, that when a person sees and knows what it is to be a sinner, and know what God is, it is a wonderful difficulty to believe, that it is possible that such a sinner and such a God should ever meet in peace. People's dry notions and opinions of Jesus Christ, if there be no more, will soon be blown away, with a deep sight of the sinfulness of sin, and of the majesty of God provoked thereby. 4. The last question is, What shall we get by coming? and what should we come for? The greatest blessings; mercy and grace. These blessings are comprehensive of all things needful to make a sinner happy.

To the first of these I began to speak last day, That God hath erected a throne of grace in the gospel, to which men are invited to come. What this throne of grace is, is spoke to; and that this throne of grace is to be distinguished from all other thrones of God spoken of in the word. The throne of his essential glory is unapproachable by all creatures. The throne of his justice is dreadful to all sinners. We should pray against our coming before this throne (Psa 143:2). He must be a proud ignorant fool that would offer to come and plead at its bar; for here all acts and sentences pass according to strict law and justice; and the law is an everlasting condemner of all sinners. There is also the throne of the Judge at the last day. But this throne is not yet set, though it will surely be; and we know not how soon, and should prepare for our appearing before it (2 Cor 5:9,10). But this throne of grace is the gracious manifestation of God in Christ, reconciling the world to himself (2 Cor 5:18,19). This is the light of the glory of God's grace shining in the face of Jesus

Christ (2 Cor 4:6). And to coming to this throne of grace, and to God in Christ dispensing his grace from it, we are here exhorted and encouraged. In pursuing of this exhortation, I would,

- I. Prove that all should come.
- II. Show who will come.
- III. And who shall be specially welcome.

I. That all ought to come to the throne of grace.

All sinners that hear of it, should improve this great privilege, and seek the enjoyment of God's grace and mercy in Jesus Christ.

1. Because God is not otherwise approachable by men in accepted worship. No man cometh unto the Father but by me; saith Christ (John 14:6). The light of nature teacheth all men in some measure, that there is a God, and somewhat of his eternal power and god-head (Rom 1:20); and that this God should be worshipped. Therefore some sort of worship is performed by all sorts of heathens, who are yet without God, and that because without Christ, and therefore without hope in the world (Eph 2:12). Never was there, nor will there be, nor can there be, any gracious approach unto God, nor any address received favourably by God, but at this throne of grace. Therefore whatever may be said of the zealous devotion, and of the moral principles and practices of the heathens, yet never any of them did, nor could offer up an acceptable prayer unto God, nor obtain a gracious answer from him; not only because they worshipped an unknown God (Acts 17:23; Gal 4:8), but mainly because they worshipped not at this throne of grace; for there can be no communion with God, there can be nothing graciously given by God to men, nothing done by men that can be accepted of God, but at this throne of grace.

2. All should come to this throne, because all men have need of the blessings dispensed at this throne of grace. Where there is an universal urgent necessity, and only one place of supply discovered, men are called to betake themselves thither. The blessings dispensed at the throne of grace, are equally needed by all. Every man, every woman, young or old, rich or poor, are equally needy, because all are unspeakably needy of the mercy and grace of God. Some indeed have a greater sight and sense of their wants than others, (and that is mercy); but the real necessity is common to all. Every unpardoned man needs a pardon at this throne of grace; but few, if any, value a pardon till they get it, or value the grace of God till they feel it. Do you feel your need of what is given and got at this throne? Come then. The law thunders and roars against you, that you may see your need of coming hither for what the law cannot give, nor hinder you from receiving, nor rob you of when received. Do you think in your heart, that you are the most needy person in all the world; that you need all the grace and mercy, or more, than ever any sinner received? Then come the rather, come the sooner. The neediest soul, the hungriest sinner, the person most greedy of the grace of God, should come first to Christ's door, and beg loudest. Is there any not needy? Alas! many think so, but none is so. Will you come for hunger and want? A sensible hunger, a sense and sight of need, an appetite after grace and mercy, is an alms that Christ can give; and many professors want it sadly.

3. The command is universal, to all that hear it. As the apostle saith, (Rom 3:19) These things saith the law to them that are under the law; so I may say, This saith the gospel to all under the sound of it, come to the throne of grace. It is no indifferent thing. God commands all men to come. Believing (that is, coming) is commanded (1 John 3:23). Are you afraid to come? Have not I commanded you? (Josh 1:9) as God spake to the Captain of Israel. Will men own God's authority in the law, and deny it in the gospel? Is he not the same God in both? He that commands you to have no other gods besides him, doth command you to believe on his Son Jesus, who is the true God, and eternal life (1 John 5:20). If coming to the throne of grace were not commanded, nor coming to it were no sin; and who dare say so? Not believing on Jesus Christ is the great gospel-sin, because believing on him is the great gospel-duty and work (John 6:29).

Object. But I am afraid he commands not me; others he may command, but not such a vile dead creature as I am.

Ans. Are you worse than some he hath commanded? (Jer 3:1,4,5) Thou hast played the harlot with many lovers; yet return again to me, saith the Lord. Such a practice in your land would greatly defile it, saith the Lord; but such acts of grace become the throne of grace. Are you worse than poor, and blind, and miserable,

and wretched, and naked? Yet the king of this throne commands them to come to him, though he sweetly calls it counsel (Rev 3:17,18). And in it we may join his two names, Wonderful, Counsellor (Isa 9:6). Object 2. But Christ calls and invites them that are weary and heavy laden (Matt 11:28) and the thirsty (Isa 55:1), and I am not such; and therefore he commands not me to come. Ans. 1. Do you expect any grace but at this throne of grace? Think you to work it out in yourselves, and come to him for more? or to get the beginning somewhere else, and then come to Christ for the rest? This bewrays your pride, and ignorance of the entire corruption of your nature, and of your impotency to any good. This frame discovers your ignorance of the nature of the grace of God, that consists in its freedom; as its glory is, in its being the original cause of all good done for us, and wrought in us, or by us.

Ans. 2. Christ never bid any man be or do any thing without him, and then come to him, and he would do more for him. Christ calls men as he finds them, and then makes them what he would have them: He begins the good work in them, and performs it (Phil 1:6).

Ans. 3. These and many such like calls and invitations do not limit and restrain the universality of the gospel-command, but do graciously apply it to such cases wherein they that are, are apt to think that they are specially excepted. What is more common than such arguings of unbelief: I have a vast load of sin lying on me; I have spent my time, and strength, and money, on sin and vanity; I have been wearied in the greatness of my way of departing from the Lord, and therefore the Lord will not receive me? Therefore such are named particularly by the Lord, and specially called.

Therefore let no man, whatsoever he hath been, or is, think, that he is not commanded to come to this throne of grace. Take the command, lay it on your conscience, give obedience to it; take the command for your warrant, and never fear but you shall be welcome. Can your souls say, Lord, no man out of hell is more needy of thy saving grace than I, no sinner more unworthy of it than I; yet, because thou commandest me to come, I come to beg, and to receive? He will sweetly receive you: Him that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out (John 6:37). A text that hath been an anchor-hold to many a sinking sinner. 4. All should come to the throne of grace, because of the universality, vast extent, and indefiniteness of the promise of welcome to all that come. The command of God is a warrant and ground for our obedience, and the promise is a ground for confidence. The promise is God's great means for working faith; faith is the impression God makes on the soul of a man by the promise. When God takes the promise of the gospel, and applies it with the power of his grace upon the soul, it leaves an abiding mark and signature; and that is faith. The promise comes as the promise of a faithful God, who cannot lie, of a great salvation, to a great sinner. When the sinner sees and feels the truth and goodness of this promise, he believes. This promise of God is to be preached to all that hear the gospel; or rather, this promise is the gospel; the Lord will make it effectual as he seeth good. The apostle Peter encouraged such men to come to the throne of grace, who, if ever any in the world should have been kept back, it should have been they; a crew of the bloody murderers of the Son of God. But the word preached by Peter takes hold of their souls, and they cry out, What shall we do? No wonder they said so, when the cry of Christ's blood was in their consciences. The apostle saith to them, (Acts 2:38) Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost, &c. Their sin was very great, peculiar to them only; none before or after them were guilty of this. The cry of innocent blood is a dreadful cry. But this was more than all the murders ever committed in the world. It was the murdering the Son of God, it was slaying the Prince of life; it was all that the devil and wicked world could do, to cut the throat of the gospel, and of all the elect of God: and this wicked act was done against Christ, because he taught that he was the Son of God, and that he came from the Father to be the Saviour of the world. Yet, saith the apostle to them, Repent, and be baptized in his name, for the remission of that sin; you that have been dipped in his blood, and so dreadfully guilty by the shedding of it, be baptized in his name, for the remission of that guilt, and of all others. This calling for repenting of their guilt of Christ's blood, was plainly a requiring of faith in him; not only that he was the Lord Christ they had slain in their unbelief, but that pardon, in the virtue of that blood, might be had by them, on their betaking themselves to him by faith. So did the same apostle preach to the council (Acts 5:28,31) when he and his brethren were charged by the high priest, for filling Jerusalem with the doctrine of Christ, and intending to bring his blood upon them: Him hath God exalted with his right hand, to be a prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. He directs them to look to Christ as the

giver of repentance for, and of forgiveness of all their sins; not excluding, but by (v 30) plainly including the greatest of all their sins, their slaying of Christ, and hanging him on a tree: and this they did with wicked hands (Acts 2:23), and with hearts as wicked as their hands. Yet thus did Peter preach Christ. So well did he remember his Lord's command, (Luke 24:47) That repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name, among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. His argument is, (Acts 2:39) For the promise is to you, and to your children. Had they not slain the heir, and foundation of all the promises? Had they not done as much as men could do, to forfeit all interest in the promise? Yes; but Peter still invites them to the throne of grace, by an interest yet in the promise. The promise of grace and salvation by Jesus Christ, is the rope and cord that God casts out to sinking sinners: it is equally in the offer of all in the gospel. It is true, that the Lord means and designs it to some particular persons; but that design is secret, and utterly unknown to all, till the promise itself be apprehended by faith, or finally rejected by unbelief. See Jeremiah 38:7-14. Ebed-melech let down a rope to draw Jeremiah out of the dungeon by. The cords could never have pulled him up, unless the prophet had put them under him, and unless his friend had drawn him up. He did so, and ventures on this mean of escape. He ventures on the strength of the cord, and on the trustiness of his friend. If either of them had failed him, he might have fallen down, and broke his neck; or stuck still in the mire, and starved in the pit. The case is so here. The promise of salvation is a great security; but it is so only to them that cast themselves on it, and trust to it. Whoever will trust God's promise in Christ, will find, that it is able to bear all their weight, if it were never so great. Therefore lay this warm promise to thy cold heart, and, by the Lord's blessing, life and warmth will come in. Try the strength of the promise, by casting all thy burden on it; and it will never sink under thee, nor thou perish by its failing. Christians think, that the promises of God are a blessed charter, (and so indeed they are); but few mind the promises as God's tendered and offered security to men; whereby, as means, he works faith in his chosen; and, by the offer of them to all in the gospel, leaves unbelievers inexcusable. Sinners perish under the gospel, not because there is no cord of salvation cast out to them, but because they either love the pit they are in, or cannot trust God's faithful promise of salvation by Christ for their delivery. So much of the first thing, the proving that all ought to come to the throne of grace, or to God in Christ sitting on it. God is not otherwise approachable; universal need of this throne, and of the blessings given at it; an universal call and command of God to come; an universal promise to all that do come; all prove that all men should come.

II. But though it be the duty of all to come, yet but few do come.

We would therefore see who they be that will come to the throne of grace. Of such we have two words. 1. Such as are given of the Father to the Son; all they, and they only, will come to this throne of grace: All that the Father giveth me, shall come to me, saith Christ (John 6:37). Ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep (John 10:26). The high spring of all the effectual calling and coming of men to Christ is this; They that are ordained to eternal life, believe, and none but they. It would be very unfit, that the book of life should be opened to, and read by any preacher of the gospel. I think not that ever any apostle had it opened to them with respect to others, so that they should be able, when looking on the multitude they preached to, to say, These are appointed for eternal life, and these passed by. But they being happily in the dark as to this secret purpose of God, did offer salvation through Jesus Christ to all that heard them. So Paul, (Acts 13:38,39) Be it known unto you, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins; and by him all that believe, are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses. Having told them this good news, he (vv 40,41) warns them: Beware therefore, lest that come upon you which is spoken of in the prophets, Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish. After his repeated pains on them, it is said, (v 48) As many as were ordained to eternal life, believed. It was a severe application of this word, that a very worthy divine made of it, that all the elect of God in this place were gathered in, by Paul's ministry in it, at this time. The grace of election is the spring of faith (2 Thess 2:13; 1 Peter 1:2), but this grace of election is not seen, but in the gift and light of faith. 2. All such, and only they, will come to the throne of grace, that are drawn by the Father: (John 6:44,45) No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath

learned of the Father, cometh unto me. Observe here the two universals: No man can come, unless drawn; Every man that is drawn, doth come.

The first decries the power of nature, the latter advanceth the power of God's grace. The utter impotence of nature, and omnipotence of grace, in the business of man's salvation, are stumbling-blocks to all the ungodly, but are foundations in Christian doctrine. The one lays man in the dust, the other raiseth him on a new bottom of the grace of God. When God hath a mind to draw a sinner to Christ, and to make him a believer on him to salvation, he teacheth him secretly and by a strong hand; he whispers into his heart the excellency of the Saviour, and greatness of his salvation; so that surely the perishing sinner comes to Christ, and as surely is welcomed and saved by him.

III. But who shall be welcome?

Surely all that come, shall be welcome; as the word every where witnesseth: and all that ever tried it, have found and testify it by their experience. For as the Son refused none that were given him of the Father in their eternal counsel, but took every one of them as his charge to redeem them; so all they, and only they, being drawn by the Father, and made willing to come to Christ, are made welcome by him (John 6:37). He knows his sheep, when wandering on the mountains (John 10:16,27,28), and accordingly receives them. When the Father drives home the lost sheep to their great Shepherd, Christ knows them before he opens the fold to them; and because he knows them, he lets them in, that they may find pasture, and feed on him and his grace to eternal life. But there are some that are specially welcome to Christ, and speed well at this throne of grace. As, 1. They that come when they can do nothing else; they that come to the throne of grace as their last shift: We know not what to do, but our eyes are upon thee, said Jehoshaphat (2 Chron 20:12). Sincerest believing, and strongest believing, is acted, when a man hath no prop at all to lean upon, but God alone. Believing is called fleeing: We have fled for refuge, to lay hold on the hope set before us (Heb 6:18). Now, who flees? Only he that can stand no longer, that is not able to deal with his adversary and danger, that hath no hope of prevailing by his strength, and therefore betakes himself to his heels. It is men's great sin to endeavour to seek that elsewhere, that only is to be found here, mercy and grace. But it is the greatest sin of all, to count all lost, as long as this throne stands, and the Lord calls men to come to it. Be deeply humbled, and covered with shame; yet come notwithstanding. Such is the corruption of our hearts, and the Lord seeth it well, that if sinners could find grace and mercy any where else, they would never come to the throne of grace for it. Christ is the last shift of a distressed sinner; yet, blessed be his name, he welcomes the comer. The woman (Mark 5:25-35) tries many means ere she comes to Christ, yet sped well when she came at last.

2. They are welcome to the throne of grace that come ofttest, and ask the greatest things. It is otherwise in addresses to friends, or great men on earth. You may be welcome to them, if you come now and then, and if you ask little things; but if you come daily, and ask great things, and grow in your suits, they will quickly be weary of you. But what saith the King on this throne of grace? (John 16:24) Hitherto ye have asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full. Had not they asked formerly great things? that he would expound his word to them (Matt 13:36), that he would teach them to pray (Luke 11:1), that he would increase their faith (Luke 17:5). But all this was as nothing to Christ; nothing in regard of the great things he had to give, and they stood in need of. This is a great word of Christ's, Ask, and I will give, and ye shall receive; ask still more, and ye shall receive more, even till your joy be full. The reason why our souls are so empty of joy, is because our mouths are empty of prayer. Christ's love-quarrels with his people are three. 1. That they do not ask great things, and often. 2. That they do not receive what he is so ready to give. Our narrow vessels cannot take in large floods from the fountain of living water. 3. That they do not praise for what they receive. It is his due, our duty, and our great mercy. Both prayer and praise widens the heart for receiving more of Christ's fulness. 3. They are specially welcome to the throne of grace that come to stay, resolving never to leave it; that not only come to it at a pinch and strait, but come to abide there. our Lord teacheth several parables, to encourage and direct us in plying the throne of grace (Luke 11:5-13, 18:1-8). Jacob was a blessed man, and knew well the manner of this court, when he wrestled with the angel (Gen 32:24-30); and that angel was the King of the throne of grace (Hosea 12:3-5). After a long night's wrestling, with weeping and supplications, saith the Lord, (Gen 32:26) Let me go, for the day breaketh, Jacob answers,

I will not, looks like ill manners in speaking to God. He saith not, How can I hold thee? If thou hast a mind to go, it is impossible that I can detain thee. Can a man hold God when he hath a mind to be gone? But Jacob knew his party, and perceived that he tried him, if he would part without a blessing. "Nay, saith Jacob, if thou ask my leave and consent to part so, I will never give it. Let the day break, and the next night come, the great Blessor, and lame halting Jacob, shall never part, with Jacob's consent, without a blessing." And he prevailed. He had got his father's blessing, by the cunning of his mother (Gen 27); had it again ratified by his father (28:3,4); he had the Lord's blessing (28:12-16); he got it renewed again, on the Lord's calling him to return to Canaan (31:3): Yet he was in a new strait, and wanted a new blessing, and wrestled for it, and obtained it. Let all the seed of Jacob imitate his practice, and they shall share in his blessing, and be fed with the heritage of Jacob their father, as the word is (Isa 58:14). In pressing the exhortation in the text, I shall lay before you a few considerations.

1. Consider the greatness of this privilege, that there is a throne of grace erected for sinners, and revealed to them. This throne is only erected for sinners: it had never been but for sinners. A throne of grace supposeth, that there are guilty sinners to stand before it, and to get good by it. The greatness of this privilege is apparent, in comparing the state of fallen man with that of fallen angels; and in comparing their state that have the gospel, with theirs that are without it.

1st, Compare the state of fallen man with that of fallen angels. Whatsoever the proper meaning of that word is, (Psa 8:5) Thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, these two may be well conceived; That man in his original make was lower in dignity than the angels; and that man was made a little after the angels were made: and long after it could not be; for the whole old creation was completely finished in six days. The angels that fell, are so sinful and miserable, that we cannot speak any good of them; yet, in their first make, they were a very glorious part of the creation. Notwithstanding, when they sinned, there was no throne of grace provided for them: God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell (2 Peter 2:4); yet, for his elect, he spared not his own Son (Rom 8:32). The devils, (for such sin made them), immediately upon their sinning, were as much condemned as ever they shall be: I say not as much executed; for it seems that their full torment is reserved to the last day (Jude 6; 2 Peter 2:4). Art thou come to torment us before the time? (Matt 8:29), say they to Christ. No wonder the devil be such an enemy to the gospel of man's salvation, and a hater of the throne of grace. The wonder is, that men should be deceived by Satan, to despise and slight this great privilege. Let Christians take a view of this astonishing appearance of God's grace, that fallen angels are all passed by, and fallen man taken up; not indeed all of them, but a great many, as one day will declare: (Heb 2:16) For verily he took not on him the nature of angels, but he took on him the seed of Abraham. 2dly, Consider the greatness of this privilege in the revelation of it. You have it, but the greatest part of the world have it not. They that cannot receive the truth of God revealed in the word about the sovereignty of grace in election, and the efficacy of distinguishing grace in calling, must see the same sovereignty acted in dispensing or withholding the means of grace as pleaseth him. And to be utterly ignorant that there is a throne of grace, renders people as miserable as if there was no throne of grace at all. They that never hear of Christ, must perish. It is an idle dream, that the efficacy of Christ's death may be applied, and profitable to the saving of adult persons that never heard of him. There is no salvation for men but by Jesus Christ; there is no knowing of it, or partaking of it, but by the word of truth, the gospel of our salvation (Eph 1:13). Christ and his name go together: (Acts 4:12) Neither is there salvation in any other; (no Saviour but he): for there is no other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved. No other way of getting good by him, but by hearing of his name, and believing on his name: How shall they believe on him of whom they have not heard? (Rom 10:14). It is a wonderful mercy to hear of him; but woe to them that hear, and do not believe. None can believe without hearing (Rom 10:17); but alas! many hear, and believe not (Isa 53:1).

2. Consider the great advantages of this privilege, of having a throne of grace erected for us, and revealed to us. All blessings may be had here, by coming for them. If there was such a throne in this world, for silver, and gold, and health, and outward mercies, what strange crowding would there be to it? The blessings to be had here, are innumerable for multitude; all spiritual blessings in heavenly things in Christ Jesus (Eph 1:3); blessings invaluable for their worth, eternal in their duration, most free in their tenure, and all given in love. Every act of favour from the throne of grace, is more worth than all God's common

mercies. Lord, lift up upon us the light of thy countenance (Psa 4:6,7), that will put joy into the soul. Every thing given at the throne of grace, is a blessing of grace. Its very name should teach people how to come, and how to call what they get at it. If it be a throne of grace, we should come to it as empty, needy beggars; and when we receive any thing there, we should call and count it grace. Ask all saints on earth, and they will witness, that great and good things are to be had at the throne of grace. Try it yourselves, and you will find it is not in vain to beg here. Nay, the damned in hell do bear sad witness, that great are the blessings that are to be had at the throne of grace, which they feel and know by their woeful and eternal loss of them. The glorified in heaven know what a rich throne of grace this is. Only sinners on earth will not believe this, nor use this throne as they should.

3. Consider that this court and throne is of short continuance. It will not be kept up always. There is a limitation of the time of its lasting; as Hebrews 4:7, He limiteth a certain day. The day of the continuance of the throne of grace, is bounded and limited with four days; the day of a man's life, the gospel-day, the world's day, and the Spirit's day. 1st, The day of every man's life. This hath bounds set to it by God (Job 14:5). The throne of grace continues unto men no longer than they live. When men die, they go not to the throne of grace, but of glory and judgment. If we have sped well at the throne of grace, we shall be welcome to the throne of glory. The uncertainty and shortness of life, with the certainty of the expiring of all treaties betwixt God and us about salvation at the end of life, should make people careful to secure the main matter in God's time.

2dly, There is the gospel-day. This is also set and limited by the Lord. He hath determined how many offers you shall have of Christ; and when they come to an end, there will not be one more. And then the throne of grace is taken down as to you. (Luke 19:42) If you hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things that belong to thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes! saith our Lord to Jerusalem. This was the ending determining day to Jerusalem as a city, and to its inhabitants as a body. Though many particular persons had another day of grace; yet the slipping of that day hangs on that poor people and their posterity to this very day.

3dly, There is the world's day. And then the day of grace will end as to all: When the bridegroom came, they that were ready, entered with him to the marriage, and the door was shut (Matt 25:10). There was no more grace to be dispensed to men; and we know not when that day will come. Miserable is their case, who shall see Christ coming in the clouds of heaven, before they have seen him by faith in the gospel; who hear the voice of the archangel, and the trump of God, before they have heard the quickening voice of the Son of God from the throne of grace; who have neglected calling on him in time, and begin out of time, (Luke 13:25) When the master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. Is it not just that they should be kept at the shut door, that would not enter at an open door in Christ's time, and when he called? When Christ comes, and hath shut the door, no man will be let in, knock as he will. Nor, while the throne of grace is patent, no man will be kept out, be what he will, that hath a mind to enter, and knocks for entrance.

4thly, There is the Spirit's day. Here is a great depth of God's sovereignty and wisdom, a great depth of his severity, an unaccountable and awful judgment; how the Spirit of God strives with men in the gospel, how near he comes to them sometimes, how close he besiegeth them, that they seem to be on the point of yielding, and are not far from the kingdom of God; and yet he draws back his hand, and leaves them. I believe, that many ungodly men, many reprobates, have been sometimes in their life nearer to heaven, (if such may be said to be near to heaven that never come there) than many an elect person was half an hour before his conversion: (Gen 6:3) My Spirit shall not always strive with man. What kind of striving this was, and what became of them striven with, we have (1 Peter 3:19,20). Nothing will more bitterly aggravate the eternal misery of the damned, than the remembrance of this, that they had a day, and in that day grace offered to them, and that they did reject the offer. Men's carnal hearts are now full of cavils against the unsearchable methods and ways of God towards the sons of men; but the last day's judgment will determine and declare, that in the perdition of the ungodly, there was, and is, most pure and unspotted justice and righteousness; and, in the salvation of all the elect, pure, perfect, and predominant grace, that reigned in them, and over them, and through them, till it brought them to heaven.

Wherefore, seeing the having of a throne of grace is a privilege of so great importance, and of so uncertain continuance, there should be the greater care to make diligent and present improvement of it. Why should any man let this throne of grace stand empty? Will men provoke the Lord to say, In vain have I set up a throne of grace for sinners that come not at it?

Again, Consider the wrath that will follow on the neglect, and not improving of this great privilege. The sin is many ways committed, and the judgments of many sorts that are inflicted. But I leave this to the next occasion. Except you, in your personal exercise and experience, do know what this throne of grace is, and what is got there; you may be Christians hereafter, but as yet you are none; unless you experience what this throne of grace is, by frequent repairing to it, and by frequent receiving good at it. That man or woman, whatever his or her name be in the world, or the church of Christ, that never found any need for, or use of, or benefit by this throne of grace, is surely a dead sinner. People may safely and surely judge of both the state and frame of their souls, by their business at the throne of grace. Never got any soul life, but by an act of grace and power from this throne. No soul can be kept in life, but by daily intercourse with it. It is as impossible that these bodies of ours should be maintained in life and strength without meat, and drink, and air; as it is for the soul of a believer to prosper without daily plying the throne of grace.

Let therefore the exhortation in the text be complied with, Come to this throne. Say therefore, Lord, I am invited to come to the throne of thy grace, and none have more need of that grace than I, and there is enough of grace there for me; and therefore I will come, and beg, and get, and abide, and bless the giver, and become happy by receiving.

SERMON III Hebrews 4:16.

Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.

I have spoke of the first thing that this text contains, That God in Jesus Christ, in the gospel, is on a throne of grace, inviting men to come to him. What this throne of grace is; why all should come; who they be that will come; and who will be specially welcome, you have heard. I was pressing this exhortation of coming to this throne. You see the Apostle, in delivering this, takes in himself with them he exhorts, Let us come. He had oft come before, and had been bountifully dealt with at this court. (1 Tim 1:14) And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant towards him. This made him commend this throne so highly, and intreat others, and stir up himself, to frequent addresses to it. I did use three arguments to back this exhortation, and shall add a fourth.

1. The first was the greatness of the privilege, of having a throne of grace to come unto; a privilege denied to fallen angels, and the knowledge of it denied to the far greater part of mankind.

2. This throne of grace is a privilege full of rich advantages. All believers know somewhat of them. All their acceptance with God, all their access to God, all their communications from him, and fellowship with him, all their blessings in time, and their hopes for eternity, are all owing to this, that God is on a throne of grace.

3. This privilege is of uncertain duration, and short. The Lord the King is for ever; but the throne of grace is not for ever. It is but a time-dispensation, and limited unto certain seasons. The gospel-day is uncertain, our lifetime is uncertain, the world's day is uncertain, to us, though all determined by God. But above all, the Spirit's day is uncertain. How long he will strive, when he will forbear, who can tell? Some godly men have thought, that there are few (if any) that live under a powerful ministry, but, at some time of their life, the Spirit of God comes close to them; so that there is not only a witness given for the Lord in the offers of the gospel, but there is a further addition to that witness, by some special approaches of God's Spirit to their hearts. But whatever there be in that observation, this is undoubted, that where the Holy Ghost makes the strongest assaults on men, if he be resisted, and withdraws, the most prodigious hardness is left behind. Therefore, extraordinary, bold, hardened sinners, cruel persecutors, apostates, and mockers of

godliness, are usually such as sometimes were under special conviction; not to speak of the sin against the Holy Ghost; which consists in some high rebellion against special workings of the Spirit of God on men's consciences under the gospel. This dreadful sin Satan perplexeth many believers with fears of it. But it is certain, that a disturbing fear of this guilt is a proof of a person's innocency as to it. For whosoever have fallen into this abyss of wickedness, are so far from fearing the sin, (though they may have a hopeless fear of wrath, Hebrews 10:27) that they glory in it; therefore they are said to do despite to the Spirit of grace. Let all that find the Spirit striving with them, take good heed to themselves, comply with his motions, and secure their state speedily, by believing on the Lord Jesus; for the season of his striving is the most critical part of our life, and, as it issues, of greatest consequence to salvation or damnation.

4. A fourth argument I would conclude this point with, is, the greatness of the sin of not coming to the throne of grace, and the dreadful wrath it draws on. This sin is many ways committed, and many ways avenged. A little of both.

First, It is committed, 1. By men's despising and contemning the throne of grace; making light of it (Matt 22:5), neglecting so great salvation (Heb 2:3). There are many things from whence this contempt springs. Either no sense of their need of what is to be had at the throne of grace; or else a dream, that they may be supplied elsewhere; or gross unbelief, that men think in their hearts, that all this account of the throne of grace is but a cunningly-devised fable; or the nature of the blessings, spiritual and eternal, unsuitable to, and not taking with their carnal hearts, who mind earthly things. If the exhortation had run thus, Let us come, that we may get silver, and obtain gold, to render us rich in this world; what leaping and striving would there be to obey it? whilst grace and mercy, that men have no sense nor experience of, are despised; and therefore the throne of grace, where only they are to be had, is despised also. The Spirit of God in the scripture is at much pains to commend the worth and value of the blessings that Christ came to purchase, and hath to dispense, and to prefer them above all present sensible things; yet, notwithstanding all the bright light of the word darting daily in men's eyes, the dross and dung of this world is more precious in the eyes, and savoury to the heart of every ungodly man, than all the grace given on earth, and all the glory to be given in heaven.

2. This sin of not coming, is committed by delaying to come. The call of God is, Let us come; the answer of many hearts is, Let us delay to come. Whence think you that these delays come? We have it daily to bewail before God and you, that a multitude will come together to hear, and do so day by day; yet all that can be said to them, from their childhood to their old age, never prevailed with many of them to spend one hour in serious treating at the throne of grace, with God in Christ, for the eternal salvation of their souls. It is undeniable, that ye are but a pack of gross hypocrites, if you attend on the means of grace in the assemblies of saints, and yet have no particular personal errand to the throne of grace for your own souls. The salvation of the soul is not carried on in a crowd. The grace of God must be particularly applied to you, and you must particularly apply it to yourselves, and yourselves to the throne of grace, if ever you be saved. The fellowship of saints was never ordained for this end, to render personal applications to God needless; and it is grossly abused when it is so perverted. It is impossible, that a person can have any true fellowship with saints in any ordinance of God, unless he hath particular business at the throne of grace for himself. He hath indeed no true religion, whose all of religion is in company and in public. Yet we see how backward many professors are to this personal treating with God; how many shifts and delays they make. To such I say, Would it not be a terror to you, if either God, or man, or angels, or the devil, should tell you this day, that, from this time to your dying day, you shall never have leisure, nor heart, nor time, to spend one quarter of an hour in dealing with God for your eternal salvation! Would not this be terrible to you! But the same dreadful thing is daily done by men's delays. The call of God is today, you say tomorrow; when tomorrow comes, then you say next day; when that comes, you put it still farther off. This you may be sure of, that whatever is the true spring and cause of delays in this matter, will still remain and gather strength, unless the grace of God come in. Men deceive themselves with vain pretences: but the true spring of all delays in treating in earnest with God at the throne of grace, is unbelief and unwillingness; and the more they are indulged by delaying, the stronger they grow. Therefore the Holy Ghost saith, Today if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts (Heb 3:7,8). See how the Spirit of God fixeth an opposition betwixt these two, present hearing, and present hardening; and a conjunction betwixt these two, present not hearing, and hardening. If there is

present hearing, there is no present hardening; if not, there is. The refusal given to the today's call of God, hardens the heart against tomorrow's call. O, that men dreaded delays as most perilous things, and the cause of the everlasting ruin of multitudes under the gospel!3. Another way wherein this sin of not coming to the throne of God's grace is acted, is in refusing to come. All do not so grossly, but some do. There are two sorts of refusers; the secure, and the discouraged. There is a woeful plague of secure despair; a strange plague, but a certain one. Some people find things are bad with them as to their souls, sins many corruptions strong; they have made some essays to get matters mended, and all in vain: whereon they conclude, that it will never be better; and they sit down in security, and give themselves up to their pleasures: (Isa 22:13) Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we shall die. A strange argument. Approach of death usually mars the taste of pleasure. The handwriting on the wall, even when not known, marred Belshazzar's cheer (Dan 5). This is a very miserable and sinful case. It springs from men's being ignorant of the true remedy, when they were sick of sin; and because all the physic and physicians they used and tried did them no good, they conclude their sickness is unto death. But let such know, that there is hope in Israel concerning this thing. Only come and see, and try what may be done. Beware of despair; it is the devil's sin. But he hath reason for it: for he is condemned; and all doors of hope are eternally shut upon him, or rather none was ever opened to him. But for a man that hath the riches of God's long-suffering, forbearance, and patience (Rom 2:4), daily laid out upon him; that hath the door of grace set open to him, and the Lord calling, intreating, promising acceptance on his coming; for such a man to give over all hope, is a sin someway worse than the devil's; a frame pleasing only to the devil, most dishonourable to God, and his Son Jesus Christ, and to the Holy Ghost, (I do not call it the sin against the Holy Ghost); a reflection on all the glorious appearances and manifestations of the throne of grace, and most surely damning if continued in. Away with it speedily: conclude thy case is not desperate; and if you cannot shake it off, come to the throne of grace, and complain of it. If ye can but see the throne, and him that sits upon it, despair will vanish as a night-owl on the bright shining of the Sun of Righteousness. Despair cannot live in the presence of the glorious grace of Jesus Christ. Come then and see, and lay hold on the hope set before you. The other refusers to come, are the discouraged. They do not despair that their case cannot be mended; but they see so much, and so many things out of order, that their hearts fail them in applying to the only remedy. In the time of their carnal security, and ignorance of God and of themselves, (that bred and kept up that security), they could rush into God's presence without fear, and call and count all the blessings of the covenant theirs, without any doubt, and yet without any ground. But when God began to deal with them, and to come close to them, and to send in light and life into their consciences, then they see their former mistakes; they see their utter want and great need of those blessings they once dreamed they were rich in the possession of; they see their utter unworthiness of them; and therefore find it hard to believe, that ever the Lord will welcome them to the throne of his grace. Usually beginners in Christianity have greater light and sense as to their necessity of saving grace and mercy, than about the Lord's willingness to give them. And this is the season wherein Satan doth usually come in (if permitted, and often he is) with his temptations and fiery darts, that they felt nothing of while they were in his kingdom and power of darkness. To such I would propose three things:

1st, What is the ground of thy discouragement? Hereto I know they will say a great deal, and it may be more than is true. I grant all can be said to be true. But the sum of all is, I am a great sinner, and exceeding miserable. Be humbled as low as hell in the sense thereof, yet be not discouraged. What is in thy case but what is common? Only thou seest and feelest for thyself, and so did others.

2dly, What is the tendency of it? Doth it tend to keep thee aloof from the throne of grace? It is then, of Satan.

3dly, What can be the cure of it? You would not be always in this heartless frame. How think you to get it removed? by keeping still from the throne of grace? Will, or can, any spiritual plagues be cured, but by Christ the Physician? or any spiritual blessing be got, but at his door? Can you expect it without coming, and begging? David took the right course with his fainting heart (Psa 42:5); he challengeth his soul for its disquietment; he chargeth it to trust in God: and because he had not prevailed with his soul, he brings it to God by faith, (v 6) O my God, my soul is cast down within me. Do ye so; and call upon him by that name, God that comforteth those that are cast down (2 Cor 7:6). I shall name no more of the ways this sin is acted

than these three; despising, delaying, and refusing. Several other expressions there are of this sin in the word; but if you be kept from these three, you are innocent from the great transgression.

Secondly, What is the wrath revealed from heaven for this great sin of not coming to the throne of grace?

1. God testifies his displeasure against this sin, by taking away of his gospel. Nothing is more just with God, than that, when his grace is slighted, the means of grace should be removed. If the Lord argue so as to correction, (Isa 1:5) Why should ye be stricken any more? ye will revolt more and more; much more may he argue thus, Why should I keep up a throne of grace any longer? you will but despise it more and more. Christ teacheth a sad parable (Matt 21:33, &c.) and makes a just, but dreadful application of it to the hearers, (v 43) Therefore I say unto you, The kingdom of God (another name of the throne of grace) shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof. They were cut off for their unbelief (Rom 11:20). With what face can an unbeliever beg of God the continuance of the means of grace, who hath no mind to enjoy the end and blessing of those means? A general contempt of the grace of God enfeebleth the spirits of ministers and Christians in standing before the Lord, for the continuance of the gospel with a people that use it not. This dreadful judgment hath been often threatened in the word, and inflicted, in the severe providence of God, on many once-famous churches and nations. As the Lord saith, But go ye now unto my place which was in Shiloh, whence I set my name at the first, and see what I did to it, for the wickedness of my people Israel (Jer 7:12); so I may say, Go to Jerusalem, and the seven churches in Asia; go to Greece and Africa, where many a famous church was planted, and learn to fear for yourselves: not to speak of later desolations in ours and our fathers days. The Lord's removing of his gospel, is a judgment that is very deep; as the apostle speaks of the same subject (Rom 11:33). We may take notice of this judgment as brought on by prevailing errors in and about the foundation, Jesus Christ; or by gradual apostasy, and impurity of conversation, in professors; or by the rage of persecution, wearing out the saints of the Most High (Dan 7:25). But yet we have good grounds from the word of God to believe and hope, that the gospel may be secured to a generation ordinarily, if they be careful to get the blessing thereof, and to walk worthy of it. If the grace of God itself be prized, the means of grace will be continued.

2. The Lord witnesseth his displeasure against slights of his grace, by fearful outward judgments. So fared it with Jerusalem, according to our Lord's prediction (Luke 19:42-44). It hath been a remark of wise observers of the providence of God towards nations since the reformation from Popery, That in those places where the greatest light of the gospel hath shined, there the greatest judgments have been inflicted; as in Germany, France, and amongst ourselves in Britain.

3. The Lord visits for this sin with spiritual judgments, the most wrathful dispensations of God on this side hell; as hardness of heart, blindness of mind, searedness of conscience, vileness of affections; judgments which they that are under, never feel, nor complain of, nor will be convinced of, though they are sometimes visible to others. If the Lord inflict them on the Heathen for their abuse of the dim light of nature (Rom 1:21,24,26,28). How much greater are such that are sent for the abuse of the light of the gospel? That dreadful commission given to the most eminent prophet (Isa 6:9,10), is often applied and fulfilled in the New Testament: (Matt 13:14; John 12:39,40) Therefore they could not believe, (their sin was, (v 37) they believed not on him; here is their plague, they could not believe), because that Esaias said again, He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their hearts; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their hearts, and be converted, and I should heal them. Paul applies it to some of his unbelieving hearers, with a strange preface, Well spake the Holy Ghost by Esaias, to our fathers, saying (Acts 28:25,26). The interest and influence of God in such spiritual judgments, is a great depth. They are always just, and always deep; and dreadful are their effect. They on whom they fall, feel nothing, see nothing, fear nothing. So that truly we may say, as Psalm 68:35, O God, thou art terrible out of thy holy places. But such as have a heart to the grace of God, and would fain be blessed thereby, need not fear those judgments, and shall never feel them.

4. Lastly, The wrath of God against such as come not to the throne of grace, is engraven in the singular vengeance of eternal ruin. There is something singular in their hell. The law sends all unpardoned sinners to a law-hell: the Lord sends despisers of saving grace to a special hell, (Heb 2:3, 10:29) a much sorer punishment. No quarters in hell are tolerable: yet our Lord saith, (Matt 11:22,24) That it shall be more

tolerable for Tyre and Sidon, Sodom and Gomorrah, than for the cities where he preached, and wrought mighty works. We should be thankful for this fair warning. I am afraid that there are very few that do truly believe this, That the condition of a sinner under the gospel, that is of a blameless conversation, and makes a fair profession; only he is an unbeliever in Jesus Christ, and one that hath no business at the throne of grace, he hath no other fault but that, (and he needs no more to ruin him); that this man's case is worse now, and will be worse at the last day, than that of the inhabitants of Sodom, on whom the Lord rained down hell from heaven. Many of our gay professors, and civil moral men, would think themselves highly affronted and undervalued, to be put in the balance with filthy Sodomites. If it were possible that thou had no fault but only unbelief, thy sin is greater, thy judgment will be more dreadful, thy state worse for eternity, than that of the vilest of the nations to whom the throne of grace was never revealed; (John 15:22) If I had not come, and spoken unto them, they had not had sin: but now they have no cloak for their sin. And to the same purpose our Lord spake to them (v 24). They were sinners before; but the contempt of that dispensation of grace that Christ brought to them, rendered them singular transgressors. So John 3:17. God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. Are then all saved, and none condemned? No: Of the world that hear of God's Son, some believe on him, and they are not condemned, but saved, and others believe not on him, and therefore are condemned (v 18). What is the condemnation? Light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil (v 19). The law condemns them, because their deeds are evil; the despised gospel condemns them, because they refuse the only remedy. Law-sin is poison to the soul, and kills as such. Unbelief is rejecting the only antidote, and kills as such. Look to one scripture more: (Luke 19:27) But those mine enemies which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay them before me. It is not usual for kings and princes to have criminals executed in their presence, but command it to be done by mean hands, in some remoter place. But Christ will have his enemies slain before him. To be slain in Christ's presence, is double destruction: (2 Thess 1:9) Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction, (ever a-destroying, never destroyed; the destroyer punisheth eternally, and the destroyed suffer eternally) from the presence of the Lord. The meaning is not only, that a great part of this punishment stands in being deprived for eternity of the gracious presence of Jesus Christ; as in Matthew 25:41. The first and saddest word in the last sentence is, Depart from me. Just; for they said to him, Depart from us; for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways (Job 21:14). Let all trembling believers and lovers of Christ persuade themselves, that they shall never hear it pronounced against them. All that make it their business to come to Christ, that make it their daily suit that he would come to them, shall not hear, Depart from me; but, Come to me, ye blessed. Ye often came for a blessing, and got many by coming; now come to receive the blessing of the kingdom. But this word, from the presence of the Lord, saith further, that this destruction flows from Christ's angry and glorious presence; and that it shall also be in his presence; as Revelation 14:10. It is in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb, they are tormented for ever.

Thus having opened the first head in the text, That there is a throne of grace erected and revealed, in the gospel, to which men are invited to come; I shall only apply it in two question, and the Lord apply them to your consciences, and make them give a right and true answer. They are two short plain ones. 1. Have you come? 2. Will ye come?

Quest. 1. Have you come to the throne of grace? Do you know and are sure that you have come? as Peter said (John 6:68,69). The apostle speaks of such comers, (Heb 12:24) But ye are come to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel. You are all hearers of the throne of grace; many are talkers of it, and some disputers and contenders about this throne: but are you comers to it? is your heart on it, your business at it, and your daily exercise about it? You are in the outward court; doth that satisfy you? Alas! many poor souls die and perish there. To help to some conviction how it is with you as to this, I would ask,

1. Have you come to the throne of grace? Then you have seen the King. He is a poor sorry courtier, that goes to court every day, and never seeth the King's face; as Absalom (2 Sam 14:24,28). Alas! many live in Jerusalem all their days, and never see the King that dwells in Zion. When Paul was brought to the throne of grace, Christ was revealed in him and to him (Gal 1:15,16). When men are brought and come to the throne of grace, they receive the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Cor 4:6).

There is a seeing of him, joined with believing on him (John 6:40). All that see Jesus Christ, must have eyes from him to see him with; the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, in the knowledge of him, that enlightens the eyes of men's understandings (Eph 1:17,18). His eye-salve can only make blind sinners to see (Rev 3:18). Are men in doubt whether they have seen Christ or not? Whence doth it proceed? Is Christ so mean, and dark, and ordinary an object, that men may see him, and not know that they see him? A man may doubt whether his eyes take up a dim cloudy star in a dark night: but the sun doth not shine, or the man is blind, if he lift up his face, and doubt whether he see the sun at noon-day. There is a manifestation of Christ promised (John 14:21,23), which, when made by him, and perceived by his people, removeth all doubtings; so that the soul must say, as Isaiah 25:9, This is our God, this is the Lord. But this measure is not ordinary, nor constantly to be expected. Is there any like unto Jesus Christ? Are any of his companions, as they are called (Song 1:7), so like to him, that a believer cannot discern the difference? Never did a man see Jesus Christ by the eye of faith, but he is, by that sight of him, persuaded that there is none to be compared with him. No man is converted, and made a believer, but by a revelation of Jesus Christ. A man may be awakened with a view of God's glory; he may be alarmed by a sight of sin and hell; and may be roused out of his sleep of security, by the thunders of Sinai: but he is never converted, and made a Christian, but by a revelation of Jesus Christ, as glorious in his robes of salvation. Whence then is it that all believers on him do not own his manifesting himself to them, and their seeing of him? It is in part from the weakness of their sight, the greatness of the glory of him they see, and their strong desire to see him better. But for such as have spent their days about the throne of grace, and yet never saw Jesus Christ, and the glory of God in his face as a Saviour, so as to disgrace all things in comparison with him, so as to raise desires after more of him, and so as to fill their hearts with love, wonder, and praise; such have been at the court, but have not seen the King on his throne.

2. Are you come to the throne of grace? What made you come? what errand did you come upon? No man comes without an errand. We need not make and seek one; we have enough at hand, if we would but use them. What wants felt you at home? and what of his fulness was taking with you? Can you say, I have a naked filthy soul, and I am ashamed to look on it; but how well would the robe of his righteousness fit and adorn it? I am empty of all good, and he is full of all grace, on purpose to fill perishing souls, and I come for a share thereof. The blessing of many ready to perish hath come upon him; and I came for his rich salvation, and would leave my poor, but eternal blessing on him. They that have no particular pressing business about their soul's salvation, may talk of the throne of grace, but do not indeed come to it.³ What got ye? If you come indeed you receive, if you receive not, you come not. Say not, you have received nothing, because you have not got all you would have. It is necessary, that such as come, get somewhat; but it is not fit that they should receive all that they want. A life of faith must be lived, and dependence and begging still kept on foot. But somewhat is still given and got, though the gift be not always seen and owned. But tell me, Christians indeed, have you not sometimes got that at the throne of grace, that ye would not take a world for? Did you ever apply to this throne in earnest, and found it in vain? Have you not sometimes got a glance of Christ through the lattice (Song 2:9), that hath made you forget your poverty, and remember your misery no more? Know ye not what it is to have a smile of his countenance, and a token that you have found favour in his eyes? Have you not got at this throne, a word of promise, that hath fed and feasted thy faith? (Jer 15:16) Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart; for I am called by thy name, O Lord God of hosts. Have you not sometimes got the door of faith opened, and the eye of faith sharpened, that ye could see within the vail, and behold the good land, and the blessed Lord of it, and thy happy interest in both? Let not this throne be disparaged, both by the true emptiness of hypocrites that are about it, rather than at it, and by the peevishness of real believers. There are no poor courtiers at this court; they are all rich (Rev 2:9). They are only poor in spirit; but not so poor as they think; for a kingdom is theirs, that is better than all kingdoms under heaven (Matt 5:3). The world count believers poor, because they see they often have not outward riches; and they are blind, and cannot see their spiritual riches in possession and reversion. The believer thinks himself poor, because he seeth not all he hath in possession (1 Cor 3:21-23); and because he would so fain have all he hath a right to (Phil 3:12-14), and the hope of; or because his charters are hid, or his eyes are dim, that he cannot read them.

Quest. 2. Will ye come? All is ready; come to this throne (Matt 22:4). If ye have never come, begin just now; if ye have come often, come oftener, and come better, come nearer and closer still. Is there any thing wanting in you? Come; for all supply is here. Are you guilty? Come for pardon. Many drawn pardons are at this court, drawn up sweetly by free grace, sealed with the blood of Jesus. Come to this throne, and add your seal of faith to one for yourself; and it shall be a charter for glory to you, lying warm at your heart, as long as you live, and will be your passport at death. But because the following words of the apostle in this verse contain arguments for coming, I say the less now. So much for the first head of doctrine in the text.

HEAD II. The second head is, How we should come to this throne of grace?

Come boldly, saith the Holy Ghost, by Paul's pen.

The point I would speak to from it, is this:

DOCTRINE. That there is a boldness in men's approaching to the throne of grace, that is allowed and commanded.

For the apostle doth not only mention it as a privilege allowed, but as a duty or frame enjoined and commanded. So that he that comes not with this boldness, not only sits down short of his allowance, but sins in disobeying a plain command. The privilege is spoke of in Ephesians 3:12, In whom (our Lord Jesus Christ, as verse 11) we have boldness and access with confidence, by the faith of him. In Hebrews 10:19,22 both the privilege is asserted, and the improvement of it commanded, in drawing near with full assurance of faith, and that to the holiest of all.

On this point I would shew,

I. What this boldness is that is allowed in approaching to the throne of grace.

II. What are the grounds of this boldness.

I. What is the boldness allowed in coming to the throne of grace?

There is a boldness that is not allowed, and that I would warn you of.

1. There is a boldness of ignorance and irreverence. When men come into God's presence, and neither know him, nor themselves, nor the matters they think they are come about; such are fools, that consider not that they do evil, nor remember that he is in heaven, and they upon earth, (Eccl 5:1,2). God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints; and to be had in reverence of all that are about him (Psa 89:7). This boldness is forbidden (Psa 2:11).

2. There is a boldness of peremptoriness, that is not allowed to any man, not to a believer himself. People may, and do often forget themselves; as we used to say, Too much familiarity breeds contempt. Condescensions from superiors, oft make inferiors forget their place. The Lord deals so graciously with his people, hears their prayers readily, stoops low to them in his love and pity, that unless they watch, and keep a guard on their spirits, they may soon fall into the sin of being too saucy and peremptory with God. The first prayer in the Bible, made by the greatest believer in the world, Abraham, is upon a most condescending appearance of God to him. The Son of God in human shape becomes Abraham's guest at meat (Gen 18). Some think, that Christ respects this appearance in John 8:56, Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day; and he saw it, and was glad. He gives him the last promise of a son, with a determination of the precise time of its accomplishment (v 10). He deals with him as a friend, (and so Abraham is called, 2 Chron 20:7; Isa 41:8; James 2:23; but all believers are called friends by Christ, John 15:14,15); and after a great commendation of Abraham, the Lord tells him his purpose of wrath against Sodom (vv 17-22). The angels are sent to execute the vengeance, and Abraham stands before the Lord to plead for mercy. With what boldness and reverence doth he plead? The more the Lord stoops in condescending to his petitions, the more low doth Abraham lie before him. He neither forgot the Lord's majesty, nor his own meanness; and expreseth again and again, a holy fear of offending by his renewed suits (vv 27,30-31). I would have you consider this instance of prayer, because it is the first recorded in the word, and because it was excellently managed by the father of the faithful. So Gideon prays in Judges 6:39, And Gideon said unto God, let not thine anger be hot against me, and I will speak but this once. I am afraid that many sincere Christians are guilty of this peremptoriness. The Lord hath been so condescending to them, that they become too

peremptory about some particulars. Beware of it; and see how the Lord hath dealt with his people, and the best of them (Psa 99:6-8). See Moses' lot in this matter. He had often sought of God, and prevailed, (Psa 106:23) Therefore the Lord said, that he would destroy them, had not Moses his chosen stood before him in the breach; to turn away his wrath, lest he should destroy them: A man to whom God spake face to face, a man to whom God spake so amazing words, Let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them (Exo 32:10); and (Num 14:20) I have pardoned according to thy word. Yet even this Moses in a small matter, for life, to cross Jordan, and to see the promised land, hath this answer, (Deut 3:26) Let it suffice thee, speak no more unto me of this matter. Samuel is checked also in a small matter, that had prevailed for far greater, (1 Sam 16:1) How long wilt thou mourn for Saul, seeing I have rejected him? A case may be such, that though Moses and Samuel stood before the Lord, they should not prevail (Jer 15:1). It is the only privilege of Jesus Christ, to be always heard (John 16:42). Yet, he, in his agony, prayed so as to teach us to beware of this sinful boldness, (Matt 26:39) If it be possible, let this cup pass from me, nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt. Believers must remember, that in all cases they must deal humbly, and in some cases they must take denials patiently.

3. There is the boldness of presumption. Presumption is like faith in appearance, but in reality it is very unlike it. Presumption works this way: the presumer may have the mercy in his eye, but he hath no promise in his eye. Take heed to this. If there be strong desires after a mercy, and that mercy not pleaded for as in the promise, there is a spice of presumption in that pleading. The reason why believers ask so great things of God, is, because God hath promised so great things to them (2 Sam 7:27). Hence it is that presumption acts ordinarily in pleading with God, not for the main spiritual blessings, but for some outward mercy, that their hearts may be too much set upon. It is about such that believers should watch against this presumptuous boldness. But if the pleading at the throne of grace be about salvation and spiritual blessings, the difference betwixt faith and presumption appears in this: Presumption can never plead with God, neither in deep distress, nor in the view of sin; but it is the excellent property of faith, that it can plead with God in both cases: (Psa 65:3) Iniquities prevail against me: as for our transgressions, thou shalt purge them away: Spoken like a believer; and (Psa 130:3,4) If thou, Lord, shouldst mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? (But can David stand? Yes, and he stands on this ground); but there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayst be feared. There is just cause to suspect, that there is presumption in that man's heart, when his boldness is only kept up, when sin is out of sight, and disappears. A believer believes most humbly, and often most strongly, when his sinfulness and unworthiness is best seen: for true boldness of faith is not supported by any good or worth in us, but by what is in Christ. The boldness of faith cannot be entertained with regarding of iniquity in the heart (Psa 66:18; 1 John 3:20); yet it can, with the being and seeing of iniquity in both heart and life (Rom 7:24,25; 1 Tim 1:15). But of this farther from the next head, of the boldness of faith. I now touch it only as it differs from the presumptuous boldness that is allowed to none. Again, faith can stand under that distress that breaks the back of presumption; (Job 13:15,16) Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him; but I will maintain mine own ways before him. He also shall be my salvation: for an hypocrite shall not come before him. "He hath taken away my children all at once, my estate in one day; hath taken away my health, and made me miserable, to a proverb in all ages: although he should proceed, and slay me with his own hand, my slayer is my Saviour, my death shall be my salvation." Great words, and hard to be spoken in the day of heavy trial! God slaying Job, is Job's salvation. God slays, Job trusts, and maintains his confidence under the stroke. No hypocrite can do this; and many believers do but bungle at the doing of it. There is an extremity a coming on every man, that will try and discover what metal there is in his faith; prepare for it.

What then is the boldness allowed in coming to the throne of grace? It must not be an ignorant, peremptory boldness. What must it then be?

Ans. It is only the boldness of faith (Eph 3:12; Heb 10:19). The boldness of faith hath this in general in it, that it is grounded and bottomed on somewhat without a man, and on nothing in him. It is grounded on Jesus Christ, as we shall hear farther. It is a great mistake in Christians to think, that they cannot come to the throne of grace with boldness, because of the many infirmities in their hearts, and in their addresses. Your complaint may be just and true; but the inference is not good. Do you never, in your counting your infirmities, put in this great one amongst them in your confessions, the want of boldness of faith? for this

boldness stands not in any thing in us, and done by us. We must not come boldly, because we can pray well, and plead hard; we must not think to be heard in heaven, neither because of our much speaking, nor well speaking (Matt 6:7), as the Pharisees did. The boldness of faith hath a higher, and more noble and firm foundation, even Jesus Christ.

I shall conclude this discourse with these three acts of this allowed and commanded boldness of faith. 1. Believe firmly that the throne of grace is erected for poor, empty, sinful creatures, just such as you be. As Paul saith of the law, (1 Tim 1:9) It is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient; so may we say of the throne of grace, It is not made, framed, and revealed for the holy and happy, but for miserable creatures that want mercy, and sinful helpless creatures that want grace. By what is dispensed here, we may know for whom, and for what sort of folks, it was designed and erected.

2. Believe firmly, that coming to the throne of grace by you is allowed and commanded by the Lord. Say confidently, While I am coming to the throne of grace for mercy and grace, I am in the work that the Lord would have me to be in. Take in all discoveries you have made unto you, or that you can find out by searching, of the weakness and infirmities that are in your way of addressing to it; own them humbly; but maintain this steadfastly, that though you cannot do as you would, as others do, nor as you are bid, that yet you are doing what ye are bid. They are called (Luke 14:21) who are the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind! See a promise looking that way (Jer 31:8,9). Now, may not the halt and maimed be confident, that they are coming, when called, although they cannot go so fast and straight as others do? Every believer walks in the steps of the faith of Abraham (Rom 4:12), though not his pace. When you draw near to the throne of grace, assure your hearts you are in your duty, though many do it better than you do. 3. Believe firmly, that upon coming you shall speed. This is coming with the boldness of faith. We should not come with a May be the Lord will be gracious. It is true, that in some particulars, not absolutely promised, nor simply needful to salvation, this may be is all we can have, or should seek. But in addressing for saving mercy and grace, people should come expecting success. It had been a cold word, if it had been said, Let us come to the throne of grace, it may be we shall obtain mercy and find grace. No; the apostle speaks in another dialect, Let us come that we may obtain. Never doubt of obtaining, if you come. I say not, that the confidence of good entertainment at this throne is common to all comers to it; but only that it is the duty of all that come for God's mercy and grace in Jesus Christ, to persuade their hearts that they shall obtain and find it. And good grounds there are for it, as we shall hear.

How is it with you, Christians? You often come to this throne: What are the thoughts of your hearts as to the issue of your addresses? It may be you think it is well if you can reach so far as this, "It may be the Lord will receive and welcome me, and therefore I will try." Though there is often faith lurking under such doubtings, and though a may be should stir up men to come; yet this is far from the boldness of faith, which glorifies this throne, and him that sitteth on it, and which is so becoming and profitable to all that approach it. See how an Old Testament saint speaks, (Job 23:3-6) O that I knew where I might find him! that I might come even to his seat: (that is, this throne). I would order my cause before him, and fill my mouth with arguments. But cannot God easily stop this man's mouth, and bring arguments against Job, that he could not answer? Yes, surely he can; but he will not; Will he plead against me with his great power? No, but he will put strength in me. He that I plead with, will help me to plead, and prevail. Few Christians know how much glory is given to God by an enlarged heart, filled with believing expectations of good from him; and how a heart thus enlarged by faith, is fitted and disposed for receiving a large blessing. We easily conceive how sharp hunger and thirst, strong desires, deep sense of need, and mighty pleadings and importunity, do prepare the way for great receivings; but we little think, how much force is in the bare-like argument of faith; (Psa 16:1) Preserve me, O God; for in thee do I put my trust, (Psa 33:22) Let thy mercy, O Lord, be upon us, according as we hope in thee, (Psa 57:1) Be merciful unto me, O God, be merciful unto me; for my soul trusteth in thee. There is a mighty force in such pleadings of faith. "I know no help but in and with thee; I expect it from thee, and therefore beg it off thee." Faith in a believer never rose so high, but the Lord's gracious answer went higher (Eph 3:20). Look well to your faith, believers; raise it high, use it well, and plead by it, and plead upon it. Blessed Jesus will never cast that soul into hell, that cannot forbear to entertain in his heart an expectation of eternal life from him, in the virtue of his precious blood, and on the warrant of his gracious promise. He that believeth on him, shall never be confounded. Never was any;

neither shall you, if you believe. It was a great word of faith, spoke by a dying man, who had been converted in a singular way, betwixt his condemnation and execution, of whom Mr. Fleming speaks in the Fulfilling of the Scriptures: his last words were these spoke with a mighty shout, “Never man perished with his face towards sweet Christ Jesus.”

SERMON IV Hebrews 4:16

Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.

It is one of the names given to the godly in the word, that they are the generation of them that seek the Lord, that seek his face (Psa 24:6). And they must be bold and arrogant pretenders to this name, that are guilty of the utter neglect of this duty. Since it is a duty of so great importance, it is needful to know how to manage it aright. This verse gives us a great directory, how to perform in a right manner this great duty. 1. It tells us whither to come: To a throne of grace. 2. How we should come: With boldness. Addresses to God may many ways miscarry; if not made to the true God, God in Christ; if not in the right manner. We have here one thing about the right manner, coming with boldness.

On this I proposed two things to be handled.

1. What is the nature of this allowed boldness?
2. What grounds are for it?

On the nature of this boldness, I began to speak last day; and did mainly insist on the negative.

Now it follows to speak of the positive. It is the boldness of faith that is allowed and commanded here (Eph 3:12). Faith is a marvellous grace, both in its original, in its foundation, and in its actings and exercise. It is the meanest and lowest of all graces. Every grace brings somewhat considerable. Love brings a flaming heart, repentance brings a bleeding heart, obedience brings a working hand, patience brings a broad back for the smiter; but faith brings only an empty heart and hand, to be filled with borrowed and gifted blessings. And yet faith is the highest and loftiest grace; it cannot rest till it be in at the heart and love of God in Christ. Faith (if I may so speak) can both be in heaven and hell at the same time. The believer looking on himself as in himself, (the apostle’s distinction, 2 Cor 3:5, ourselves, as of ourselves), judgeth himself to the pit of hell, as his deserved lot; but when he looks on himself as in Christ, he sits high (Eph 2:5,6) and makes bold to enter into the holiest of all (Heb 10:19). How many contrary sentiments of himself doth a believer express! only saved from being contradictions, by this distinction, That the word reveals and faith improves. I know that in me dwells no good thing (Rom 7:18). How! no good thing in a man full of the Holy Ghost! a man rich in the grace of Christ! a man that had laboured more abundantly than all the twelve apostles! (1 Cor 15:20) Yea, saith he, in me, that is, in my flesh dwells no good thing. A believer as in himself, and a believer as in Christ, are in a manner two different, distinct, contrary persons. A believer as in Christ, is a new creature; as in himself, and the remainders of corruption in him, is an old man still, or rather, hath much of the old man in him. A Christian hath two different opposite I’s in him; as the apostle elegantly and deeply discourseth (Rom 7:19-25). This genius of faith is much to be heeded in its bold addresses to the throne of grace.

This boldness of faith in this court of grace, acts in four.

1. In a free access at all times, and in all cases. It is a privilege allowed by the Lord to his people, and embraced and improved by their faith. There is no forbidden time, in which we may not come. No such command as in that King’s court (Esth 4:11). Here it is proclaimed, (Psa 62:8) Trust in him at all times, (Phil 4:6) Be careful for nothing; but in every thing, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God. There cannot be a more large and comprehensive account of the matter of allowed addresses to the throne of grace, than this. The apostle prescribes prayer as a cure of perplexing care. He hints, that every thing that is, or may be the matter of care, may lawfully be made the matter of holy prayer. Turn your care into prayer; and the care will evaporate and vanish, and your cure will be felt.

Blessed be the Lord, that hath made this good in the experience of many who have gone before him, with hearts filled and oppressed with many cares, and have returned light and free, and their countenance no more sad; as Hannah (1 Sam 1:18).

2. The boldness of faith acts in free speaking of all the mind to God. This the Greek word in the text particularly points at. Let us come with boldness, free speaking of all our mind; pouring out the heart to him (Psa 62:8), I poured out my complaint before him: I shewed before him my trouble (Psa 142:2). The tongue is not to be tied at this throne; but all that is on the heart, is to be told to him. He knows it before we tell it, and better than we do; but it is his will, that we should make all our minds known to him. A believer, the better case his faith is in, he is the more open and free in dealing with God.

It is recorded of a man, that we should hardly have counted a believer, had not the Holy Ghost numbered him amongst them, in Hebrews 11:32 that he uttered all his words (or matters) before the Lord in Mizpeh (Judg 11:11). So Samuel did, (1 Sam 8:21) And Samuel heard all the words of the people, and he rehearsed them in the ears of the Lord. It is a great favour that the Lord allows us so to do. This is not after the manner of men. It would be counted a troublesome impertinence, to vent all our thoughts, and cases, and concerns, to a creature; but we may do so to the Lord. When David refrained his speech, and kept silence, it went badly with him (Psa 32:3).³ This boldness of faith acts, and should act, in familiarity with God. Believers should come to the throne of grace, not as strangers and foreigner, but as fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God (Eph 2:19). Our Lord, in his directing us to pray, bids us begin with, Our Father, which art in heaven. The Spirit of adoption helps to cry, Abba, Father (Rom 8:15; Gal 4:6). When faith speaks rightly this word, and fixeth on it, all other desires will sweetly follow. Abba and Amen, uttered in faith, are the might of prayer. Strangers know not what familiarity the Lord expresseth to his people, nor how much familiarity he allows them to use with him. It was a great word of a great saint many years ago in this land, when dying in a bright shining of the Sun of righteousness on his soul, "Tell it to the people, preach it at my funeral, That God dealeth familiarly with men."⁴ This boldness of faith acts in importunity at the throne of grace. This importunity is nothing but the stiffness and tenaciousness of faith. Faith sometimes (and then it is best) will neither be beat back by delays from God, nor by inward challenges; but when it hath got hold of God, it will keep its hold. Our Lord spoke several parables to direct and encourage to this importunity: Luke 18:1-8, that of the unjust judge and oppressed widow; and Luke 11:5-8. We must understand parables warily. No importunity did ever, or can ever prevail with God, to do that for us, or give that to us, that he hath no mind to do or give. All he doth and gives, is in love. Yet he puts his people on importunity in asking, as if he were unwilling to give; when indeed it is that they may be more fit to receive, and that he may give the more. Thus Christ tried the woman of Canaan (Matt 15:22-28). So much for the first thing, What is the boldness of faith allowed and commanded in approaches to the throne of grace?

II. What grounds are there for this boldness?

There is need of great and solid ones to bear up this frame. And, blessed be God, we have such.

1. The gracious discovery made to us of God in Christ. This is, as it were, the essence of the throne of grace. The Father's name declared by the Son (John 17:25,26). It is utterly impossible that there can be any lawful boldness in approaching unto God, unless we know this name, and take up this discovery of God. Many professors busy their minds and heads with general notions and names of God; as that he is gracious, merciful, long-suffering, abundant in goodness and truth, forgiving iniquity. All good names of God. But is he not just, and a hater of iniquity; holy, and of purer eyes than that he can behold it? But the main inquiry is little thought on, Where shall we find the benefit of all the comfortable names of God, and escape the harm of his awful names? It is all in this blessed name, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ (Eph 3:14). If you approach to God out of Christ, you run into a consuming fire. Here is the ground of the believer's boldness: The God he seeks, and before whom he comes, is revealed to us as Christ's Father, and ours in him; (John 20:17) Go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God. Blessed be the words, and the speaker of them? and happy is the believer of them. Faith cannot stand strong without the remembrance of them. They are my brethren, for all their fainting, and forsaking of me: I count and call them such, though I be entered in part into my glory. Tell them whither I

am going, and where they are henceforth to seek me; and how to call on and worship the Father, as mine and theirs, and theirs because mine.

2. Another ground of boldness, is the mediation of Jesus Christ. But this being the third thing in the text, I leave it to its proper place.

3. The intercession of the Holy Ghost in his people, is a great ground of boldness. They have not only Christ making intercession for them at the right hand of God; but they have the Spirit himself making intercession in them, and for them (Rom 8:26,27). A special scripture; that I would remark five things from, relating to this purpose. 1. Who is the assister of believers in prayer? The Spirit itself; as also he is called as to his witnessing (v 16). And the word points at the immediateness of his assistance.

2. What this assistance is applied to? Our infirmities; infirmities in ourselves, and in our prayers; as the apostle declares, We know not what we should pray for as we ought. The communion of the Holy Ghost is only with believers, for he dwells in them only; and his communion with them is only with his own new creation in them; and because this, as in them, labours with infirmities, his care is about them also.

3. The way of his helping, is in the original hinted: He helpeth with us, or over-against us, as a powerful assistant to the weak, in bearing a heavy burden; as (Col 1:29) Whereunto I labour, striving according to his workings, which worketh in me mightily. It is in vain to expect the Spirit's assistance in work we neglect, or against infirmities we indulge and comply with.

4. What this assistance is? Making intercession for us (vv 26,27) and that according to the will of God. How can a believer but prevail, who hath the blood of the High Priest speaking in heaven (Heb 12:24), and the Spirit of Christ crying in his heart on earth (Gal 4:6)? The voice of the Spirit is the best thing in our prayer; it is that God hears and regards.

5. But, lastly, How doth this assistance and intercession work in us? With groanings which cannot be uttered. What! only with groanings? We would think it should be, that he assists with piercing cries that might reach heaven, with strong arguments that cannot but prevail, with mighty force and power that cannot be resisted. Is all this great preamble of the Spirit itself helping our infirmities, and making intercession for us according to the will of God; is all this come to a poor unutterable groaning? How strange seems this to be! Yet how sweet is it! Some groanings are so small, that they cannot be uttered; for the believer hardly feels them: some groans are so great, that they cannot be expressed; as (Job 23:2) Even today is my complaint bitter: my stroke is heavier than my groaning. Sometimes the Spirit of grace and supplications is a Spirit of liberty and enlargement unto Christians in prayer; so as they can, by his help, pour out all their hearts to God, and plead strongly: sometimes he is a Spirit of groaning, working only sense of want, and breathings after supply. There is more of the Spirit in a sensible groan, than in many formal words of prayer. The Spirit is called the Spirit of faith (2 Cor 4:13); and the Spirit of grace and supplication (Zech 12:10). Join both those names together: he is the Spirit of faith in prayer, or, the Spirit of prayer in faith (Rom 8:15). The Spirit of grace belongs to the throne of grace; and his assistance doth give boldness to believers. The more you feel of his help, pray the more boldly.

4. The covenant of grace gives boldness to believers in their coming to the throne of grace. The covenant of grace, as well as the Spirit of grace, belongs to the throne of grace. Dying David had that sight of this covenant, that gave consolation to him under sad reflections: (2 Sam 23:5) Although my house be not so with God; yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure: for this is all my salvation, and all my desire, although he make it not to grow. Let us consider some properties of the promises of this covenant, (for the covenant of grace is a covenant of promise, Rom 9:4; Eph 2:12), that do give just ground for the boldness of faith in coming to the throne of grace.

1st, The exceeding greatness of the promises. They are exceeding great and precious promises that are given to us (2 Peter 1:4). When a believer looks within, he seeth great and manifold wants and necessities; that he hath nothing, and wants every thing. Some have thought, that they wanted more grace than ever any sinner did; yet never any wanted more than is in the promises. There is surely more grace in the promises, than there is want in the creature. Creature-wants cannot exhaust God's fulness of grace; and all this fulness is in the promises. There is more of grace in the promise, than there can be of sin and misery in the man that pleads it. Take heed how you compare your necessities with the fulness of the promises. Nothing you can

need, but a supply is promised. Study your hearts and God's covenant, and you will quickly find it to be so. We may ask any thing; for God hath promised every thing (Psa 84:11).

2dly, The freeness of the promises gives boldness at the throne of grace. That they are promises of a covenant of grace, proves they must be free. A free promise is a bond given merely from the heart and proper motion of the promiser, without any motion or motive from the party to whom it is made, except it be that of his misery, that grace works on. If the promises were not purely free to us, there could be no boldness in pleading of them. See how the Shunnamite pleads with the prophet Elisha, (2 Kings 4:28) Did I desire a son of my lord? did I not say, Do not deceive me? As if she had said, "It was not at my desire, but of thine own motion, thou didst promise me a son; and I did not fully believe it at first; but now the son promised is dead." So may the believer plead: "Lord, I did not ask of thee a promise of grace and glory. I was sinfully contented in, and with my natural lost estate; and thou didst call me, and quicken me with thy promise: wilt thou not make out thy promise?" The freeness of the promise is the firmest foundation of boldness in pleading its performance. No other promises, but free ones, are in the covenant of grace; and no other pleading of them but as free, is allowed to them that come to the throne of grace. If thou be for merit and worth in thyself, go elsewhere; there is no place for such proud rich folks at this court.

3dly, The sureness of the promises of the covenant of grace, is another ground of boldness at the throne of grace. They are the sure mercies of David (Isa 55:3). Sure, because of grace: (Rom 4:16) therefore it (the promise, or the inheritance promised) is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed. A promise is made for faith; (would ever God or man promise, but to be believed?) faith is given for, and acts on the promise; (believing without a promise, is dreaming). A promise made by the God of all grace (1 Peter 5:10), to sinners void of all grace, to give all grace to them, must be a promise of grace: the believer of this promise must, and can have nothing in his eye, but the grace of the promiser. Now, saith Paul, it is this grace of the promise and promiser, that makes the blessing promised sure to all the seed. Again, the promises of God are sure, because they are his (Heb 6:17,18); promises sworn for putting an end to the strife of unbelief. Balaam was a bad man, and therefore called a mad prophet (2 Peter 2:16); yet, by the over-ruling Spirit of God upon him, spoke truly and highly, (Num 23:19) God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good? All God's promises are sure, because they are his promises that cannot lie. And they are yet farther confirmed of God in Christ (Gal 3:17). So that the believer, in his pleading of God's promises, may lay down this conclusion: I want indeed great and many blessings; but I want nothing, I ask nothing, but what he hath promised who cannot lie, and what is confirmed in Jesus Christ, the Amen, the true and faithful witness. Believers fail greatly in their neglect to quicken and strengthen their faith, by taking up the promises in their full extent, fulness, freeness, and certainty. It is always found, that faith is weak, when the promises are mean in our eyes: but if the promise appear, and shine in its glory, as God's faithful word; then faith is aloft, and acts strongly. Hence it is, that all strong believing gives glory to the promises (Rom 4:20), and weak faith reflects on him, (Psa 77:8,9) Hath God forgotten to be gracious? doth his promise fail for evermore? Alas! it was the good man's infirmity to say and think so (v 10). But from his arguing I observe, that where faith is feeble, a man thinks the promise fails; (as a giddy man thinks the rock he stands on, shakes and reels, when all the shaking is in his head or legs); and when he thinks the promise fails, he thinks the promiser is changed from what he was when he made it. And it borders on blasphemy, to rob God, by our unbelief, of his glorious attribute of unchangeableness. If you have a mind to believe, keep still the promise in your eye; if you would believe strongly, view the promise narrowly and steadily. The promise is both the father and mother of faith; it both begets faith, and feeds it. Your first believing is from the power of the promise; and the continued and growing life of faith, is by sucking and drawing nourishment from the breasts of the promise.

5. Another ground of the boldness of believers in their approaches to the throne of grace, is, their privileges that they are possessed of. So the apostle argues (Heb 10:19-21) to drawing near with full assurance of faith (v 22). Some of these I shall name, with this caution, That though all believers have them, yet all do not know they have them; and therefore all do not use them as they ought, and would, if they knew them to be theirs. But all should therefore labour to know them, that they may use them to the glory of the giver, and to the comfort and edification of the receivers.

1st, The first of these privileges, is election. And justly it is called the first: for nothing can be before it; for itself is before time; and all that they afterwards receive, flows from it. Election is that eternal and adorable act of free grace, wherein God the Father passed over his love to a select company of mankind, that were to come into the world; appointing them to salvation; appointing a Saviour for them, and all means fit to accomplish his design of love on them, to the praise of his grace (Eph 1:4-6). This blessing is revealed in believing. When God gives faith, he makes known his electing love; and when we act faith, we may see it. Faith is the faith of God's elect (Titus 1:1). This, when seen, is a great ground of boldness at the throne of grace: (Luke 18:7) Shall not God avenge his own elect, that cry unto him day and night? This our Lord prays upon in John 17:9,10, I pray for them: I pray not for the world; but for them which thou hast given me, for they are thine. And all mine are thine, and thine are mine, and I am glorified in them. As if our Lord had said, "I am sure to be heard; for I pray for them that are partakers of thine everlasting love. They are thine by election, and given to me; they are mine, by receiving and redeeming of them." We are bid give diligence to make our calling and election sure (2 Peter 1:10). They are sure in themselves, and sure to God; but we should make them sure to ourselves: and many Christians smart sadly by neglecting this diligence.

2dly, The gift of Christ for us, is a great privilege that gives boldness at the throne of grace. So the apostle argues, (Rom 8:32) He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all (you may see who this all are, vv 28-30) how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? As if he had said, "It is a small thing to God to give us all other things, when he hath given his Son. We receive now many blessings, blessed be the giver; we have greater things in the promise than we yet receive, or can yet receive; but shall surely receive in his time: yet all we get, and shall to eternity receive, is far less than the gift of Christ." It is like our Lord had respect to this in that word to the woman of Samaria, (John 4:10) If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldst have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water. If she had known Christ as the well of salvation to sinners, she would have employed him, and should have been accepted of him. But here many Christians stick: they doubt not but Christ was given for his church and people, but they know not how to apply this to themselves. If I knew, say many, that Christ was given for me, I would then come boldly to the throne of grace, and ask any thing confidently. I answer, None can know that Christ was given for them, till they come unto him: and all that come to him, may know that he was given for them, and should believe it. He was given by the will of the Father, and his own, for his elect. This is a secret hid with God. He comes to men in the gospel, offering himself, and all his purchase and fulness, to all that hear of it. He that hath his heart drawn forth to like this bargain, and accepts by faith of the Saviour, and of his great salvation, hath possession thereof immediately; and by that may come to know, that it was designed for him in God's purpose of love. So Paul (Gal 1:14-16), he was one of the holiest and most religious Jews in their church; and yet was at the same time one of the most wicked young men in all the country: a very hypocrite, a proud self-justiciary, and a bloody persecutor of Christ and his church. Yet of this wicked creature it is here said, that God had separated him from his mother's womb; and (Acts 4:15) He is a chosen vessel unto me; I will pour out of my grace on him, and will do much for him, and by him. When did all this break out? When he called me by his grace, and revealed his Son in me. Then he can say, (Gal 2:20) He loved me, and gave himself for me; and again, (1 Tim 1:15) This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. All say so: but had he any mind of thee? and hast thou any share in his coming to save sinners? Yes, saith he, of whom I am the chief. He came to save me the chief of sinners. Any sinner may come after me, and expect mercy at Christ's hand, when Paul hath sped so well (v 16). He hath made me a pattern of his mercy, for the encouragement of all sinners that have a mind for a good turn from Jesus Christ.

3dly, The privilege of actual reconciliation, and of being brought into a state of grace, is a ground of boldness in coming to the throne of grace (Rom 5:9,10); where the apostle having shewn God's love in giving Christ to the death for us (v 8), he adds the blessings that flow from this gift; justification by his blood, and therefore much more salvation from wrath through him (v 9); and reconciliation to God by his death, and therefore much more salvation by his life (v 10). The improvement he makes thereof, is in verse 11, and not only so, but we also joy in God, (the original is, we glory or boast in God), through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement. A state of grace, is a state of boldness. All that are in it should, and all that know they are in it will, use boldness of faith at this throne of grace (Rom 5:1-

6).6. The experiences of believers are a great ground of boldness. Experience works hope (Rom 5:4). The experience of others, as well as our own, is of great use herein. Sometimes we find David improving the experience of others for the strengthening his own faith; sometimes he offers his own experience for the comfort of others, (Psa 66:16) Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what he hath done for my soul. Because David was in distress of conscience, and got peace and pardon, (Psa 32:1,6) For this shall every one that is godly pray unto thee, in a time when thou mayest be found, (Psa 119:74) They that fear thee, will be glad when they see me; because I have hoped in thy word. There is no Christian that hath not experience. As he hath a soul that needs much to be done for it, so the Lord doth much for all he saves. And because the Lord dealeth variously with his people, therefore there is much difference in their experiences. Yet because all believers are members of the same body, and receive all from the same head, Jesus Christ, there is some skill and capacity in every Christian to understand, and to be profited by the experience of any Christian. Hence it is, that communicating of experiences is a Christian duty, and a good part of the communion of saints. But there is much Christian prudence requisite in the discharge of it. Let no man boast of a false gift, and pretend to that he hath no sense of; nor talk vainly and proudly of what God hath done for him. All true experiences are acts of grace from God felt on the soul. And grace is humbling; (1 Cor 4:7) For who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? Now, if thou didst receive it? why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it? Three questions confounding the pride of men and Christians. Of these experiences that should give boldness in coming to the throne of grace, I shall name three.

1st, The experience of the first visit of grace, is a good ground of confidence in asking any blessing of God. Can you remember when you were dead in sin, and had no thought of grace, nor of thy need and want of it, but wast well content with thy lost state; and that, in this state, grace came from this throne, and did beset thy heart, and overcome it? May you not argue, If the Lord sought me out, and found me in my departing from him, and stopped me, and turned my heart towards himself; may not I come now confidently, and ask mercy and grace? It is a matter of great use to believers, to keep up a savoury remembrance of the gracious change that preventing grace wrought upon them. Paul could never forget first Christ's visit to him, but speaks of it before kings and rulers, and people (Acts 22:26). He remembers time and place, and every circumstance. I say not that Christ's first visit is so sensible to all, or (it may be) to any, as it was to Paul. But Christ's work of grace may be known by itself, even when some circumstances of time, and place, and outward means, are not known.

2dly, The experience of the Spirit of prayer, and of answers of prayer, is a great ground of boldness of faith. I join these two together, for the Lord usually doth so: (Psa 116:1,2) I love the Lord, because he hath heard my voice and my supplications. Because he hath inclined his ear unto me, I will call upon him as long as I live. Have ye not known, that sometimes you have been so troubled, that you could not speak? as Psalm 77:4: that your hearts have been so bound up, and straitened, that you could say nothing, and do nothing, before the Lord; but sit as dumb and oppressed, all dark above, all dead within, and all doors shut upon you; you durst not neglect prayer, and you could not perform it? and have you not quickly found the two-leaved gates cast open to you, your hearts enlarged, and your mouth wide open in asking? The remembrance of such experiences should strengthen the confidence of your faith. Have you not known what the answer of prayer is? that he hath prepared your heart, and hath caused his ear to hear? as Psalm 10:17. Come the more boldly at all other times. They are triflers in prayer, that know nothing of God by the name of hearer of prayer (Psa 65:2), They that sow in tears, shall reap in joy. Whoever hath gone forth weeping, bearing (and sowing) his precious seed, hath doubtless come again rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him (Psa 126:5,6); and should therefore sow in hope. 3dly, The experience of communion and fellowship with God, is a great ground of boldness in coming to the throne of grace for more. Such as have most of this blessing, desire most earnestly more of it, and may desire it the more confidently (1 John 1:1-4). Surely we have this fellowship with the Father, and with his Son Christ Jesus; and we would fain have you share with us therein, that your joy may be full. This communion with God is a mystery, undoubted to him that tasteth it, and surpassing all the delights of sense or reason; incredible and unintelligible to all that have it not. A stranger intermeddles not with this joy (Prov 14:10). It lies more deep, than that any eye of flesh can see it. It is of that nature, that only tasting can declare its transcendent sweetness: (Psa 34:8) O taste and see that the Lord

is good. Saints feel much of it, they talk much of it, the word is full of suitable and savoury expression of it; yet all are riddles and dark parables to them that experience it not. You that know what it is, though you cannot express it, yet you can relish and understand some sound words about it. Yet know what it is to be brought near to him, and to have the clouds and veils, that are either on your hearts, or on his face, scattered, and the light of his countenance lifted up upon you (Psa 4:6,7). You have been sometimes so in the mount, as to think, O, how good it is to be here! You have known what the warm and healing beams of the Sun of Righteousness upon you are (Mal 4:2). You have tasted that in his company, that hath made the puddle of the world's wells of comfort loathsome and unsavoury; yea, as hath made you groan in this tabernacle, and long to be in at that complete and uninterrupted communion above, whereof all you taste on earth, is but a small earnest and first-fruits. And may not, should not such come boldly to the throne of grace?

APPLICATION. Is there an allowed boldness in coming to the throne of grace? Then let us use this boldness. Alas! many come doubtingly and discouragedly. Their unbelief is so strong, and their faith so weak, that they not only come without this boldness, but think that they ought not to come with it, but with a frame contrary to it. They think, that it is true humility, to come with a fear, that is inconsistent with this boldness. It is indeed required, that men should come before the Lord with awful fear and reverence, and that they should judge themselves unworthy and undeserving, both of the privilege of coming, and of the least of the blessings they come for. Yet the boldness of faith is not prejudiced thereby. I shall therefore answer some of the common pleas of unbelief, as to this privilege, and its improvement.

Object. 1. Is from conscience of sin and guilt, grounded specially on these two scriptures, Psalm 66:18 and 1 John 3:20. This plea seems to be strong, and to justify or excuse doubtings in Christians; and doth usually mar the due sense of this duty, of coming boldly to the throne of grace. To remove it therefore, consider, that sin affects the heart and conscience two ways. 1. It defiles the conscience. 2. It disturbs it.

1. Sin defiles the conscience: (Titus 1:15) Unto the pure all things are pure: but unto them that are defiled, and unbelieving, is nothing pure; but even their mind and conscience is defiled. But we must see when and how the conscience is defiled by sin. Conscience is God's tribunal in every man. It is an active and awful power in men, judging of themselves, as to their state and actions, as they think God judgeth of them. So that there are two main causes tried, and to be decided, at this court of conscience.

1. Am I at peace with God, and he with me? and this is only truly resolved, when conscience pronounceth as God declares in his word. And that declaration is, That every man by nature, and as in the first Adam, is an enemy to God, and God to him; and that every one that is in Jesus Christ by faith, is a child and friend of God, and God is at peace with him. The answer then is different, if according to truth. Some may, but will not conclude their state of enmity, by their not believing on Jesus Christ; some may, but dare not conclude, that they are at peace with God, though they cannot deny their faith in Jesus Christ.

2. A second cause is about particular actions: and the question then is, Is this, or that, or the other action, pleasing or displeasing to God? And this is to be determined by the light of conscience, acting according to God's holy law. For God is the only Lord of conscience, and his will the only rule and law of conscience. Conscience therefore may be three ways defiled. 1st, By the unpardoned guilt of a natural state, as it is in all unbelievers. Nothing can purge the conscience, but the blood of Christ (Heb 9:14). An unbeliever doth not apply to it, nor apply it to himself, and God applies it to none but by faith. Therefore all such unbelievers have all the loathsome filth of their natural state lying on their consciences, defiling it. The answer of a good conscience towards God, is by the resurrection of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 3:21). All unbelievers' consciences can speak nothing towards God, by any thing Christ hath done or suffered; for they know him not, and are not in him. They would give an answer, or make their plea, from their good works and honest meanings. But all such answers and pleas are rejected by God, in his judging of a man's state. For all God's judgments of men's state proceeds on these two, in Christ, or out of Christ. And as it is with them with respect to one or other of these two, so do men stand or fall before God's judgment, whatever the judgment of their consciences be.

2dly, Conscience is defiled by sinful actions, known to be such. Now, if these be loved, and delighted in, they do justly mar confidence; neither can any man in this case draw near to God, but with the mouth, and hypocritically (Isa 29:13). This is a frame not to be found in a believer. He may be guilty of known sin, but it is not delighted in. To this David's words refer, (Psa 66:18) If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not

hear me. It is not, If there be iniquity in my heart; for who can say, I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin? (Prov 20:9). It is not, If I see iniquity in my heart; for where there is least sin, it is best seen. Paul saw enough (Rom 7:23-25), and groaned under it; and yet blesseth God through Jesus Christ for the hope of victory. But it is only, If I regard iniquity in my heart, (if I look kindly on it), God will not hear me. And indeed the man in this case cannot pray. It is as impossible that a person approving and loving sin, can make a real approach to God, as it is for a man to depart from, and approach to one, at the same time, and with the same motion.

3dly, The conscience is defiled by doubtful practice. Of this the apostle speaks, (1 Cor 8:7) And their conscience being weak, is defiled. To this belong also the words in Romans 14:5, Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind; and verses 22, 23, Whatsoever is not of faith, is sin. In deliberate actions, especially of worship to God, to act without a clear warrant from the word of God, defileth the conscience.

2. Sin disturbs the conscience. And conscience is disturbed by sin, two ways.

1st, When the evil and filth of sin is seen, a man lothes himself therefore. No defilement on the conscience disturbs it, till it be seen. Men like swine wallow in the puddle, and see no filth therein, till God open the eyes of their consciences.

2dly, When the danger of sin is seen, and the wrath it deserves is perceived, then perplexing fears, and sensible sorrow, work in the soul. Now, what is the course such a poor creature should take? The sin is committed, the guilt is contracted, the conscience is defiled, the defilement is seen, disturbance and trouble is felt in the conscience; what should such a sick soul do? Will any say to him, Wash thyself where thou canst, and cast away the burden of thy sin the best way thou canst, and then come to the throne of grace? This would be strange gospel indeed. We know no other course a man should take in this case, but coming to the throne of grace, to have the conscience sprinkled with the blood of Christ, the only cordial for a disturbed conscience, and the only purger of a defiled conscience. Therefore Peter was quite out in his prayer; he prayed backward, when he said, Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord (Luke 4:8). Were ever those words uttered at the knees of Jesus Christ? He had said better, if he had prayed, "Lord, come near to me, and abide with me, and let me ever abide with thee: for I am a sinful man. Where can a sinful man be better, than with the Saviour of sinners?" But Peter's prayer is the natural prayer of every man that seeth his sinfulness, and is ignorant of Jesus Christ. The publican understood prayer, and plied it better (Luke 18:13), when he said, God be merciful to me a sinner. "I feel my sinfulness, I see thy mercy, Lord, let them meet; and thy mercy shall be glorified, and I saved." Whoever therefore are distressed with the guilt of sin in their consciences, or with the power of it in their hearts and lives, must seek all their relief at this throne of grace. It is only the power of that grace revealed and dispensed at this throne of grace, that is too hard for sin, and all its powers. And for any man to think to subdue sin, except by the power of this grace; or to think that he shall have this powerful grace, without coming for it to the throne of grace, is to dream to his own destruction.

Object 2. I am in the dark about my interest in God and Christ, and therefore I cannot come boldly to this throne. If I did know that God was at peace with me, and I reconciled to him, and justified, then I might come boldly.

Ans. 1. Whose fault is it, that thy interest in Christ is not put out of question? Were Christians more in self-examination, more close in walking with God; and if they had more near communion with God, and were more in acting of faith, this shameful darkness and doubting would quickly vanish. It is a thing to be heavily bewailed, that many Christians have lived twenty or forty years, since Christ called them by his grace, yet doubting is their life; they doubted when they began, they go on doubting, and many die doubting, when the blame is justly to be laid on themselves. There is an assurance of faith, that is a duty, as well as a blessing (Heb 10:22). And were it more minded as a duty, it would be more often attained as a mercy. That assurance of faith I press you to have, stands in firm and strong believing. The faithful promise of Christ in the gospel, is the foundation of it. And the ground will bear all the weight we can lay on it. This assurance is not only a blessing that comes down from heaven, but it may, by his blessing of means, spring up out of the soul; I mean, it may spring out of the lively vigorous actings of faith. The great believers we read of in the word, the confidence of their faith rose up to that height and strength that we admire, from a clear persuasion of the truth of the promises, and of the faithfulness of the maker of them. So it is said of Abraham, (Rom

4:20,21) He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; and being fully persuaded, that what he had promised, he was able also to perform. And lest any should think, that because the man was singular, and the case singular, therefore ordinary believers may only wonder at it, and not attempt to imitate it; the apostle adds, (vv 23,24) Now it was not written (in Gen 15:6) for his sake alone; but for us also, &c. As if the apostle had said, “You see what ground Abraham had for his faith; how strongly he built upon it, and how pleasing that was to God. You have the same ground; build ye also upon it by faith, and that faith in you will be as pleasing to God.” Abraham had God’s promise to build upon. In this promise there was its outward part and external. And this was an offspring of his body by Sarah, and the land of Canaan for an inheritance. The spiritual and main thing in the promise, was Jesus Christ the Saviour, and the blessing of eternal salvation in him. This was Abraham’s gospel: (Gal 3:8,9) and the scriptures foreseeing (that is the author of the scriptures foreseeing) that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached the gospel before unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed. So then they which be of faith, are blessed with faithful Abraham. His gospel and promise was of Christ to come, and of salvation by him. Ours is the promise of salvation in Christ come already delivered for our offences, and raised again for our justification (Rom 4:25); that is, imprisoned for our debt, and set at liberty for our discharge. Now, consider, how Abraham improved this promise. He had nothing else in his eye, he would consider nothing, but the promise, and the faithful and mighty promiser. So must we. When we give place to considering of ourselves, our sinfulness and unworthiness; when we consider the greatness of the blessings in the promise, how far they are beyond our deserving, how many things there be that do make it incredible to reason that we should ever receive, or that God should ever give such great things to us, faith must be at a stand. It is as incredible to an awakened conscience, that God should justify a sinner, as it was to reason, that Abraham should have a son by Sarah. Our only way is, to consider the promise. God hath said it, and he will perform it, and I will believe it. If all the angels in heaven, or faithful men on earth, had said, that God will save me from sin and wrath by Jesus Christ; that such a vile creature as I am in myself, shall be excepted in that beloved, I durst not believe it. But when God himself hath said so, why should I doubt it? God’s promise in the gospel deserves our highest trust and confidence; and such as view it in all its grace, truth, and power, will pay it that due.

Ans. 2. Suppose thy want of clearness as to thy interest in Christ, and that it is thine own fault; may you not come boldly to the throne of grace for satisfaction therein? If you know not who is your Father, may you not come to him to know it? There are many worse prayers made than this, That the Lord would make manifest his own work in you. Lord, help my unbelief, was a believer’s prayer. Complaining of doubtings and darkness, and praying for light and clearness, hath often dispelled the clouds, and brought the soul under a bright sunshine.

Ans. 3. Direct trusting on God, when saints have been in darkness as to their interest in him, is required and commanded in the word, (Isa 50:10) Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? Let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God. What had the woman of Canaan (Matt 15:22-28), but direct trusting? Christ was silent to her first crying unto him; when the disciples crave an answer for her, Christ tells her and them, that he was not sent for such as she; when she comes and worships him, saying, Lord, help me, he answers her humble believing prayer with reproach. Yet all shakes her not; but by faith she relies upon Christ, and makes an argument from this very reproach. And blessed was the issue.

Object. 3. What should a man do that never came to the throne of grace before? I can understand how a believer may, and should come boldly. It is no wonder that a poor beggar go boldly to that door, that he hath been often at, and was never sent empty from. But can, or may a poor sinner come boldly, the first time he comes?

Ans. 1. It is granted, that usually first approaches to the throne of grace, are feeble and weak, and not with that confidence of faith that believers do grow unto by experience, and exercise of faith.

Ans. 2. Yet a man may come boldly at the first time. There is good ground for it. 1. Consider the text, Let us come boldly, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace. Who can, or should put in for these blessings; more than he that never yet got any! Do receivers come to receive daily more grace and mercy; and may not one, utterly destitute and needy, beg somewhat of this mercy and grace! 2. Consider the ground of this

boldness lies fair and equal to all that will use it in coming. To name only now the promise of God: This is laid before all men in the gospel. Have you a hand of faith to lay hold on it? That makes it yours. God's promise is as sure and true before we believe it, as after. Believing adds nothing to the sureness of the promise. Our believing is like a drowning man's catching and laying hold on a rope thrown out to him; his laying hold on it makes not the rope stronger, yet it makes the rope his defence. The promise is equally true before believing and after believing; but it is no man's known property, till it be believed. The cords of salvation are cast out in the gospel to multitudes; yet most perish, because they do not lay hold on them. No man can sink into hell, that holds the promise of salvation by the arm of faith. 3. Consider how the Lord directs, (Jer 3:19) But I said, How shall I put thee among the children, and give thee a pleasant land, a goodly heritage of the host of nations? That is dreadful indeed, when God makes such a question. Who can answer the Lord's questions, but himself? And I said, Thou shalt call me, My Father, and shalt not turn away from me. A most blessed answer to a dreadful question. (v 4) Wilt thou not from this time cry unto me, My Father, thou art the guide of my youth? An interest in God by Christ is offered and promised to all in the gospel; plead it by faith, and it is yours.

3. We find instances in the word, (and the like the Lord can make again), of great confidence in some at their first coming to the throne of grace: As the blind man (Mark 10:46-52). He only heard of Christ's passing by: he staid not for Christ's calling him, but began to cry out, Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me. When many charged him to hold his peace, he cried the more a great deal, Thou Son of David, have mercy on me. "Christ was never in my way before, and he shall not pass now without shewing mercy on me, if crying may prevail." And that his crying was in faith, Christ witnesseth (v 52). In all appearance, the woman of Canaan was never at the throne of grace before (Matt 15:22-28) at least, never at Christ's feet before: yet she managed her first address with that confidence, that she not only got her desire, but that high commendation with it, O woman, great is thy faith. So the centurion (Matt 8:5-10). But above all instances, is that of the believing thief on the cross (Luke 23:40-43). Never had the throne of grace so little to encourage an address to it, as when the King of grace was dying on the cross. Never had a sinner less encouragement to come to the throne of grace, than when the Saviour was nailed to one tree, and the sinner to another. Marvellous faith! a dying sinner, dying for his sins, employs a dying Saviour for salvation, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. How little did Christ nailed to, and dying on the cross, look like a King? How strong was the man's faith to believe, that Christ, through death, was going to his kingdom? and that Christ's gracious thought of him would save him? And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise. As if our Lord had said, "This is thy first and thy last address to me, verily it shall be heard." Believers do not think how pleasing to the Lord, large and high thoughts of the sufficiency, fulness, and freedom of the grace that is in Jesus Christ, are. Believers should devise liberal things, and by liberal things they shall stand (Isa 32:8). Let a believer ask, and think on the warrant of the promise, as much as he can; the Lord is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us. Unto him be, glory in the church by Christ Jesus, throughout all ages, world without end. Amen. (Eph 3:20,21).

SERMON V Hebrews 4:16

Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.

HEAD III. The third thing follows to be spoke to, the ground of this boldness, implied in this therefore.

And we must look back to verses 14, 15 for the finding the force of this therefore. The words are, Seeing then that we have a great High priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an 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. Let us therefore come boldly, &c. The doctrine I am to handle from this inference of the apostle is this. DOCT. That the main ground of all the boldness allowed in coming to the throne of grace, is in our Lord Jesus Christ. The interest, and room, and place, that Christ hath in this throne of grace, is the ground of all allowed boldness in coming to it. When people are secure, nothing is more commonly practised by them, than fearless rushing into God's presence. Any carnal careless sinner can, when he will, bow the knee, and make that he calls a prayer to God. But when conscience is awakened, and light darts in to make them know somewhat of God, and of themselves, it is then found a matter of wonderful mystery and difficulty, to perceive any thing that can justly and sufficiently support the confidence of a self-condemned sinner, in his approaches to God for mercy. Hence it is so often seen, that this is the common way of all the ungodly, and of such as are ignorant of God in Christ. While they are secure, and blind, and hardened, they feel nothing, and fear nothing: but when death and judgment approach, and stare them near in the face; and when they begin to think in earnest, that they must stand before God, and receive their eternal doom, being ignorant of a Mediator, and quite estranged from any believing employing of him, they sink in discouragement and despair. And, alas! how many miserable sinners are there, that are never awakened out of the sleep of security, until they are plunged in the very pit of despair? The resolution therefore of this question, How a sinner may draw near to the throne of grace with confidence, so as he may be welcomed by him that sitteth on it, and may receive good things thence? is only in this, that this boldness is all in and by Jesus Christ. My work therefore at this time (and it is indeed the main work of ministers at all times) is, to declare and shew you, how our Lord Jesus Christ is the ground and foundation of true confidence in coming to God. And herein I would lead you to such things that concern the Lord Jesus as are commonly known, usually talked of, but rarely duly pondered and improved. 1. Let us consider the person of this Mediator by whom we may have access with boldness (Eph 3:12). A wonderful person! the Son of God made man; a marvellous man; by whom all men may be accepted with God, when there is not a man in the world that can be accepted of God in his own name: yet all that come in Christ's name are accepted. Our Lord Jesus Christ is God's own Son, the Son of God tabernacling in the flesh; God manifest in the flesh; the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of his person (Heb 1:3). There is one God, and one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time (1 Tim 2:6,7). In due time it will be seen, what this ransom was paid for, and for whom: for every one of the ransomed shall get their liberty and inheritance in God's time and way. People commonly profess the faith of this truth, That our Mediator is God and man. But how little is it improved by faith? We do not consider him, how great a person he is, and how fit for us (Heb 3:1,2). Such as have any serious thoughts of God, and of themselves (and they are in a forlorn state that have none), find a necessity of a Mediator, when they consider the strictness of his justice, the power of his wrath, the perfect purity and holiness of his nature, compared with the sinfulness and vileness of their own nature, hearts, and lives. But there is another deeper thought of God, that will discover as great necessity of a Mediator; and that is of his greatness. With God is terrible majesty; with God is unsearchable glory. How can there be a bold and acceptable approach to him of whom we cannot frame a right suitable thought? How is it avoidable, but that all our worship must be to an unknown God? for no man hath seen God at any time (John 1:18). Here comes in the Mediator Jesus Christ; who is not only a screen betwixt justice and us, but is a glass wherein we may behold the glory of God. This glory is only to be beheld in the face or person of Jesus Christ (2 Cor 4:6). All other views of God's glory are either confounding, or but vain unprofitable notions. All the speculations of the Pagans, that polished the dim light of nature; and all the curious studies of some called Christians, about the nature, being, properties, and attributes of God, are nothing but pretty pieces of philosophy. There is nothing of sound theology in those thoughts, unless they be all stinted, limited, directed to, and determined by that discovery that God makes of himself to us in and by his Son Jesus Christ. The mediation then of Jesus Christ, is not only an argument which, and on which we may plead with God; but it is the mean by which only we must approach to God, and the light wherein we see, and know savingly the God we worship. He knew the way best, who is the way to the Father, and said, No man cometh to the Father but by me; and did answer Philip's weighty and very natural desire, Shew us the Father, and it sufficeth, thus, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? He that hath seen me, hath seen the Father: and how sayest thou, Shew us the Father? (John 14:6-9). They all

worship an idol, or wander in a perfect maze and labyrinth, that seek God out of Jesus Christ. No where else is he to be sought or found, but as a consuming fire. God of old put his name at Jerusalem; to it they must come with their solemn sacrifices; when afar off, they must look to it, as Daniel 6:10. When they are bid remember the Lord afar off, it is added, and let Jerusalem come into your mind (Jer 51:50). Now, Jerusalem, temple, altar, holy of holies, mercy seat, priests, sacrifices, &c. were all but shadows of Jesus Christ. Under the New Testament, when Christ is come, the name of God is in him, and all the worship and approaches are to be made to God dwelling in this true tabernacle which the Lord pitched, and not man (Heb 8:2).² Let us consider our Lord's office of High Priest. So the apostle calls him our great High Priest, and we have him (v 14). This is a great ground of boldness in dealing with God, that we have Christ for a High Priest. He was of God's own choosing and calling. He is not of our choosing, but he is for our using. Should that man be called a Christian, who hath no use for this great High Priest? High priests were taken from among men, and ordained from men in things pertaining to God (Heb 5:1). Consider the honour of this office to Christ, and its usefulness to his people. He glorified not himself to be made an High Priest; but he that said to him (v 5). Christ's offices of King and Prophet carry visible plain glory in them. But to be made an High Priest, especially when he is to be both priest, altar, and sacrifice, seems to have no glory, but abasement. But if we look to the inside of this office, it excels in glory. What inconceivable glory is it to Christ, to be the reconciler of all things, to take up so honourably the grand quarrel betwixt angry heaven and sinful earth, to purge our sins by the sacrifice of himself, and then sit down at the right hand of the Majesty on high? (Heb 1:3); to offer a sacrifice, in the virtue whereof an innumerable company, out of all nations, tongues, and languages, are redeemed, and justified, and glorified: for which he shall be eternally praised in heaven, by all the happy inhabitants of that blessed place! (Rev 5:9). As for the usefulness of this office to his people, I shall only name two things. 1. In this office he manageth all our business with God; such as we could never have done ourselves; and must be eternally undone, if it were not done for us; to satisfy justice, fulfil the law, and bring us in a sure title to the inheritance of heaven. 2. By him we offer all our spiritual services, and have them presented by him for acceptance (Heb 13:15). We must do all in his name (Col 3:17).

3. Let us consider what our Lord did when he was on earth, and thence we have great ground for confidence in coming to the throne of grace. This the apostle hath in his eye (v 15; 5:7). Two things I would take some notice of on this point. 1. He had the same things for substance as errands to the throne of grace that we have. 2. That he did ply the throne of grace as we should. Only permitting this, that there is but a likeness in what he did, to what we should do at the throne of grace: and that likeness consistent with manifold differences, as we shall regard. 1st, Our Lord Jesus Christ had the same things, and the chief of them, that are to us errands to the throne of grace. I shall instance in some of them, and answer an objection.

(1.) Our Lord had affliction for an errand, and more of it than any of his people. He was afflicted; yea, smitten of God and afflicted (Isa 53:4), He was oppressed and afflicted (v 7), If any man be afflicted, let him pray (James 5:13). When Christ was afflicted, he prays.

(2.) Our Lord was deserted. Blessed be his name for it. We should rejoice, that he had not a life without clouds. The bitterest and saddest desertion that ever a believer was under, is nothing to what Christ met with, when he cried out, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? None are so much to be pitied as a saint under desertion. When affliction is heavy and pressing, if all be clear above, though there be clouds round about, yet if the Lord smile from heaven, a Christian's case is not much to be pitied. But if all be dark about, and the darkest of all clouds on the amiable face of God, this is the extremity our Lord was in. Yet he prayed, and in his agony prayed yet more fervently. Deserted believers, take comfort in a deserted Saviour. His desertion was penal, yours but medicinal. Though it be bitter physic, it is of the great Physician's prescription; and he can and will bless it, and make you bless him, both for the physic and the cure.

(3.) Christ had temptation as an errand to his Father: In all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin (v 15). O that Christians would learn to behave themselves under temptation, in some measure, as Christ did! Temptation to Christ was a far other thing than it is to us. Temptation is bad to us, because of the danger of it; therefore he bids us, Watch and pray, that we enter not into temptation (Matt 26:42) when he was in the depth of his agony. But temptation to Christ was a mere affliction. There were never but two sinless men in the world, the first and second Adam. Satan came to both. When he came to the first Adam, he found nothing of his own in him; but he quickly got somewhat put in him, and left it with him, and in him and all

his posterity. When he came to the second Adam, he found nothing in him, and could put nothing in him by temptation (John 14:30). The holier a saint be, and the more gross the sin be he is tempted to, and the more hatred he have of the sin, the greater is his trouble in and by the temptation. What affliction then must it have been to Christ to be so tempted as he was? (Matt 4).

(4.) Our Lord had the charge and burden of sin on his soul, not upon his conscience: The Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all (Isa 53:6). And was not that a mighty load? Sense of sin is the greatest discouragement to believers. But never was there a man out of hell, or in it, that had such a load of sin on him as Christ had. His own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree (1 Peter 2:24). Law and justice charged Christ severely; and exacted more of him, than ever they did of any other person. None but Christ was made sin (2 Cor 5:21). Men are sinners by nature, and increase their sinfulness by their life; and an inexhaustible fountain of sin is in their heart (Eccl 9:3). But none of them is, or can be made sin. He only that knew no sin, was made sin. And because he was made sin for us, he was also made a curse for us (Gal 3:13). The law curseth the sinner, but cannot make a sinner a curse for others: it can, and doth make him accursed, and a curse for himself. Here is heaven's art: all the righteousness we are made, flows from Christ's being made sin for us; all the blessing we get, springs out of Christ's being made a curse for us. Believers, learn where to seek and find true righteousness, and the true blessing. In vain are they sought any where but in Christ, and in his being thus made sin, and a curse for us. The Lord Jehovah charged Christ with the debt of his people's sins, and he could not deny the debt. Though he contracted none of it, yet he undertook as surety to answer for it, and to discharge and pay it. Therefore the law and justice exacted it of him, abated him nothing. Because the law will have blood and life for sin, Christ offers, and gives his. Our Lord Jesus had no challenges in, nor burden upon his conscience; yet he had a heavy burden upon his soul: therefore he had a troubled soul (John 12:27) though a quiet conscience. For trouble of conscience properly flows from the sight and sense of committed sin; but Christ's trouble of soul was from the sense of wrath, for the charged and imputed sins of others.

Object. But, may a poor believer say, Christ knew not what a body of sin and death was, he knew not what a bad heart is; and these I feel, and am discouraged by.

Answ. Christ did not know these things indeed by feeling and experience as you do; but he knew them better than you do, or can. 1. Christ knew them by the wrath due to them. He that paid the debt, knew best the debt that was contracted, though he himself did not contract it. He knew how dear the expiation was for the sin of your heart and nature. 2. Christ knew it by temptation. Temptation brought sin as near to Christ, as it was possible it could be brought to a sinless man. Some saints know some sins only this way. There are several acts of wickedness that the Lord restrains his people from, before their conversion sometimes, and usually after it. Those sins they know not by the committing of them, nor it may be by any special inclination to them; yet they may know them to be dreadful evils, by an external temptation to them, and by the sight of their sin and misery that wallow in them. 2dly, As our Lord Jesus Christ had many errands to the throne of grace, so he did ply that throne. Our Saviour was a praying Saviour. He spent whole nights in prayer to God his Father. As he was, so should we be in the world (1 John 4:17). Are we afflicted, and should we pray? So afflicted Jesus prays. Is our soul troubled, and do we pray? So Christ did (John 12:27). Are we deserted, and pray? So did our Lord. But here is a depth too deep for us to wade in; how our elder brother, how God's own Son in man's nature, did plead at the throne of grace. This throne he plied, was not the same we come to. To us he sits on the throne himself, and therefore it is a throne of grace to us. We approach to God in Christ, and in Christ's name. Christ came in his own name, and needed no mediator. We find he came to his Father frequently, earnestly, and confidently. The church of Christ owe him eternal praises for that prayer (John 17), which is only properly Christ's prayer. That in Matthew 6:9-13 is a pattern of our prayer taught us by Christ: but this is the prayer made by Christ; and therefore truly the Lord's prayer. Of Christ's praying the apostle speaks, (Heb 5:7) Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications, with strong crying and tears, unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard, in that he feared. This is a great word. When a poor believer is hanging over hell, and a spirit of prayer working in him, how mightily doth he cry to be saved from that death? "O let me not fall in: if ever thou hadst mercy on a sinking soul, save me." But never did a distressed believer cry so mightily to be saved from hell, as Christ did to be saved from death. But that death Christ prayed against, was another sort of

death than we know, or can fully apprehend. Christ prayed with great fervency, and with great confidence. We rarely have them joined in our prayers. If we have confidence of a good issue, we are apt to grow cold in asking. Christ knew the blessed issue of all his distress, and believed it confidently (Isa 50:7-9), yet prayed earnestly. He was heard, and knew it: (John 11:41,42) Father, I thank thee, that thou hast heard me. And I know that thou hearest me always. Christians, take encouragement and direction to pray, and how to pray, by Christ's practice when he was on earth.⁴ Let us consider Christ's death for encouraging us to confidence in coming to the throne of grace. This is the main ground of boldness in coming: (Heb 10:19) Having boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus. There is precious blood must be shed, or we cannot enter; we must see it by faith, or we dare not venture. We must come to the blood of sprinkling (Heb 12:24). We dare not step one step into God's awful presence, unless we see the way marked, consecrated, and sprinkled with the Mediator's blood. How shall the unholiest of sinners venture to come into the holiest of all, God's presence? Yes, saith the Holy Ghost, such may, by the blood of Jesus. Let us therefore consider what this blood of Christ doth, and speaks, in order to our boldness in approaching to the throne of grace. 1st, This blood satisfies justice, and answers all the claims and charges of the law against us. What mars boldness, like fears of a standing controversy betwixt heaven and us! God is holy, we are vile sinners; God's law is strict, we have sinfully broke it, and deserve hell most justly. No answer can be given, but by this blood. What would the law have, but Christ gave? Would the law have a sinless man to answer it, as it was first given to sinless Adam? Lo, I come, saith our Lord Jesus, without all sin; a man against whom, for himself, the law hath no charge or challenge. Would the law have perfect sinless obedience? Christ did perform it. Must the law have life and blood for every breach of it? Christ never broke the law; but the burden of millions of breakers, and breaches of it lay on him, and his blood was shed for them: and thereby he fulfilled the law, put away sin by the sacrifice of himself (Heb 9:26); finished the transgression, made an end of sin, made reconciliation for iniquity, brought in everlasting righteousness, sealed up the vision and prophecy, and anointed the most holy (Dan 9:24). You can never have boldness at the throne of grace, unless by faith you apply this blood. Christ is set forth to be a propitiation, through faith in his blood (Rom 3:25). The propitiation is in his blood; faith in it makes it our propitiation.²dly, This blood, as it is satisfying blood, so it is purchasing blood. It is both an atonement and satisfaction, and it is a price. It is redeeming blood for persons, and purchasing blood for blessings. All the blessings we come to the throne of grace for, are all bought by this blood. So that we may say, that though we have nothing, and deserve nothing; yet when we ask all things, we ask nothing but what is well and truly paid for by our Lord Jesus.³dly, All the blessings purchased and bought by Christ's blood, are bequeathed to us, and left, by him that shed it. Christ's blood is a testamentary bequeathing blood: and believers in their coming to the throne of grace may come as suers for the execution and fulfilment of the last will and testament of our Lord Jesus. For Christ by his death turned the gospel and new covenant into a testament (Heb 9:15-17). His death confirms his testament. His last will is, that all the blessings his blood purchased, might be secured and laid up for, and in due time given forth to them they were purchased for, and bequeathed to. The whole legacy of grace and glory, and all the legatees, are and were well known to the testator and executor, (though not to us particularly); and the testament will be punctually fulfilled. So much for the assistance to faith that Christ's death affords. Learn to feed on it. He that cannot make a soul meal, and take a soul fill of a slain Saviour, is a sorry Christian. A true Christian is a poor starving sinner, digging in Christ's grave for eternal life. There it only is, and there he surely finds it.⁵ We find further in our Lord Jesus, (and indeed every thing in and of him helps forward our confidence in coming to God), that this great person the Son of God in our nature, this great officer that lived so holily, and died so virtuously, that he also rose again from the dead. The resurrection of our Lord is also a mighty ground of boldness: (1 Peter 1:3) Blessed be the God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which, according to his abundant mercy, hath begotten us again unto a lively hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. If Christ had lain still in his grave, our hope had lain there too; but because he rose, our hope also riseth with him. So 1 Peter 3:21 where the apostle hath an elegant similitude. He compares Christ to the ark of Noah. All that were in this ark, were saved, and they only; the deluge drowned all the world besides. They that were saved in the ark, were saved from drowning in the water, and were saved by water. The like figure whereunto, baptism, now saveth us, (Will bare water baptism save? No: Not the putting away the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience towards God), by the resurrection

of Jesus Christ. As if the apostle had said, "He that by faith hath sucked in the virtue of Christ's resurrection, and can by that faith plead it before God, is a saved man. If all the world perish in the deluge of God's wrath, this man is in the ark, and nothing shall hurt him." But, alas! Christ's resurrection is looked upon by many professors as a part of gospel history and truth, that it is a shame for any to be ignorant or doubt of; and therefore they profess the faith of it. But they consider not, that a great part of the food of our souls, and of our faith, doth lie in this point of truth. This I would shew in three things. 1st, Christ's resurrection was a demonstration of the divine dignity of his person: (Rom 1:4) He was declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead. The glorious rays of his Godhead did appear in his word and works; and some had eyes to behold his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth, even when he dwelt among men (John 1:14). But his glory was under an eclipse till his resurrection. How stately and how sweetly doth he himself express it! (Rev 1:17,18) I am the first and the last, (high names of a divine eternal person): I am he that liveth, and was dead; and behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen. They that saw him dead, could hardly believe he should ever live again; and they that saw him alive, had need of faith to believe he had ever been dead. He asserts both, and we should believe both. Since death entered into the world by sin, never was there a man more truly, really, and fully dead, than the man Christ was, who died for our sins: and there is no man on earth more truly alive, than the man Christ is now a living man in heaven. He in his rising gave proof of his divine power. He was crucified through weakness, yet he liveth by the power of God (2 Cor 13:4). There was never such an appearance of weakness in the man Jesus, as when he expired, and lay cold dead in his grave. Never did sin reign so unto death, nor the law's power more appear, than in slaying the second Adam. As great, and greater, was the appearance of his divine power in his rising again: (John 10:17) Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life that I may take it again. Christ died that he might rise again. He went amongst the dead that he might rise from the dead: (v 18) No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself: I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father. Christ was bid both die and rise again. Blessed be the commander, and blessed be the obeyer; for our everlasting life is in this commandment (John 12:50). Never any but Christ had this power of his own life. We must yield our life when God calls for it, and till then we must keep it; and when that call comes, we must obey. We die, because we can live no longer, and because our times are in God's hand. And when it shall please the Lord to raise up our bodies at the resurrection, we receive our life again; but have no power to take it up again, till the powerful word of Christ come, Arise from your graves; and that word gives us our life again. None but Christ had power of his own life, both to lay it down, and to take it again. We dare, we can, we should do neither; but only obey, and submit to the sovereign will of our high landlord, at whose pleasure we are tenants in these clay cottages. 2dly, Christ's resurrection was a demonstration of the acceptance of the sacrifice of himself; that the blood he shed, and sacrifice he offered, was savoury, and acceptable with God; that the debt was fully paid, and the payment accepted, when the surety was discharged of his prison. Therefore we find it so often written, that God raised him from the dead (Acts 2:24,32), even when it is said, that it was not possible that he should be holden of death. Death and the grave are strong and cruel (Song 8:6). They have taken, or will take all mankind prisoners, and are able to keep them; only they took one prisoner, Jesus Christ, who was too hard, too strong, for them. Death had dominion over him but for a little while, and by his own consent (Rom 7:9); but it hath no more dominion over him. But he hath dominion over it: I have the keys of hell and of death (Rev 1:18). Courage, believers in, and heart-lovers of Jesus Christ! Death and hell are indeed dreadful jails; but as long as Christ keeps the keys, (and that will be till he cast them both into the lake of fire, Rev 20:14), no believer shall ever be locked up in them. If hell were searched never so narrowly, amongst all the condemned prisoners there, no man or woman could be found in it, in whose heart there was ever one spark of true faith in, or love to the Lord Jesus, (Heb 13:20) God brought again from the dead, the great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant. Christ is also often said to rise by his own power. Christ put forth his divine power in his resurrection: the Father declared his full satisfaction with his undertaking of the work, and payment of the price of redemption, by discharging of him in, and by his resurrection. The angels' work was only to roll away the stone; but by his own divine power, his blessed soul did take possession of his dead body; and he did rise up immediately, a truly living man. And this he did by his Father's leave and will; and the angels

served only as sergeants and officers, to unlock the prison doors of the grave: for Christ could easily have removed the stone by his own power, as he did greater things in his resurrection. No wonder the apostle Paul made it one of his great aims in Christianity, to know the power of Christ's resurrection (Phil 3:10). It is not to know the history of his resurrection, nor is it to know the mystery of his resurrection, but it is to know the power of it. The same power that Christ raised himself from the dead by, is put forth, (and no less is needful) for the raising of a dead sinner. The same power that raised the Saviour, dead for sin, is needful for raising a sinner dead in sin: (Rom 6:4) Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death; that like as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we should also walk in newness of life (Eph 1:19). There is an exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, &c. How loth are men to admit this, that the saving quickening of a sinner requires the same divine power that quickened the dead Saviour? All saving conversions are the fruits of Christ's resurrection, and of almighty power. 3dly, Christ's resurrection is the pledge and earnest of our resurrection, and of eternal life. How great things doth Paul build upon it! (1 Cor 15). He proves our resurrection from Christ's resurrection. He argues for Christ's resurrection, by enumerating of absurdities that must follow on the contrary; as, (v 14) If Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain, (v 15) We (the apostles) are found false witnesses of God, (v 17) Ye are yet in your sins, (v 18) Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ, are perished, (v 19) We are of all men most miserable. But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first fruits of them that slept, (v 20) For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. The first Adam was made a living soul (v 45). But when he became a sinner, he became a killing head to all his posterity, (Rom 5:12) The second Adam is a quickening Spirit, and gives eternal life to all his seed. And he took possession of this eternal life in his human nature, and in our stead, at his resurrection. He conquers and subdues that death the first Adam brought in, and reigns over it by his grace (Rom 5:21). Christians, would you aspire after the resurrection of the dead, as Paul did? (Phil 3:11) direct all your aims, build all your hopes on Christ's resurrection: Because I live, ye shall live also (John 14:19). This living head will in a little time have no dead members; with his dead body shall they arise (Isa 26:19). 6. Christ's ascension into heaven, is a ground of boldness in coming to the throne of grace. So in the context, (v 14) He is passed into the heavens. This is great ground of faith, that Christ is in heaven, and for us hath entered within the veil (Heb 6:20). How dare a sinful man adventure into God's presence? Because there is a sinless man there, that went thither on purpose to mind our business, who are on earth. No man ever went thus into heaven, and on this errand, but our High Priest (John 3:13). All others go thither to get for themselves: Christ ascended to get, and to give (Psa 68:18; Eph 4:8). How kindly did our Lord deal with his disciples about this, and how hardly were they persuaded to submit to his going away? He told them whither he was going, and for what; he told them of his returning again, and receiving them to himself, never to part more (John 14:2-4), and yet sorrow filled their hearts (16:6). He again saith, (v 7) Nevertheless, it is expedient for you that I go away. If you will not be content, because it is necessary and fit for me, I tell you the truth, it is expedient for you that I go away. How hard was it to believe this? What was, to all reason, more expedient, yea necessary, than that such weak scholars should have their blessed Master's company? It was so far from seeming expedient to them, that they thought they would be ruined thereby; and were very near it (Luke 24:21). Although the matter be not so obvious to our conceptions and liking: yet really it is a greater mercy and advantage to us, that we have our glorified Mediator at the Father's right hand, than if we had him present with us upon the earth. It is more expedient for us, that he is where he is, than it would be to have him where we are. Poor distressed believers, they cry for ministers and Christians to pray with them, and for them: O if they had but one hour of Christ's bodily presence with them, and had him to pray for them, as he did for some when he was on earth, what heavenly consolation would it be to them? Take in by faith the comfort of his being in heaven, and his being as knowing and mindful of you, and as able to help, and that as speedily, as he was on earth, or could be, if he were now on earth with you. 7. Lastly, Our Lord's intercession in heaven, is a great and strong ground of confidence in coming to the throne of grace. This is in the context. This is the last ground of Paul's triumph of faith: (Rom 8:33,34) Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth: Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea, rather that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. His faith begins at Christ's death, and

riseth out of his grave with him, ascends up with him to the right hand of God, and concerns itself in his intercession there. Not unlike this rising and climbing of faith, is his account of the rising of grace on the vessels of grace (Eph 2:4,5). They are dead in sins when grace finds them first. The first thing grace doth to them, is, to quicken them with Christ, then raising them up together, then setting them in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. All our life springs out of Christ's grave: (John 12:24) Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit. This heavenly grain, Jesus Christ, must be sown in the earth and die; and from the virtue of that death, all the life of grace and glory grows up in all its branches. He is indeed the tree of life, that now groweth in the midst of the paradise of God (Rev 2:7). And he is the glory of the place, and the eternal food of all the happy inhabitants thereof. But he was once dead in his grave; and grew out of that grave, up to all that glory and dignity that we shall one day be blessed with the beholding of (John 17:24). In this his glory in heaven, he intercedes for us. Intercession is a sort of praying, (1 Tim 2:1) Supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, are commanded to be made for all men. We have one sad intercession, (Rom 11:2) Elias made intercession to God against Israel. He was a severe prophet, and had severe service put into his hand. But our great Prophet and High Priest makes no intercession against his Israel, but all for them. This intercession of Christ, which is so great a ground of boldness to us at the throne of grace, stands in these: 1st, In his appearing in heaven, in our nature, and in our name before God: (Heb 9:24) For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true, (and those were the places the high priests of old entered into), but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us. He is there, not only for himself, to reap the glorious fruit of his hard work on earth; but for his people, as their head and representative. All the church, the body, is now in heaven itself, because its head is there (Eph 2:5,6). Christians, you are now lying among the pots, and defiled with the smoke and soot of this sinful world; you are sometimes plunged in the ditch, till your own clothes abhor you, as Job speaks (9:31); you cry out, Wo is me, that I sojourn in Mesech, that I dwell in the tents of Kedar (Psa 120:5). Let faith say, "But where is my Lord and head? Is he not in heaven? in that glory that I am not able now to bear a view of? And he is appearing there, as my nearest and dearest friend. I am ashamed to look on myself, and my loathsome deformity; I am afraid that so foul and spotted a face as mine should be seen in heaven. But Christ is there, and my Christ is there; and there he is to appear for me, who must dread my personal appearance there, if it were not for this appearance of my head for me." 2dly, Christ's intercession stands in this, That he, in our nature, and in our name, presents continually the savour of his sacrifice: (Heb 9:12) He went into the holy place, not with the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption for us. Aaron, and his successors in the office of high priest, were appointed to offer the great sacrifice of yearly atonement at the altar, and with the blood thereof to enter into the holy of holies, and to sprinkle the mercy seat (their throne of grace) with that blood (Lev 16:14). Our Lord Jesus, the antitype, offered the sacrifice of himself in his death; and, in and with the virtue of that sacrifice, he entered heaven, to sprinkle the highest altar therewith. It is but a fond Popish fancy to think, that there do remain visible marks and signatures of his humbled state, on the glorified body of our Lord Jesus. That is indeed to know Christ after the flesh, in a bad sense (2 Cor 5:16). But his entering with his own blood, is spiritually to be understood; that Christ's appearance in heaven, is to bring up a memorial continually before God, of the virtue and savour of that sacrifice he offered without the gates of Jerusalem: (Eph 5:2) Christ hath loved us, and hath given himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling savour. This savour never spends or wears out. The blood of Jesus, in the virtue of it, in the merit of it, and in the power of it, is as fresh this day, as in the day it was shed on the cross. He is still the new slain way to the holiest of all (Heb 10:20), as fresh and fragrant as ever. If men by their unbelief account it old or stale, and to have lost its savour and virtue to themselves; and if they will seek for somewhat else to procure them acceptance in heaven; let them try, and perish; for none can help them that reject Christ. But our Lord presents nothing for the salvation of his body, the church, but his own blood; and nothing else is accepted in heaven for this end, but that precious blood. And all they to whose conscience this blood is applied, and who come into it, and feel its virtue and power, will abhor all vain and dangerous mixtures of any thing with this sovereign balsam. It is always savoury in heaven; and it is always savoury to all them that are in the right way to heaven. Our Lord, in his intercession, fills heaven with the almighty and eternal savour of his blood; and heaven is filled with the praises of it, and

of the shedder of it (Rev 5:9-12). If its savour do not fill the parts of the earth where it is preached, it is because men have lost, (or rather never had) the spiritual sense that only can take in this savour, and not because this blood is impaired in its virtue. But this is the sin and misery of this condemned world, that what is most savoury in heaven, is least savoured on earth; and what is most sought after, prized, and doted on in earth, is vanity and abomination in heaven (Luke 16:15). 3dly, In Christ's intercession, there is his knowledge of, and sympathy with the ailments and distresses of his people. This the apostle takes notice of in verse 15. His knowledge of their distresses, we can more easily account for, than for his sympathy. His omniscience as God, we believe. Peter sweetly owned it (John 21:15-17). O that Christ would with power ask the same question at all of you, and that you could give the same answer! Christ's question is, Lovest thou me more than these? "Not long since thou saidst so, what sayest thou now?" Peter's answer is, Yea, Lord, thou knowest that I love thee. And on the repeating of the question, Peter gives the same answer (v 16). When Christ a third time asked the same question, Peter was grieved (v 17), and answers, Thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee. As if he had said, "I dare not compare my love to thee, with that of others to thee; thou hast reason to question my love to thee, because of my late woeful denial of thee: but yet I dare call thee to witness, who knowest all things, that I do love thee. Though all my brethren love thee better than I do, or can; though I be more unworthy than any, to be loved by thee; yet I am sure I love thee." If the love of Christ were as a hot fire within, and its coals were casting out a vehement flame, as Song 8:6, believers would more often call Christ by that sweet name, sweet to us to speak, and sweet to him to hear, O thou whom my soul loveth (Song 1:7). Miserable souls are they who love not Christ; and dull unobservant people are they that know not what, or whom their souls love. Is the love of Christ a mere notion? Is it not a most sensible, holy, and spiritual passion, or rather a heavenly grace! Can men love Christ, and not feel it? Should they feel it, and not avow it? Is there any thing we should be ashamed of in the love of Christ, but the shameful smallness of it? that our highest and hottest love is so unsuitable a return to his incomparable loveliness, and his wonderful love to us, and the dear demonstrations of it? All ye that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity, look on him, and love him more; love him with all your souls, and blush with shame that ye love him no better. Blow the coals of love by faith, and let the flame mount up to heaven, and ascend ye in the flame of the altar, as Manoah's angel did (Judg 13:20). You that doubt of your love to Christ, go to him, fall down before him; answer Peter's question, according to the true sense of your souls, and it will be, Lord, thou knowest that I love thee. Love Christ, and ye will quickly feel ye love him. A sight of Christ will beget love, and love will quickly speak for itself (2 Cor 5:14,15). But for Christ's sympathy with his people, this is harder to conceive, than his knowledge of their distresses. It is a sympathy different from what he had in the days of his own infirmity. It is as tender, but not disturbing; as real, but not afflicting. It is inconsistent with his glorified state, to have any trouble. His sympathy itself is to be believed: the manner how it acts, is unsearchable: (Heb 2:17) In all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren; that he might be a merciful and faithful High Priest, in things pertaining to God, (Heb 4:15) He is touched with the feeling of our infirmities; and was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.

About this deep point of Christ's sympathy we may soberly conceive, 1. Our Lord's remembrance of his own infirmities, temptations, and afflictions in the days of his flesh. This is plain and certain. 2. His sure and distinct particular knowledge and remembrance of his people, and of all that concerns them, within and without. 3. His interest in them, and care of them, and concern for them, as his members. 4. His power and wisdom as their head, to send down vital influences upon them, as their case requires (Eph 4:16; Col 2:19). 4thly, lastly, Christ's intercession stands in presenting his people, and their desires and wants, to the Father, for acceptance, and answers of peace. Both our persons and our prayers must be presented by this great High Priest, set over the house of God (Heb 10:21), or no welcome, no acceptance. An Israelite, though he brought, might not offer the sacrifice on the altar; only the priest; and the high priest only must offer the great sacrifice for all Israel in the day of atonement. Christians must bring themselves (Rom 12:1), and all their spiritual sacrifices; but Christ must present them, and we only by him (Heb 13:15). What a mighty encouragement is there in this for faith? Our High Priest makes another thing of our sacrifices than we can. Believers often know not rightly their own case; Christ knows it exactly. Many of our prayers are mere mistakes. We complain, when we should praise; we ask what would do us hurt, and are unwilling to receive what would do us much good. Our Lord Jesus puts all to rights. He can say over our prayers rightly,

he can make good sense of them, can purge them of their faults, can spy out any thing of his own Spirit in them, and, lastly, adds his own incense to them (Rev 8:3). And thus are they accepted. We may best understand Christ's heart and work in intercession, by John 17 wherein we find three.

(1.) Christ conceals all the faults and weakness of his people. Not a word of these in all that prayer, and they were guilty of a great many.

(2.) He tells all their good, and makes much of it; (vv 6-8) I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me: and they have received them, and have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me. He knew, and reprov'd them for the weakness and staggering of their faith; he foretold an approaching trial, and their fainting in it (John 16:31,32); yet he knew they were true believers; and he makes much of it in his prayer: as again, verses 14, 25.

(3.) Christ declares fully their necessity, and begs supply for them. No Christian needs any more than a full answer of this prayer of Christ; and it was put up for all his body, and will be answered as to every member of it. Whenever you are upon your knees at the footstool, remember who is at the throne above, and what his business is there. Footstool supplications of believers would be all quite lost, if it were not for the Saviour's intercession at the throne (Heb 8:1). Our High Priest is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens.

And he ever liveth to make intercession for us (Heb 7:25). This is the end of his living in heaven, to make intercession for us. Take heed, and mind Christ much in your prayers; and never fear his forgetting you. Shall Christ live for ever to make intercession for you? and will you live all your days without making use of him as an intercessor? Alas! that Christ in heaven gets so little employment from believers on earth! He seeks your employment, he loves it, and loves them best that give him most of it. He undertakes for every thing put in his hand, and in due time will give you a good account of all you intrust him with, and make you say, He hath done all things well (Mark 7:37).

APPLICATION. Is all the ground of confidence at the throne of grace, laid in Jesus Christ our High Priest? Build then your confidence on this safe and sure ground. Not only may you lawfully make use of Christ's mediation, but you must do it. It is not only a privilege the Lord allows you to make use of, but it is his command, and your duty to use it. You are commanded to come to the throne of grace, and commanded also to come in Christ's name, and to come boldly in this name. The neglect of either of these is sin. Not to come to the throne of grace when he calls, is a great sin. To come to it (or rather to pretend to come) in any other name but Christ's, is a great sin too. And to come in this name diffidently, is to reflect unworthily on Jesus Christ, and the power and virtue of his mighty name: (John 14:13,14) Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it. Can a man desire a larger promise than this? Can one desire a stronger plea than Christ's name, and a better hand than his to have our answers from? Be ye askers, and askers in my name, I will be the doer. The Father's glory in the Son, and the Son's glory, is concerned in giving good answers to all prayers put up in Christ's name. You cannot honour and please Christ more, than in using his name confidently. All bills with Christ's name at them will be accepted at the throne of grace, and will surely be answered. But coming to the throne of grace in Christ's name, is another thing than commonly people take it to be. Some think it enough, that they conclude their prayers with the words Christ taught (Matt 6:9), but never for that use it is oft formally and superstitiously put to. Some think, that it is only to say in their prayers, for Christ's sake. To ask in his name, is a higher business, than to be reached by unbelievers, and men void of the Spirit of God. If no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost (1 Cor 12:3); if praying be required to be in the Holy Ghost (Jude 20); if praying always with all prayer and supplication, should be in the Spirit (Eph 6:18); how shall men call on him in whom they have not believed? (Rom 10:14). But can you take the searcher of hearts to witness, that you build all your hopes of acceptance at the throne of grace, in this name and mediation of Jesus? that you durst no more rush into God's awful presence, without the protection of this great name, than you durst leap into a devouring flame? Can ye say, "I have no name to come to God in, but Christ's. My own name is abominable to myself, and deservedly hateful in heaven. No other name is given under heaven, but that of Jesus Christ, in which a sinner may safely approach to God. Since the Father is well pleased in this name, and the Son commands me to use it, and the Holy Ghost hath broke this name to me, and made it as an ointment poured forth (Song 1:3), and since its savour hath reached my soul, I will try

to lift it up as incense to perfume the altar and throne above. Since all that ever came in this name were made welcome, I will come also; having no plea but Christ's name, no covering but his borrowed and gifted robe of righteousness. I need nothing, I will ask nothing but what his blood hath bought, (and all that I will ask); I will expect answers of peace and acceptance, only in that blessed Beloved; beloved of the Father, both as his Son and our Saviour; and beloved of all that ever saw but a little of his saving grace and glory."Let such go and prosper. The Lord is with you, the Lord is before you. He will welcome the Mediator in his bringing you to him (1 Peter 3:18), and welcome you with salvation, who come in his name for it. The prodigal's welcome (Luke 15) is but a shadow of what ye shall meet with. Christ welcomes dearly all that come to him; and the Father welcomes the believer that cometh in Christ's name, and is brought in Christ's hand, to this throne.

SERMON VI Hebrews 4:16

Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.

From this text, I have already spoken to three of the things I did take up in it.

1. Unto the throne of grace itself, that is erected for, and revealed to sinners in the gospel; that new court of grace, which the Lord invites the fallen seed of Adam to come unto.

2. I have spoke to that boldness that is allowed and commanded in coming to it. We are not only allowed to come, but we must come, or perish, and bring the guilt of our own soul's blood upon our heads, by refusing (Acts 18:6). We not only may come and try, but we may and must come boldly and confidently, expecting to speed in our coming.

3. I have spoke to the great ground of this confidence, couched in the word therefore, in the text, and relating to verses 14, 15. Were it not for Christ's place, and business, and heart in heaven, no man on earth could have boldness at the throne of grace.

HEAD IV. The fourth and last thing in the verse, is, the end we should come for, and the great blessings we may receive by coming; expressed in two words, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.

God's mercy and grace are the most comprising, comprehensive blessings; and these expressions of them contain all that is needful for our happiness. Nothing can be added to them; no blessing but is in them; no blessing is without them. It is the common apostolic prayer, (and such prayers made by the penmen of the holy scripture, under the immediate guidance of the Holy Ghost, are equivalent to divine promises, yea are such), Grace be to you; sometimes, Grace, mercy, and peace be to you. So that these words, as they stand in the text, do equally answer these two inquiries:

1. What good things shall we get at the throne of grace? The Spirit of God answers, You may, and shall obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need. And are not these well worth coming for? are they any where else to be had? And here they may surely be found. How should this endear the throne of grace to us, and engage to coming to it?

2. Wherefore should we come? with what design? what end should be in our eye? Come, saith the Spirit, by the apostle's pen, that ye may obtain the one, and find the other. Come, that you may get both. Design this getting in your coming.

I would first speak of our coming, that we may obtain mercy, and on it discourse of these three things:

I. Of the mercy that is to be got at the throne of grace.

II. Of the import of the phrase, obtaining of mercy.

III. Of the duty required of coming with this design, that we may obtain this mercy.

I. I shall discourse of the mercy that is to be obtained at the throne of grace.

You see that it is only mercy that is named, without any mention made, whose mercy it is, or of what sort it is. But when miserable sinners are invited to come to God's throne of grace for mercy, it may be easily known whose it is, and what it is. It is God's mercy in Jesus Christ, who is the mercy seat, or throne of grace. It is not angel-mercy, or creature-mercy; but God's mercy. And who can tell what a great and vast

thing his mercy is? Mercy, in the proper notion of it, is a kind, relieving, compassion to the miserable. The object of mercy, is a miserable creature. Divine goodness shines in giving being to nothing, and in creating all things; wisdom, in ordering them, and guiding them to his glory; justice, in disposing of them according to his will, the essential rule of righteousness. But mercy hath no fit object, till misery appear for mercy to act on. The shewer of mercy is a compassionate person; its nature and end is, to relieve the miserable. Mercy with God is another sort of mercy than what is required of, and can be practised by creatures. We may, and should have compassion on the miserable, whom we are not able nor allowed to relieve. The judge that condemns the criminal, should do it with mercy and compassion; but he breaks the law, if he suffer his mercy to delay or divert a righteous sentence and execution. But the Lord's mercy is not only tenderness and compassion in his own heart, (so we borrow words, by the pattern of sound words in the scripture, to speak of God after the manner of men), but it is always relieving to the person on whom it is bestowed. Let the misery be never so great, and of what kind soever it be; whoever they be that are the objects of his mercy, they are certainly relieved thereby. There is no redemption out of the pit, though their misery that are there is the greatest. Why? Because there is no mercy for them. If it were possible that God's mercy in Christ could enter into hell itself, (as it falls on many very near to it,) that mercy would bring them out. But the door of mercy is quite shut upon them; and the Lord hath resolved and declared, that his mercy shall never visit them.

That we may the better understand what this mercy of God is, the getting whereof we should make our great errand to the throne of grace, it will be needful to consider that misery in men that renders them needy of this mercy.

And this I would consider, as it actually lies on them, and is incumbent; or as it is coming on them, and imminent.

1. The misery that all natural men lie under. It is true, they do not see it, nor feel it; but this makes not their misery the less, but the greater. For insensibleness of misery, especially where it is removable, and when this insensibleness is a hindrance of using the right means of removing it, is a great plague, and an aggravation of the misery. I shall give you a few scripture-accounts of this misery.

1st, The misery of a natural man, and of all natural men, is, that they are utterly destitute of all true good: In me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing (Rom 7:18). Must it not be so much more with them that are flesh, and in the flesh, and have nothing in them but flesh? the first notion we have of misery is this, that it stands in a deprivation of good. And the greater that deprivation be, and the more good things a man is deprived and destitute of, the more miserable we count the person to be. He is a miserable man that is blind; because the light of the world is so pleasant and useful, and the eye simply needful to behold and use it. It is a great addition to this man's misery, if he be dumb also; because the tongue is a man's glory, and the organ of expressing our thoughts, and communion with our own kind. The misery is yet farther heightened, if a man be also deaf; for the ear is the door of knowledge, both of things natural and divine. If you go to the inward senses or powers; if a man be deprived of those, his misery is yet greater; as it is a greater misery to be void of understanding and memory, to be an idiot, (an innocent, as we call them), than it is to be deprived of any of the bodily senses. Now, if one wanted all the senses of the body, and powers of the soul (if such a creature should be called a man), would we not account this a most miserable creature? But if there be yet somewhat better than all these, surely then he that is altogether void of that, must be more miserable still. That there is somewhat better than all these good gifts of body and mind, and that every man by nature is without it, is most manifest in the word. To be without God, without Christ, without hope (Eph 2:12), is more and worse, than to be without any, or all outward good things. This destitute state is expressed by our Lord, (Rev 3:17) Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked. What a great difference is there betwixt Christ's, and their opinion of their state? And must not Christ's be right and true, and theirs false if it contradict his? Were they any thing the less miserable; were they not rather much more so, that they so misjudged? Our Lord aggravates both their sin and misery from their ignorance, Because thou knowest not. Spiritual blessings are of that nature, that all are miserable indeed that are without them; but no man is sensibly miserable, till he seeth that he is without them. It is the knowledge of this want that brings in

the sense of misery: as every unpardoned sinner is a miserable man; but he never counts himself miserable, till he feel the weight of sin, and see the want of pardon.

2dly, Every natural man is needy of God's mercy, because he is a condemned man. A condemned man, is a dead man in law. As there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus (Rom 8:1); so there is nothing but condemnation to all that are not in him: (John 3:18,36) He that believeth not, is condemned already; and the wrath of God abideth on him. You may have seen and heard, how malefactors will cry for mercy from the judge, when he cannot, and ought not to pity them, so as to spare them: when they are bid hold up their hand at the bar to receive their doom, how earnestly on their knees, with tears, they will cry, Mercy, my lord, mercy for God's sake. Every natural man is condemned. But how few of their consciences can witness for them, that they ever sought God's mercy? so as convicted criminals an earthly judge's mercy? The mercy they beg is small, in regard of what sinners stand in need of from God. An earthly judge may reprieve or pardon today, and the pardoned man may die tomorrow. But if the great Judge condemn you, and you are not pardoned, you are sentenced to a never-dying misery. Prisoners beg mercy of a man, who, may be, is bound up by law, and conscience of his oath, to shew none, but to execute justice. Here the case is just contrary. The Lord bids men beg his mercy, and condemns them only that despise it. We have his command, and promise, and many acts of pardon, for our encouragement. What pleading for pardon would there be at earthly bars, if they had the judge's command to ask, his promise to grant it, and his hand and seal to that promise? Such is our case; yet few beg it in good earnest. Be ashamed, and convinced of your sin, when you see men begging a frail, short life of a judge; and say, "Alas! I never begged the mercy of eternal life so earnestly at the throne of grace, as these wretches do a frail, short, uncertain life."

3dly, The natural man hath all the creation against him, and therefore is needy of God's mercy. The whole creation groans under him; he is a burden to God's earth, a plague to the creation (Rom 8:20-22). What a noise do men make, and what pains do they take, to heap up dust? If God prosper their endeavours, they think he blesseth them, and count themselves happy in their enjoyment. But what is all this for, to a natural unrenewed man? All these creature-comforts will be but as so many witnesses against them in the day of the Lord (James 5:1-4). Men seek the creatures to satisfy their carnal desires, and supply their outward wants; but they do not remember, that, unless the special saving mercy of God come along with them, the creatures are abused, and, in their way, witness and groan to God against them. They groan to be put in God's room in men's hearts, and to be made fuel for men's lusts. They all wait but for God's call to execute vengeance on his enemies. Is not such a man needy of God's mercy, that hath the whole creation of God at war with him? 4thly, But there is worse than all these: The man himself, and all he is, hath, and doth, is under the curse of God (Gal 3:10). What is the curse? It is the malediction of God, on a man: it is God's devoting him to ruin. He is cursed in his body, cursed in his soul, cursed in his family, cursed in his trade and estate, cursed in his crosses, cursed in his mercies, cursed in his life, and cursed in his death; cursed in time, and cursed to eternity. Ah, how long and broad is this curse! (Zech 5:2-4). O what need is there of God's mercy! for it is this mercy only that can take away the curse. There is no evil we are in danger of from an angry God, but must be removed or prevented by the opposite good from a reconciled God. If God's anger be our plague, nothing can remove it but his love. If his curse be our burden, only his blessing can take it away. The whole creation cannot make up the loss of God's favour. And this they know well, that ever saw the face of an angry God. So much of the necessity of God's mercy, from the present misery of natural men.

2. I might proceed to speak of that which is coming on them, without the intervening of this mercy of God. We do not reckon a man miserable only, on the account of what he feels, but also on that of his just fears. And generally the smart of misery is raised from fear, rather, and more than from feeling. If any thing renders a man's present state miserable, the apprehension of the duration or increase of what he feels, adds greatly to his misery. Many things would be little complained of as great evils, were a man sure that in a moment they shall be removed. But in a sinner's case, for as bad as it is at present, it will surely be worse with him shortly, if mercy prevent not. There is certainty of its coming, and an eternal duration of it when it comes. It is called the wrath to come (1 Thess 1:10). Nothing like it ever came on them. Present wrath, though dreadful, is but a trifle to that that is to come. It is wrath to come; for it will surely come. As surely as God lives, as surely as God is true in his word of threatening, this wrath will come on the world of the

ungodly. There is no putting of this evil day far away, but in vain thoughts; no diverting or keeping it back a moment. All the united force of the rebellious part of the creation will not be able to stem or stop this fearful tide of wrath. It is wrath to come; for it is still coming and approaching. As many days and years as an ungodly sinner counts in his life, as many days and year's journeys hath God's wrath made towards him. Think on this, old sinners; God's wrath and you are near to meet, except mercy interpose. You think that you run from it, but it runs after you. It will come upon you, and pursue you, and overtake you, as Deuteronomy 28:45. It is wrath to come; because it is always a-coming, and never past. The tide of God's wrath on the damned is an eternal flood; there will never be an ebbing. Look down to hell, and see how they fare there. Alas! men will not believe, and fear, and fly; and therefore must feel. How many daily hear of this wrath to come, and yet never have any fear of it, till they be irrecoverably plunged into it? who never awaken out of the sleep of security, till they are awakened by the flashes of hell-fire? who will never believe God's wrath, till they feel it? No true believer goes to hell; all unbelievers are sent thither: but as soon as they come there, they become woeful believers, because eternal feelers of this wrath to come. Men's danger of this dreadful state, should make them cry mightily for God's mercy, as it renders them unspeakably needy of it. But your own serious thoughts about it, would do you more good than many words can. II. The second thing proposed, is, What is the obtaining of mercy? A frequent manner of speech in scripture: (1 Tim 1:13) Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, (1 Peter 2:10) Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy. This phrase of obtaining mercy speaks forth, 1. That the mercy is God's gift. Our obtaining, is the fruit of his giving. I obtained mercy, saith Paul, and may every believer say. How so? He gave it; he shewed, he demonstrated it, as 1 Timothy 1:16. It is the Lord's shewing it, tendering, and giving of it, that is the only spring of our obtaining it. We do not buy it, we do not work it out, we are no way meet for it but by misery. God's mercy springs not out of the earth, but comes down from heaven. It is the gift of God: and as such must all seek it, that would obtain it; and as such will all eternally own it, that do obtain it. 2. This phrase speaks forth a particular application of mercy to the receiver by the giver of it. I obtained mercy, saith Paul. "General mercy would not do my business, another man's mercy would not save me; I must have it of my own, for myself; and so I got it. Mercy came to me, made me a visit, and applied itself to me in particular." So must it be with you. You will never be saved, you shall never see God's face in glory, unless his mercy deal with you, and apply itself as particularly to you, as if there were no other person in the world to be saved by mercy besides thyself. There is indeed a blessed multitude of the vessels of mercy, and the Captain of our salvation brings many sons to glory (Heb 2:10). But yet there is a personal particular application of saving mercy to every saved sinner. And for this application of mercy, we should come to the throne of grace. Though there be infinite mercy at his throne, and though many receive of this mercy; yet you must have of this mercy for yourselves, or you cannot be saved. Your soul is your own, and no man's else; your danger, sin, and misery, is your own, and no man's else; and the mercy that saves you, must be as much your own, and not another body's mercy. That deep discourse of the apostle looks this way, (Rom 11:30-32) For as ye in times past have not believed God, yet have now obtained mercy through their unbelief: even so have these also now not believed, that through your mercy they also may obtain mercy. For God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that he might have mercy upon all. It is a great mystery of judgment and mercy the apostle is speaking of; the rejecting of the Jews, and calling in of the Gentiles. Mercy took occasion, from the just casting off of the Jews, to visit the Gentiles; and will in due time bestow itself again upon the Jews. But both of them must have mercy of their own. Mercy to the Jews will not save the Gentiles; mercy to the Gentiles will not save the Jews. Both must have their own mercy. The fountain is the same, the streams are the same; but the vessels are not the same, and every vessel of mercy must have its own measure of its own particular mercy. So must it be with you, if you be saved by mercy. It must be your own, and no man's else. 3. Obtaining of mercy, speaks forth the receiver's possessing of it. Obtained mercy, is not only bestowed and applied mercy, but it is possessed mercy. Such things as cannot be possessed and kept, are worth little pains in seeking. But God's mercy is well worth the seeking; because it may be both had by seeking, and kept when obtained, and is unspeakably beneficial when enjoyed: (Psa 103:17) The mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him. As if the Psalmist had said, "Man is but a flower; his life is a wind and vapour that quickly and surely passeth away. But it is not so with

God's mercy, it eternally abides on all it falls upon." O that men would think on this! As God lives, and is true in his word, God's everlasting mercy, or God's everlasting wrath, will eternally lie upon every one of you. And what an amazing difference is there betwixt these two! And yet how many behave, as if indifferent which of these two shall be upon them? God's saving mercy is such a jewel, that though the Lord gives it but to few, yet he will never take it away from any he hath given it to (Psa 89:28-33). Believers, God may take any thing from you, but his mercy; and you may spare any thing, but his mercy. If God come to take away your children, give them; if he come to take away your estate, let him have it; if he come to take away your health and lives, yield them; strive not with him; bless a giving, and bless a taking God. If he crave thy right eye, or right hand, and what is dearest to you, give, yield all to him. But say, "Let me only keep thy mercy; I cannot part with that, it is the only thing I cannot spare." The blessed Canaanite's striving with Christ was about his mercy: "Be silent, disown, reproach me, I care not; but thy mercy I must have." It were a cruelty that only unbelief can charge God sinfully with, to take away so precious a gift as saving mercy is. Let but this mercy follow me, as Psalm 23:6, and it is no great matter where I go. If I be in the lowest hell, mercy will bring me out: (Psa 86:13) For great is thy mercy toward me: and thou hast delivered my soul from the lowest hell. There is no time-hell that a vessel of mercy can be in, but mercy will bring him out again; and this mercy will secure him from the eternal hell. This mercy is God's mercy; therefore sovereignly free, therefore almighty, therefore eternal. You sin, believers, when you fear his taking away his mercy. He gave it at first, that you might be eternally possessed of it. Mercy gave mercy, and mercy will keep mercy, and mercy will stay with you, and keep you for ever.

III. The third thing to be spoke to, is, the end and design of coming to the throne of grace; and that is, that we may obtain mercy.

Not only that this mercy is to be got at the throne of grace, and there only; nor that this throne of grace is erected on purpose to dispense this mercy; nor is it only that we should come to the throne of grace, to ask and beg this mercy; but that we should come to obtain it. This is the duty exhorted to in the text. And in the setting about this duty, two things are required.

1. Come as sensible of your need of mercy. No man can come truly without this sense. He that hath no sense of misery, compliments God in asking mercy, and takes this saving name of God in vain. It is dreadful to provoke God to wrath in our way of asking his mercy: and all such contract this guilt, and expose themselves to his wrath, that have no heart-sense of their need of this mercy. It is an amazing stupidity that the power of sin hath brought on men, that, in a world of sinners sinking into everlasting misery, so few are really sensible of their need of saving mercy. And no man is sensible, till God by his grace make him so.

2. Come in faith of his mercy. You cannot come at all without this faith. Faith is coming to God (Heb 11:6). Unbelief is departing from the living God (Heb 3:12). No man can come, but he that is sensible of misery; for coming is the act of a man drawn and moved by the cords of a man. No man can come but in faith; for there is no other coming for a Christian. These three things should be in this faith:

1st, A believing that there is abundance of mercy with the Lord; which if shewed and put forth to you, and on you, would save you abundantly. So argues the prodigal, (Luke 15:17,18) And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough, and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise, and go to my father, and say &c. (Psa 130:7) Let Israel hope in the Lord: for with the Lord there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption. The highest working of unbelief is, when men judge their misery greater than his mercy: the great work of faith is, to get these two to meet fairly: and mercy will surely prevail. His tender mercy is over all his works; much more is his abundant mercy above a sinner's misery. Cain's words should be left for himself, and used by none else, (Gen 4:13) And Cain said unto the Lord, My punishment is greater than I can bear; or, My iniquity is greater than that it may be forgiven; words sounding like the language of hell, and not to be spoken by any that would escape it. I know many secure people find no difficulty in that they count believing of this, that there is mercy enough with the Lord. But yet the matter is far otherwise. It is mighty difficult to believe the abundance of his mercy, when men are in great pressures of misery. The best of saints have sometimes stumbled here. When Moses is pleading with the Lord for mercy to Israel, (Num 14:17,19) And now, I beseech thee, let the power of my

Lord be great, according as thou hast spoken. And pardon, I beseech thee, the iniquity of this people, according unto the greatness of thy mercy. As if Moses had said, "Lord thou hast proclaimed thy name, and I heard it, and believed it; but I did not think, that their wickedness would have been so great, as now I find it to be." Was not Moses a great believer? yet he stumbled in this point of the power of God's mercy (Num 11:18-23). Israel murmureth for flesh, God promiseth a whole month's diet of it. What saith Moses (vv 21,22)? How doth the Lord answer him? (v 23) And the Lord said unto Moses, Is the Lord's hand waxed short? thou shalt see now, whether my word shall come to pass unto thee, or not. This great man's unbelief was greatly aggravated, in that he saw the Lord bring that people out of Egypt, with signs and wonders, and with a mighty hand; he saw them daily fed, clothed, and led, and protected with miracles of divine power and mercy: yet one new difficulty shakes his faith. When Paul gives us his last account of his faith, (for that epistle was his last writing), he lodgeth his faith on Divine power: (2 Tim 1:12) I know whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day. "If I be persuaded that he is able, I shall not doubt of his being willing to keep that charge safe I have committed to him." Let the eye of faith take up clearly the power of mercy; and the faith of its application to thy benefit, will be the more easy. But he is a rare believer, whose view of the power of mercy is not darkened by a clear sight and deep sense of his own great misery, at least at sometimes.

2dly, To come for mercy in faith, is to believe the fitness and suitableness of God's mercy to our misery. Here many stumble woefully. Their question is, "Am I fit for mercy?" when it should rather be, "Is his mercy fit for me?" And this question every sensible soul can answer; the other none in heaven or earth can answer. If any man think himself fit for mercy, of all men, that man is most unfit for it, and farthest from receiving of it. But every sensible soul will say, "Though I be unfit for, and unworthy of mercy; yet mercy is very fit for me. Is there pardoning mercy with God? who is it so fit for as a guilty vile sinner? Is there saving mercy with him? who is it so fit for as for a lost man, as I am?" Come to the throne of grace for mercy, in faith of this, "Mercy is fit for me exactly, though I be utterly unworthy of it." They that think they are fit for mercy, will never get it, nor indeed can ask it. But they that think they are needy of it, and that it is fit for them, will both ask it and get it. 3dly, To come to the throne of grace in faith for mercy, is, to believe that there is all good will in him that sits on this throne to give and shew mercy. It is implied in the text, Let us come to obtain mercy. But what if, when we come, he will not shew mercy? That is an ungodly supposition, mischievous to ourselves, and reflecting upon God. He hath mercy in abundance to give; he delights in giving, he never refused mercy to any that came for it, he hath promised he never will: and why should men harbour such a suspicion, that we may come and not obtain? Benhadad could adventure on a report, that the kings of Israel were merciful kings; and yet Ahab was one of the worst of them (1 Kings 20:31). And shall not sinners come upon a more sure report of the mercifulness of the King on this throne of grace? It is on this truth of the Lord's good-will to shew mercy that our faith so readily halts. Many think they ought not to believe this good-will to shew mercy. I would have you consider some instances of Christ's dealing with sinners. (John 4:10) Jesus answered and said unto her, If thou knewest this gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink: thou wouldst have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water. Where we are to regard, 1. To whom these words were spoken by our Lord: To a Samaritan; a vile creature, as to the former course of her life; a blind, ignorant, sottish sinner, that was guilty of refusing Christ a cup of water, the greatest sin she ever committed in her life. 2. What our Lord saith to her: If thou knewest me, thou wouldest have asked; if thou hadst asked, I would have given thee living water. And before he had done he made her know him; made her ask, and gave her of his living water. But that I mainly observe from the word of Christ, is a truth, which few will believe when they hear it, even few believers themselves will believe it as they ought, That Christ is more ready to give begging sinners eternal life, than they can be to give Christ himself a cup of cold water. Our Lord saith it, but men will not believe it. Another of Christ's words is in Luke 11:13, If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children; how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him? Christ makes the comparison favourably (vv 11,12) of a child's asking necessities; will a parent refuse that desire, and give what is hurtful? But consider our Lord's design in this saying. It is plainly to encourage to seeking. And the argument he useth, is from the greater love and readiness in God to give the best things, than earthly parents have to give their children the necessities of this life. The preference is not here given to God's greater riches and fulness, than that of

parents, who may have their children beg of them what they have not to give, as in Lamentations 4:4; but it is a preference given to God's greater willingness to give. Now, who believes this, and makes the just application to his own case? and says confidently, "The Lord is much more willing to give me saving mercy, if I ask it, than I am to give a bit of bread to maintain the life of the nearest and dearest relation I have in the world?"

APPLICATION. I shall only add a few words of application.

1. There is no principle of natural religion engraven more deeply on the hearts of men, than that there is misery in men, and mercy in God; and that God's mercy only can relieve men under this misery. This runs through the whole world in all ages; and will continue as long as sense of misery is in men, and any notions of God are preserved in the minds of men. And these sentiments are not to be defaced. Attempts of atheists are damnable to themselves, but vain efforts against the Rock of ages.

2. Notwithstanding of this, God's true mercy in Jesus Christ is the greatest riddle, offence, and stumbling-block, to all natural men. God's mercy they like well enough, and would have applied to their own relief under misery; but God's only and true mercy in Christ, they cannot away with. That there is no mercy with God for sinners, but what flows through the blood of Jesus Christ; that God's love should appear in sending his own Son, under the charge of men's sin, and under the smart and feeling of their miseries; that as God shews mercy only this way, so men that would have it, must only seek it this way; the world never did, never can, never will understand, nor relish it, nor betake themselves to it. They would have mercy to come to them another way; and so seek it, and look for it in vain, and perish by the miss of it.

3. There is no address made to God, more honourable to God, more acceptable to him, and more becoming a miserable sinner, than an address to God for his mercy. It is his glory to be the sovereign Lord of mercy; it is his honour to be attended with the addresses of miserable men; it is his delight to dispense mercy to the addressors. What is more becoming God, than to shew mercy? and what can be more fit, than that a miserable sinner should beg his mercy?

4. There is no provocation more common, than sinful ways of begging God's mercy. I shall briefly instance in a few. Many profane careless creatures have this word frequently in their mouths, God be merciful to me; who yet have no more sense, either of God or of themselves, of his mercy or of their misery, than the ground they go on. This is a gross taking of God's name in vain. Undue addresses to God for mercy, are great provocations. Some beg only outward mercies. Such people would like this text well, if it had been, "Let us come that we may obtain gold, and silver, and health, and long life." If prayer was ordained by God for such mercies, the throne of grace would be crowded with supplicants. But you will never ply prayer rightly, till you understand that there is something to be got at this throne of grace, that is better in itself, more needful for you, and that will do you more good, than all that the world hath to give. Some beg mercy only when they are under God's afflicting hand: (Psa 78:34) When he slew them, then they sought him. Some beg God's mercy limitedly; they only beg one mercy, and desire no more. His mercy is of a large extent, and we should beg it all. We may beg a particular mercy, according to our present felt necessities; yet we must not make an exception against any act of mercy. We must not beg the mercy of pardon, with a heart-quarrel against the mercy of sanctification. The Lord be merciful to thy servant in this thing (2 Kings 5:18) was a faulty prayer, if there was any sincerity in Naaman. Though we may ask any particular mercy, yet we must lay open our hearts to the whole flood of mercy: (Psa 119:132) Look thou upon me, and be merciful unto me as thou usest to do unto those that love thy name. So Psalm 106:4,5. Lastly, some beg mercy for themselves, and for their idols in the same address. One part of their prayer is for mercy to themselves, and another part of it is for mercy to their idols. Is not that a woeful, ill-made prayer? and yet how frequently is it done? Idols are such things as have a greater, nearer room in the heart, than God hath. Whatever is loved, feared, trusted, and delighted in, more than God, that is an idol, be it the best or basest thing we can name, or think on. These idols are of two sorts; lawful, and unlawful. Not that it is lawful to have any idol; but many make idols of lawful things: such things I mean, that in their proper place may be sought, and lawfully used; but are woefully abased, when put in God's room. These are the most dangerous, because least perceived idols. Christian, it is lawful to love thy relations, to pray for wife and children, to beg God's blessing on thy lawful diligence in thy calling: but watch well, that none of these lawful things come in between thy heart and God. If they do, thou wilt fall into this snare, of begging God's mercy to

thyself and idols in the same prayer. Unlawful idols, or idols in unlawful things, are, sins, lusts, and heart-plagues. Woe to him that begs God's mercy to them. We should daily beg God's mercy against them. The more mercy (that is, forbearance) God sheweth to such idols, the more wrath, and the less mercy, he sheweth to the man himself. God's mercy cannot be shewn both to a man and his idols. The purest mercy is then shewn to a man, when the Lord dealeth severely with his idols. Kill my sinful idols, and save me, is a fit prayer at the throne of grace; and he is a happy man that gets it answered.

5. Sinful addresses for God's mercy, are great provocations of his wrath. His mercy is so sacred a name of God, that he will hold no man guiltless that taketh it in vain. In this matter the best contract much guilt. All have many sins in their holy things, and in their approaches to the holiest of all, the throne of grace, and do stand in need of atonement. And we should all come to the throne of grace, for mercy to pardon the sins that are in our seeking of mercy. But where then shall the ungodly and sinner appear? He perisheth for want of mercy. He should come for it; and he cannot come for mercy, while he is what he is, but he provokes the Lord to more wrath against him. This is one of the inextricable straits that every unbeliever is in, that nothing but sovereign grace and mercy can bring one out of. Look to him for this deliverance, and he will shew you mercy.

SERMON VII Hebrews 4:16

Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.

The last thing in this verse is, what is to be had at the throne of grace, and what we should come for? And that is, mercy and grace; and we need no more. And we should come that we may obtain and find them: and we should, in our coming, design no less. Of the first I began to speak last day, and did open these three things:

1. What is this mercy we should come for? It is God's saving mercy in Christ, suitable unto, and of relieving of that misery that every natural man is perishing under. Mercy in God, and misery in man, are relatives; and happy is that person that hath them well married and matched together.

2. What is in this phrase, obtaining of mercy? I told you, that it implied three things. 1. That mercy is God's free gift. We only come by it, because he gives it. 2. That there is a personal particular application of this mercy to the obtainer of it. 3. That it is given as a possession; not as a gift that may be recalled and retaken; but it is given for an everlasting possession. Whoever is made partaker of God's special saving mercy, it shall never be taken from him. It shall never waste, nor spend, nor wear out; but shall stay with him, follow him, and grow up with him to eternity. The burden of that heaven-like song (Psa 136) is six and twenty times repeated. For his mercy endureth for ever. How sweetly will it be sung from all the mansions in heaven, and by all the blessed dwellers in them! O give thanks to our God; for he is good, for his mercy endureth for ever. Can you learn this song? as the word is, Revelation 14:3. Only the redeemed of the Lord can say so; but all they should say so (Psa 107:1,2). His mercy is most sweet; a crumb of it will save a starving soul, as Matthew 15:27. A large measure of it on earth, is a heaven. But the eternity of this mercy, is the mercy of this mercy. Time-mercies in regard of this, are no mercies.

3. I spoke of the design and end we should have before us in coming to the throne of grace: come that we may obtain mercy.

That which I would do at this exercise, is to apply this truth. And the Lord apply both doctrine and application. And,

First, I would put this question to your consciences, and let them speak as in God's sight, Whether have ye obtained mercy, or not? Can you say with Paul, But I obtained mercy? You must have it as well as he, and may know it as really as he did; though ye receive not so much, nor know it so clearly, as so great a believer as Paul did. See to get your consciences well resolved in this main case, that you may be able to give a peremptory answer. The importance of this question is very obvious. Can a man retire within, and

look up to God, and consider this, "I am a miserable sinner in myself, as all are; nothing but God's special mercy can relieve me"; and not think it a matter of vast consequence to know whether he hath obtained this mercy or no? Woe to them that never asked the question; and they are but in a sorry case that cannot answer it.

I would propose a few things to enforce the duty of trying yourselves in this matter.

1. It is mercy you have been seeking. If ever you made any fashion of prayer, surely it was mercy you sought. Most of you, if not all, pray at least sometimes. Now, whenever you pray, unless you be woefully formal and stupid, your consciences must tell you, it is mercy you seek. Have you long and often begged God's mercy? and will ye never inquire whether or not you have got it? None ask in earnest, but they will try how they speed. There is no surer and plainer argument of trifling in prayer, than when men are careless what they get by prayer. We would be called of the generation of them that seek God's face: and shall we not inquire if we have found him? Our Lord bids us ask, that we may receive; and shall we ask, and not think of receiving? nor try if we have received?

2. A great many round you have obtained mercy; therefore it becomes you to inquire, whether you have obtained it. If the mercy of God were so very rarely dispensed, that none, if any, in an age, did partake of it, this neglect would be a little more excusable. But when mercy falls round about thee; when one on thy right hand obtains mercy, and another on thy left hand obtains mercy; when this mercy falls on some of the family thou livest in, on some of the congregation thou hearest in; when this mercy falls on one that hath the same natural parents that thou hast: will none of these things make you ask, Have I also obtained mercy? We find our Lord aggravating the misery of the damned, by their seeing of the blessedness of the saved, (Luke 13:28) There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out. A most dreadful passage! Christ is telling men that were to be excluded from heaven, what they would think, say, and do, in that dismal case. Prevent this misery in time, by inquiring whether you have obtained mercy: and do so the rather, that ye may see others partaking of this mercy. When you see the saving mercy of God sought and obtained by others, it should provoke you greatly; not to envy them their share, but to desire a share of your own; for there is enough, and to spare. And the Lord doth shew mercy to some, on purpose that he may encourage others to come, and ask, and obtain. So Paul tells wherefore he got his mercy: (1 Tim 1:16) Howbeit, for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first (or the chief) Jesus Christ might shew forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting. There were other ends Christ had in shewing mercy to Paul. The Lord shewed him mercy, that he might be saved eternally; he shewed him mercy, that he might be an able minister of the New Testament (2 Cor 3:6) and a successful apostle (1 Cor 15:10); and the church of Christ hath good cause now, for many ages, to bless our Lord Jesus for that rich mercy which that chosen vessel obtained, and was filled with. But the apostle, in that place, takes notice of another design of Christ's in his mercy to him; and that was, to set up Paul as a pattern and copy of the freedom, riches, and power of saving mercy. And Christ can, when he will, write another copy, like Paul; and somewhat like it he doth in all that he calls savingly (Eph 2:4). Take in this argument, "Many obtain mercy; and why not I? None deserve it; yet many have it. None deserve it less, and need it more than I; why then not I?" If you see the Lord shewing mercy to others, and you care not for mercy to yourselves; how can you expect it, or think you have got it?

3. Inquire whether you have received God's saving mercy; because this mercy is brought so near you, that it must either be received or refused. There is no midst. No man doth neither, no man doth both. All that have the offer of God's saving mercy in the gospel, do and must necessarily either receive or reject it. This should make people inquire the more narrowly, whether they have obtained mercy. If ye have not obtained it, ye have refused it: (Acts 13:46) It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles. This last is a strange phrase. I am persuaded in the Lord, that no man shall ever get everlasting life, that thinks himself worthy of it. It is always to be sought by us, always given by the Lord, and always taken by the receivers of it, as an alms of grace for Christ's sake. Nothing surely was farther from Paul's mind, than to have these foolish Jews to count themselves deserving of eternal life; or that, on the account either of their privileges or works, they did or could deserve salvation at the hand of God. But all the apostle meant,

was this:— “Everlasting life is brought near to you in this word of the gospel: you put the word from you; thereby you declare, you are unwilling to receive everlasting life, and God counts you unworthy of the offer of it; and we will carry it to others”; as he tells other unbelieving Jews at Rome, (Acts 28:28) Be it known to you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it.

Now, for resolving of this question, Whether you have obtained special saving mercy, or not? this seems easily determinable. There is so great a difference betwixt that state of sin and misery that mercy finds men in when it first visits them, and that state that mercy brings them to, that we are apt to think the change may be easily known. See Ephesians 2:1-18. Yet there are so many things that obstruct, both them that have obtained mercy, from owning it, and them that have not obtained it, from acknowledging their want of it, (of which I shall not now speak), that searching is needful. And for your help in that work, I offer these few plain marks. 1. A high value of special saving mercy above common mercy, is a good sign of one that hath obtained saving mercy. There is a special mercy of God, and there is a common mercy. Special mercy is saving; it comes from the heart and love of God (Eph 2:4), and is treasured up for, and laid out only upon his chosen. It is the favour he bears to his people (Psa 106:4). Common mercies are thrown about with a large and indifferent hand: He maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and one the unjust (Matt 5:45). Now, these two sorts of mercies are as far different, as heaven and earth. The excellency of the one is far beyond that of the other, though we be unworthy of either. I am less than the least of all thy mercies, said a great saint (Gen 32:10); and so should all say. But few do perceive this great difference; and many give the preference to common outward mercy. Who but a Christian doth count it a greater mercy to have the conscience sprinkled with the blood of Jesus, than to have a large and prosperous estate in the world? that the light of God’s countenance, and an hour spent in his courts, (when the King’s presence is in them), is better than all the enjoyments of this world? Moses was a man that obtained singular mercy from the Lord. It appeared in this, that he esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt (Heb 11:26). He had excellent balances and true weights. He put in the one scale, Egypt’s honours, treasures, and pleasures, (and how weighty are such things in the worldling’s balances!); and in the other, the reproach of Christ, and affliction with the people of God. His judgment on this weighing, is, That this reproach, because of Christ’s concern in it; and this affliction, because it is of and with God’s people, is better than all the other things. The true test of men’s spirits is justly taken from their settled inward apprehension of the worth and value of spiritual saving mercy, above all outward mercy. (Psa 4:6,7) There be many that say, Who will shew us any good? Most men are for any good, they know not well what, and from any hand that can show it, and give it. But David knew what good he would have, and who could show it. Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us. Why is he so earnest for this blessing? Thou hast put gladness in my heart, (carnal men seek gladness, and make it, and take it to themselves, as well as they can; but gladness of God’s putting in their heart, they know not), more than in the time that their corn and their wine increased. David doth not here compare, though he doth discover, the holiness of his heart, with the earthliness of that of others; he compares not the tenderness of his conversation with theirs: but he compares the joy God gave him by the light of his countenance, not with the joy he had, but with that the ungodly have, in their sensual satisfactions. Try yourselves by this. Where is your esteem lodged? What sort of things are they that relish with your spirits? Common outward mercies carry away the hearts of the most part of men, and this shews that few men have obtained special mercy.

2. He that hath obtained special mercy, hath a love to it, and to the giver of it, and to the way God gives it, and in which he receives it. He that is a lover of God’s mercy in Christ, is an obtainer of it. A natural man may have a liking of God’s mercy in general: but mercy as from God through Jesus Christ, mercy shown on the account of a full satisfaction made to justice in and by his blood, mercy given freely to glorious ends and purposes, every natural man seeth no glory, no goodness, no beauty, in it. But every obtainer of it doth admire every thing in it. “It is rich mercy, saith he; it flows from a blessed fountain, free love; runs in a blessed channel, the redemption of Jesus; comes to me in a well-ordered covenant; and was shown me for his praise in my salvation from sin and misery.”

3. An obtainer of mercy, is a daily beggar for more mercy. Whenever God’s special mercy is tasted, hunger and thirst after more is raised. No sooner did Paul obtain mercy, but behold, he prays (Acts 9:11). There is more of mercy yet to be had. Mercy quickens the soul’s desires, and enlargeth them. The greatest

receivers are the greatest beggars: (1 Peter 2:2,3) Desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby; if so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious. This mark is plain, and will never fail. They that drive not a trade of prayer for special mercy, have not yet obtained it.⁴ An obtainer of mercy from the Lord, is a shewer of mercy to others. He is a merciful man to others, (Matt 5:7; Col 3:12,13) Put on therefore (as the elect of God, holy and beloved) bowels of mercies, kindness &c.; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another; even as Christ forgave you: and (Eph 4:32) Forgiving one another, even as God, for Christ's sake, hath forgiven you. How unbecoming is it, that such should have bowels of brass, on whom God's bowels of mercy have been poured out? This is a mark that will never fail, but in a high fit of temptation. All that have obtained God's mercy, will be disposed to shew their mercy. Forgiving one another, is an easy thing; it costs nothing but to think a kind thought: yet how hard is this to many, through the power of corruption? There are some acts of mercy, as bounty and charity, that poor Christians have no ability for. But the principal act of mercy is in every Christian's power; and that is mercy to men's souls. We cannot give them that mercy we have obtained; but we can, and should wish the like to them. Never did a man obtain mercy from the Lord for himself, but he wished that others should partake of it also. The woman of Samaria (John 4), (of whose conversion we have the largest account of any convert in the Bible), as soon as she obtained mercy, (she forgot what she came to the well for, she had got somewhat better than the water of Jacob's well; she met with Jacob's God, and had got Jacob's blessing), she goes to the city, and turns a sort of a preacher to them: Come, see a man that told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ? (v 29). She obtained mercy, and would have all the city come, and get mercy also. And a great many came, and obtained mercy. Christ caught that woman by his grace, and made her as a bait to catch many more. No believer can deny his sense of such a frame as this. There are some persons thou dost love, and shouldst love: thou prayest for them. What does thou mainly ask for wife, children, brothers, sisters, and all or any thou lovest heartily? Is it not, O that they might share in God's saving mercy? If thou ask it for others as the greatest mercy, thou thyself art on obtainer of mercy. Paul obtained mercy. He loved his countrymen the Jews dearly, and on good grounds (Rom 9:1-5). What prays he for them? (Rom 10:1) My heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. All right prayer should be the heart's desire. Salvation is the best thing we can pray for to ourselves, or to them we love. And no man can heartily pray for salvation to others, who hath not got it himself.

Secondly, I would now direct some words to them that have obtained mercy, and know it. Blessed be the Lord, that there are not a few in the world, not a few in this city, and, I hope, not a few in this meeting, that have obtained mercy of the Lord, and know it also; who can remember when their misery was great; and when the mercy of the Lord made a visit to them; and what great things it brought to them, and wrought in them.

1. Let such be very thankful for special saving mercy. Praise is a great debt, as well as a great blessing. Let none take this as an ordinary duty; but let all Christians know, that the main point of the life and practice of Christianity lies in the performance of it (1 Peter 2:9). Praise should rise according to the worth of what we praise for. Greatest favours call for highest praises; and special mercy from the Lord is the highest favour. It is a good custom, and a duty also that people, when they receive their daily bread from God, do give him thanks for it, as well as beg his blessing on it. Pray then, how do you think the Lord will take unthankfulness for his special mercy? How many hath the Lord to give in this charge against? "I never gave thee a night's rest, but thou gave me thanks for it in the morning; but I have by my mercy raised thee up to newness of life, and I was never thanked for it. I never fed thy body, but thou blessed me for my bounty; but I have given thee my Son for the bread of thy soul, but no praise for this gift. When thou wast near death, I did in mercy restore thee, and was praised for it; but special mercy hath delivered thy soul from eternal destruction, but when didst thou praise for that?" Have a care this charge be not given against you. Live to his praise, and let praise be the main work of your life.

2. Walk tenderly under God's special mercy. The more special the mercy be, the more carefully it should be improved. God's saving mercy is a load, a burden; not indeed hard to be borne, but it is hard to bear it aright; a burden that will not break the back, but will weigh heavy on the shoulders of the bearers; and such as are under it, are in no small danger of stumbling: (Isa 38:15) What shall I say? he hath both spoken unto me, and himself hath done it: I shall go softly all my years in the bitterness of my soul. And that

there was special mercy in his eye, see verse 17, Thou hast in love to my soul delivered it from the pit of corruption; for thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back. Here is a right sense of mercy, and a good resolution about the guiding of it: "I will walk softly all the years (fifteen of them) that God hath added to my life." But what performance was there? (2 Chron 32:25) But Hezekiah rendered not again according to the benefit done unto him: for his heart was lifted up.³ Obtainers of mercy should ask grace to guide mercy; and ask it the more earnestly and confidently, because they have obtained mercy. Be not discouraged in asking more mercy, because you have made so poor improvements of what you have received. Every mercy lays us under an obligation for more service; and grace to enable for that service must be given, and therefore should be asked. We need mercy, God gives it: When we get it, we should guide it well; and in order to that, we must beg more; new mercy to enable us to guide the old. No mercy from the Lord but it may be ill guided, but the last, eternal life (Jude 21). A Christian is not out of all danger of abusing any mercy of the Lord, till he receive perfecting mercy in heaven.

Thirdly, To them that have not obtained mercy, or at least do not know that they have, only four things I would say to such. Ask mercy, receive mercy, plead mercy, hope in his mercy.

1. Ask mercy. The Lord hath two designs in offering and dispensing his mercy to men: to be honoured by the prayers of them that want it; and to be glorified by the praises of them that get it. This duty of asking mercy, is frequently commanded by the Lord, commonly practised by his people, and never in vain.

(1.) Ask mercy like itself. Ask some way according to your need, and its worth. If our begging bore any tolerable proportion to the great blessing of God's saving mercy, what mighty praying would there be? Let not mercy be sought as a small thing. It is the one thing needful, and it is the one thing we should seek of the Lord. God's mercy, saving mercy, free mercy, mercy great, vastly above all our misery; O how would it be asked if asked like itself!

(2.) Ask mercy at the right door. There is not a crumb of saving mercy that comes to any perishing sinner, but by Jesus Christ. There is no corn in Egypt, but what comes through this Joseph's hand. He is a mad beggar of mercy that forgets Christ.

(3.) Ask mercy in God's time. He that commands us to ask, and tells us at what door to beg, and promiseth to give, tells us also when we should ask. Men have their times; as in great distress, when dying, and at judgment. Beware of putting off asking, till God's time of giving be past. It is an awful word of Christ, (Luke 13:25) When once the master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying, &c. There are two sad beginnings here. Beginnings to stand without when the door is shut; such will eternally stand without. Beginning to knock at the door; such as begin to knock at God's shut door, will never get in. There is no good answer to be given by God to such for eternity. Is not that a very unhappy beginning? So our Lord tells us in the parable of the ten virgins (Matt 25:10). The foolish came when the door was shut. They were foolish that they came no sooner; and miserable that they came too late. I believe the damned will see more of the blessedness of the saved, than the saved will see of the misery of the damned. Christ expressly aggravates the misery of the damned, by what they shall see of the bliss of the saved (Luke 13:28). But all we see in the word that the saved shall see or hear of the misery of the damned, is their resurrection to damnation (John 5:29) (which is a most miserable one; better were it for them to have their bodies lie eternally in the grave, than to be raised for damnation), their sentence of condemnation, and their vain pleas and pleadings for mercy. But O that men would come in at God's time, and cry for mercy, as they will do out of time! How much better would it be for them! God's time is now, today, the present time (2 Cor 6:2), Now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation. If men refuse God's mercy in his time, he will deny his mercy when sought in their time, and out of his. (Isa 30:18) He waits to be gracious, and willing to be exalted in having mercy. Notwithstanding all the mercy with the Lord, all the mercy that is offered in the promise, the Lord never promised a sinner his mercy tomorrow. If you will beg his mercy today, you may have it, and it shall endure for ever. But God never gave an allowance and liberty to any man, to spend one day or hour in consulting whether he should beg God's mercy or not. David had indeed a sad choice of judgments laid before him (2 Sam 24:13), and is bid by the Prophet, Advise now, and see what answer I shall return to him that sent me. But for a perishing sinner, that hath an offer of God's mercy in Jesus Christ, there is no delay allowed, but only he is bid ask it presently.² Receive God's mercy. Receiving is easier than asking. Asking requires some pains; receiving is

but a consent of the heart to take what is offered. Asking supposeth a great and needful blessing, that he that wants it would fain have; and therefore he begs it. Receiving implies, that this great blessing is in his offer fully and freely; and therefore he must accept it. Here is the state of things betwixt God and men in the gospel. The Lord brings his mercy near to them, offers it to them, bids them take and receive it; but many will not. God offers quarter to rebels in arms against him; but they stand upon their sword, and will not take quarter. Ministers' work is, to intreat and beseech in Christ's stead (2 Cor 5:20). God only can persuade and prevail with men. Mercy comes prepared and ready for men. It is prepared in the purchase of Christ; it is prepared in the well ordered covenant; and as prepared and ready, it is tendered freely to sinners: All things are ready, come to the marriage (Matt 22:4). All things are ready. God himself is ready to give mercy. Christ is ready; he is slain for us: let us come and keep the feast (1 Cor 5:7,8). The Holy Spirit is ready to seal you to the day of redemption, if you will accept of God's mercy in the Redeemer. Heaven is ready, the way is plain, and all hindrances of law and justice removed (Heb 10:19,20). The city of refuge is ready; and its gates are open continually, to receive and give entrance to all that flee for safety (Heb 6:18). Alas! all things are ready; but men are not willing. There is not a moment's time needed to ripen God's mercy for men. No perishing sinner, that seeth his need of God's mercy, and is willing to receive it, needs stay a moment, till mercy be ready for him, or he more ready for it: (Rom 10:6-8) The righteousness which is of faith, speaketh on this wise, (How very few have ears to hear such a speaker, and such a speech?), Say not in thine heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? (that is to bring Christ down from above): Or who shall descend into the deep: (that is to bring up Christ again from the dead). (Christ is come down already from heaven, and is gone back again to heaven.) But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is the word of faith which we preach. Mercy and salvation for lost sinners is prepared by Christ's coming down, and going up again; and he hath lodged the power and virtue of his undertaking in the gospel. Suck at that well with faith, and thy soul shall be saved: there thou wilt find Christ, and all his fulness. There was never such a treaty made in the world. We can fetch no similitude fully like this amongst men. Thus the Lord pleads with men in the gospel:— "You are already undone with sin and misery lying on you, and you are every hour sinking into greater; let but my mercy in my Son enter in, and it will cure all that is past and present, and prevent all the misery that is coming on you." And will not miserable sinners receive God's mercy? Are you afraid of saving mercy? will it hurt you? why do ye not give it entrance? It is one of the greatest demonstrations what monsters sin hath made men, that they are unwilling to be saved by free mercy, in Jesus Christ. Open a door for God's mercy, by a free receiving of it; or else you will find the door of his mercy shut against you, when you need it most. Your giving way to his mercy, is your receiving of it. Say with the heart, "Let God's mercy enter in upon me, and save me its own way." A yielding, and giving, and putting of a lost soul into the hand of Christ, is the nature of saving faith in him. Will ye not trust in his mercy? Is it not able to save you? Your want of a sense of your need of his mercy, is a giving the lie to all the threatenings and curse of the law; your doubting of the ability of his mercy to save you, is to give the lie to all the faithfulness and truth of God declared and sworn in the gospel.³ Plead mercy. When you beg it, use no other plea for mercy, but mercy. When you beg mercy, you must beg mercy only for mercy's sake. That that moves God to shew mercy, must be our argument in pleading for mercy. Wherefore doth God shew mercy? Because he will shew mercy, and delights in it (Micah 7:18). And therefore should we plead it. Mercy in his heart, is the only spring of mercy from his hand. David, who knew God's mercy well, had tasted of it often, and needed it greatly, when fallen into a foul pit, thus pleads for mercy: (Psa 51:1) Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving-kindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Have a care of making any other plea for mercy from the Lord, but that of mercy with him. And stick to this plea, and it will prevail. If the Lord for trying of your faith, or Satan for shaking it, should say, How dare such a vile sinner as thou art, beg so great a gift as saving mercy, from so holy a God? the poor pleader hath a ready answer: "I want mercy as much as my soul is worth. In vain do I seek it of any creature; nothing but his mercy can save me. I beg mercy only for mercy's sake: I bring nothing but a starving soul, and an empty hand. I beg his mercy as an alms, which will eternally enrich the receiver, and not impoverish the giver. What can such as I beg of such a God as he is, but mercy? His name is Mercy, my name is Misery. I would have my misery relieved by his mercy, and his mercy glorified in my relief."⁴ Hope in his mercy: (Psa 147:11) The Lord taketh pleasure in them that fear him, in those that hope

in his mercy, (Psa 130:7) Let Israel hope in the Lord: for with the Lord there is mercy. It is from the devil, for whom there is no mercy, that any of the most miserable out of hell are tempted to think there is no mercy with God for them. He envies men God's mercy. He doth not only tempt to sin, but also to security in it, till the day of mercy be past. If God awaken a sinner to see his need of mercy in time, Satan tempts him to think that it is out of time. In such temptations he acts most like himself, a reprobate damned spirit; and in managing of them he hath great advantages, from his own craft and malice, and men's just deserving of wrath. Look on all such thoughts as from that adversary, and treat them accordingly. When you beg mercy, look for it: expect to obtain it, when you would lay hold on it. The Lord will never keep back his saving mercy from a sinner that would have it as his life. When you plead for mercy, for mercy's sake, hope to prevail; and that will help you to plead better. So much for this exhortation. Will ye go home and do so? Will you study more your misery, and the greatness of his mercy; and ask and plead for it more earnestly? There is never better fruit of preaching, than when the hearers are sent away hungering and thirsting after the Lord's mercy.

SERMON VIII Hebrews 4:16

Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.

I have spoke to the first of the blessings to be got at the throne of grace, which we should come for, obtaining of mercy. The second is, The finding of grace to help in time of need. This expression, finding of grace, is probably borrowed from the Old Testament, wherein the bestowing of favour is usually so expressed. We find it in men's pleadings with one another. So Jacob to Esau, (Gen 32:5, 33:1) These are to find grace in the sight of my lord. And he pleads upon it, (v 10) If I have found grace in thy sight, then receive my present at my hand: for therefore I have seen thy face, as though I had seen the face of God; and thou wast pleased with me. Jacob had seen God's face that morning, and had found grace in his sight, and he remembers it when he finds grace in the sight of his angry brother. So we find the phrase used in dealing with God, by Moses, (Exo 33:12,13) Yet thou hast said, I know thee by name, and thou hast found grace in my sight. Now therefore, I pray thee, if I have found grace in thy sight, shew me now thy way, that I may know thee, that I may find grace in thy sight.

The first thing I would remark here, is, the connection betwixt these two blessings and errands, obtaining of mercy, and finding of grace. Mercy and grace are joined together by God, and are not be put asunder by man. Many would separate them. They would be content to obtain mercy; but they care not so much for his grace. But such are only profane ignorant persons, that know neither God nor themselves, nor his mercy, nor his grace. The Lord will not give mercy without grace, nor grace without mercy. All that receive either, receive both; and all that would have either, must ask both; and none can ask either aright, but he that asks both. This grace we are called to come to the throne of grace for the finding of, is specified from its great advantage and usefulness. It is grace to help in time of need. The words in the original are, grace for seasonable opportune help. It is the nature of this grace, that it is helpful. Its helpfulness mainly appears in a time of need. A time of need will come: this grace is to be asked before that time come; it is to be waited upon till the time of need come, and used when it comes.

The truth to be spoke to, is this plain one:

DOCTRINE. That all that hear of God's offer of grace, should come to God to ask it, to get it, to find it. Men should come to God's throne of grace, for grace for themselves. They should come to God in Christ Jesus, for the grace of God in and by Christ Jesus. This is a truth so bright in its own evidence, that there is no need to confirm it. What hath been said of coming to obtain mercy, is equally binding unto coming to find grace.

Two things, then, I would speak unto at this time.

I. What is this grace we are called to come to the throne of grace for?

II. What finding of grace is; what speciality is there in this expression? It is certain, never did a man find grace, before grace found him. Grace is always the first finder: but the sense of it, and our knowledge of our having found it, follows after.

I. What is this grace we are to come to the throne of grace for finding of?

We have need to know this distinctly. The reason why many are so confused, and dark, and barren in their prayers, is, because they know not what is to be got by prayer. If we had a clear knowledge of the full extent of this grace that is to be dispensed at this throne of grace, we should quickly know what to ask, and find matter for asking continually.

This grace of God, that we are invited to come to the throne of grace for finding of, comes under three different considerations. 1. As it is in the fountain from whence it flows. 2. As it is in the channel in which it runs. 3. As it is in the vessels that do receive it.

1. Grace considered as in the fountain from whence it flows, is grace in God. The scriptures take notice of the special interest that each of the three blessed persons of the godhead have in dispensing of grace. We find the Father called the God of all grace (1 Peter 5:10); and there Christ is also named, and the Holy Ghost implied. The Father, the God of all grace, is the caller; he calleth us to his eternal glory by Christ Jesus; we are fitted for the possession of it by the grace of the Holy Ghost. Our Lord Jesus Christ is oft spoke of as the fountain of grace, (John 1:14) Full of grace and truth; and that we might know that this fountain-fulness in him is for communication, (v 16) and out of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace. The Holy Ghost is called the Spirit of grace (Heb 10:29); of grace and supplication (Zech 12:10); of faith (2 Cor 4:13). When we come to the throne of grace, for grace in this consideration, we come for the manifestation and communication of grace from the fountain, according to his will and our need, for the carrying on of our salvation to the praise of his grace. It is to be observed in that apostolic wish, which by a good custom is made the concluding blessing in Christian assemblies, (2 Cor 13:14) The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all, Amen, that there is grace in the Father's love, and grace in the communion of the Holy Ghost, as well as there is love and communion in the grace of our Lord Jesus. For grace is in all divine favour, and in all its fruits, freely bestowed on the undeserving sons of men.

2. Grace may be considered as it is in the channel in which it runs, in the way and means of its conveyance, usually called the means of grace. And this is the gospel. It is true, that this form of speech, means of grace, is not a scriptural phrase, though it be usual with us. But by it we mean nothing, but such means as are hallowed by divine institution, and backed with a gracious promise of bestowing grace on the right users thereof. The main of which means, is the gospel itself, called by Paul, in Acts 20:24, the gospel of the grace of God, and (v 32) the word of his grace. And in Titus 2:22, the gospel is called simply, the grace of God. If you take away the doctrine of free grace, you take away the gospel. It is but an empty shadow, a false name, to call that doctrine gospel, that is not the word of his grace. The grace of God in the means is universally offered to all that hear the gospel; but the blessing itself is sovereignly dispensed, like grace. There is ground sufficient in the promise for faith in waiting on the Lord in the use of his appointments: but yet the Lord never used any outward mean that was always effectual to all them that had it. The greatest of any outward means that ever men were under, was the personal ministry of Christ; yet all his hearers did not believe, yea, but a few did (John 6:26, &c.). What a heavenly discourse doth Christ deliver! but what was the effect of it? (v 66) From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him. The Lord hath wisely ordered it thus, that the means (the channel his grace runs in) are at some times, and to some persons, filled with his grace; and at other times are but empty pipes, that the means themselves may not be doted on, and that the fountain may still be depended on. When, then, we come to the throne of grace, for grace, as in the means, we come begging, that the Lord, who hath appointed the means, and keeps the blessing of them in his own hand, would fill the means with his grace, and fill our souls with the communication of that grace, in our use of these means. 3. Grace is considered as it is in the vessels that receive it, in men that partake of it. And here it will be needful to distinguish. The grace of God as received, comes under a very notable distinction of common grace, and saving grace, or special. Somewhat hath been

hinted of the same distinction, betwixt common and special saving mercy. But of this distinction, as to grace received, I would speak more fully.

First, Common grace is so called, not because it is ordinary and usual, (for in bad times it is rare enough), but because it is not saving. It is most likely, that in such happy times (which we cannot now boast of, but only hope for) when saving grace is bestowed on many, common grace is dispensed more frequently also. That there is such a thing as common grace, is as certain, as it is that there is such a creature (if I may so call him) as a hypocrite in the church, or in the world. For an hypocrite is nothing else but an unrenewed sinner, painted over with more or less common grace. And to men that see the outside of others only, he may appear like a true Christian.

I would give some particular instances of this common grace.

1. There is a common enlightening grace, a common illumination (Heb 6:4, 10:26). The apostle supposeth, that there is an enlightening, and a receiving a knowledge of the truth, that may be where a fatal apostasy may follow. The Lord may give the light of his word; and, in and by that light, may dart in some clear beams of gospel-truth on such that are led no farther. It is far from being true, that all knowing heads have sound hearts. There may be, and often is, much clear light in the mind about points of saving truth, when there is no sense, no savour, no faith in the heart. Acts 26 we find Paul speaking in the most noble assembly that it is like he ever spoke in; a King and a Queen, and a Roman Governor greater than both. In this august assembly, Paul, though a prisoner in bonds, remembers his being an apostle, and preacheth Christ, and takes Christ's grace in converting him for his text: (v 24) When he is thus speaking, Festus said with a loud voice, Paul thou art beside thyself, much learning doth make thee mad. At the same time, (v 28) Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian. This was a great deal better than Festus' word, yet a poor word in itself. It spoke some glancing of ineffectual light on his mind. An almost Christian, and no more, is but a sinner almost saved, and no more; or one that is no Christian, and never saved at all.

2. There is common awakening grace. The Lord sometimes alarms the consciences of the ungodly, and may raise a great sense of sin in such as are never forgiven; and fears of hell, yea, a foretaste of hell, in some that never escape it. I have sinned, saith Pharaoh; I have sinned, saith Saul; I have sinned (saith Judas), in betraying innocent blood. Alas, poor wretch! it had been better to have confessed his sin against his master, to his master, than to his murderers. Felix trembled when Paul preached. It was grace in God to come so near to him, and great power was put forth. What else could make such a great prince as Felix was, to tremble at the words of a poor prisoner standing before him in his chains? Awakening grace is but common grace. The law wounds many a conscience that the gospel doth not heal, because not applied to. No wound can the law make, which the gospel cannot heal. Boast not of your wounds by the law, unless you can tell how you were healed. There is no cure for a conscience wounded by sin and by the law, but the blood of Jesus shed for sin. Did ye come to it? (Heb 12:24). Did he apply it to you? Were you cured of your wounds before ye went to him, and before he came to you? Woeful is that cure, and worse than the wound. Many poor creatures are wounded by the law, and to the law they go for healing. But God never appointed the law to heal a wounded conscience; and it never did, nor can, nor will, to the end of the world, nor to eternity. It is Christ's name, and property, and glory, to be the only physician of souls; and all must die of the disease of sin, that are not his happy patients.

3. There is common restraining grace; an act of God's grace and wisdom, which he often puts forth in his ruling of this wicked world. How quickly would this earth become a hell, were it not for this restraining grace? if all unrenewed men were permitted by God, to commit all the sin Satan tempts to, and their natures incline them to, there would be no living in this world for the godly. This restraining grace we find a Heathen had: (Gen 20:6) I with-held thee from sinning against me, saith the Lord to Abimelech. And, which is more, we find a great saint praying for it, (Psa 19:13) Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins, let them not have dominion over me: that is, "Lay a powerful restraint on me by thy grace, that when I am tempted, my way may be hedged up, and I may be kept from complying with the temptation." But yet bare restraining grace is not desired by a Christian in good case, without sanctifying grace. He desires not only the restraining of the outward acts of sin, but the removing of inward inclinations to sin; he begs the renewing and changing of the heart. So David, when he had fallen foully, by the strength of inward

corruption, and God's leaving him to himself; when recovered by grace, and renewed unto repentance, prays like a wise believer, (Psa 51:10) Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.

4. There is common assisting grace. Many a bad man hath had good assistance from God in a good work. The Spirit of God hath clothed many, and enabled them to great and good works, which God gets service by, and the world good by, though the doers thereof be not accepted: (Matt 7:22) Many shall say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? All great things, and all done in Christ's name, and done by his assistance. In their casting out of devils, and in working of miracles, there was an exerting of omnipotency, with and by their faith; which is the greatest divine assistance we can imagine. And no doubt they were assisted by Christ's Spirit in their prophesying in his name. Now, such things they thus did. Christ, in his reply, denies not their doing of them, finds no fault with the works in themselves; but all his quarrel is with the workers: I never knew you, you are workers of iniquity.⁵ To common grace belongs some comfort and joy reaching the heart in hearing the word. Our Lord expressly explains the stony ground this way, (Matt 13:20) He that received the seed in stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it.⁶ Lastly, There is reforming grace, that belongs to common grace. The power of the word may come so on natural men's consciences, that they may reform many things; as Mark 6:20, Herod, when he heard John Baptist, did many things, and heard him gladly. So 2 Peter 2:20. If any say, What! should we come to the throne of grace for common grace? I answer, Not for it alone, but for it, and better. It is a mercy to have common grace; it is grace that is undeserved: but it is a woeful snare to him that rests in it. If the Lord restrain your corruptions; if he enlighten your minds, and awaken your consciences; if he assist you with gifts for good works; if he help you to mend any thing that is amiss in your conversation; bless him for all: but rest not on any of these things. It is a higher and better grace that is saving, and that you must seek after.

Secondly, Saving grace, as distinct from, and beyond all that is common, respects three things.

1. It respects and works a change in a man's state, which common grace never performs. Saving grace changeth a person's state. By this grace an enemy is reconciled to God, a guilty sinner is justified freely through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, a stranger receives sonship by Christ. Common grace never alters the state of a man's person, but it leaves him where it found him. It never doth, nor can take him out of the old stock of fallen Adam; he still lies in that pit; and is never by it translated into Christ, and ingrafted in him, as a new head. But saving grace, when it comes, doth all (Eph 2:4-18).² Saving grace respects man's sinful nature, and changeth it. And this grace thus working, is called regenerating, sanctifying, and renewing of men. Christ calls it, being born again (John 3:3). If any man be in Christ, (through this grace), he is a new creature (2 Cor 5:17). This the apostle calls, (Titus 3:5) According to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost. Natural men are apter to look to their conversation, than to their nature. They may see many things amiss in their way, who are loth to look into their heart. And if light shine in, to discover inward heart-faults, they are still backward to own that all is naught, and that there is no good in their hearts. If the light pursue them yet closer, and make them see that all is stark naught within, they are still more backward to own the true spring of their disease, and the true remedy for it; that all this dominion of sin over them, flows from the natural state of their persons, as standing still in and under the first sinful Adam; and can never be altered and mended, but by grace putting them into Christ, as the root of their new life.³ Saving grace respects and works on the new nature. Special grace not only changeth a man's state, nor his old corrupt nature only: but it works on this new nature wrought by grace. The special operation of the grace of God, in and from the fountain, is upon his own new creation in the hearts of his children. We cannot conceive it fully; our minds are not able to take in these depths of God. We hear from, and read in the word, of the intimate correspondence the Lord entertains with them in whom he dwells. Christ dwells in the heart by faith (Eph 3:17), His Spirit dwells in his people (Rom 8:9-11). But what is it in their hearts that he dwells in? He dwells in his own workmanship in their hearts, in his own new creation, in his own garden that he hath planted in them. There his presence is, and there his eye is, on that his hand is; this is that he waters, and carefully looks after. When a believer comes to the throne of grace, for this grace, he comes to beg that the new creation in him may be visited, refreshed, and strengthened, and brought to

perfection. They that have no planting of Christ in them, want this errand to the throne of grace, that believers daily come upon.

So much for the first thing, What this grace is?

II. What is the finding of this grace?

Why the apostle useth this phrase, different from the former, about mercy? That was obtaining of mercy, this is finding of grace. Mercy and grace are near a-kin; and so is obtaining and finding. Besides the Hebrew phrase, remarked already, these things I would note in it:

1. I conceive, that this phrase of finding grace, doth imply the duty of seeking it; according to our Lord's own direction, (Matt 7:7) Ask, and it will be given you: seek, and ye shall find: knock, and it shall be opened unto you. Where, and in verse 8 our Lord gives three commands to one duty of prayer, under three several names; and six promises for encouragement, under three different names also, redoubled.

2. This form of speaking, points forth the giving and bestowing of grace. His grace and favour is what is given to, bestowed on, and enjoyed by them that come to the throne of grace. When the old world was exceeding bad, all stark naught, and but one good man in it, (you must needs think that it was a bad world then), and that was Noah, (Gen 6:8) But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord. This word we should regard the more, that it is the first place where the grace of God is mentioned in scripture. There have I seen righteous before me in this generation, saith the Lord to him (Gen 7:1). And how this man came by his righteousness, see in Hebrews 11:7, By faith, Noah being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith. Who but the Spirit of God by Paul (who, I think, was the penman of this epistle) would have found the righteousness of faith in Noah's building of the ark? Many, nay, most of men, called Christians, cannot see this righteousness that is by faith, in the gospel itself. There was a brave inheritance, and estate in this righteousness of faith, secured and revealed in the first gospel (Gen 3:15). Of this estate Abel and Enoch were possessed; and Noah became (that is, declared himself) an heir of it, by his faith, and the fruits of it. The whole world had the warning; Noah from God, the world by Noah. All were equally concerned in the danger. Noah preached it to them; and God's Spirit was with him, striving with them a hundred and twenty years. But not one man found grace, but he alone. A prodigious depth of judgment and mercy! such a man as Noah preached so long to the world of the ungodly, as 2 Peter 2:5, and not one single man or woman believed. He only found grace in the eyes of the Lord, (Jer 31:2) Thus saith the Lord, The people that were left of the sword, found grace in the wilderness; even Israel, when I went to cause him to rest. It is a great blessing to find grace any where; but to find grace in the wilderness, to find grace where and when the sword of God's anger and justice is destroying multitudes, is heightened grace. Grace falls still on remnants. Justice and wrath seizeth on the bulk and whole piece: (Rom 11:5) A remnant according to the election of grace, (v 7) The election obtained it, (that is, grace): and the rest were blinded and hardened. The more be left, and the fewer be savingly taken, the greater is the grace shewed to those few, and the more happy are they that find it. 3. In this phrase of finding grace, there may this be conceived, if you will understand it rightly, the casualty of the getting of grace. There is no such thing as casualty to God: he always knows when, and where, and on whom to bestow his grace. But the bestowing of his grace is a mere casualty to all men; both to them that receive it, and to others that look on. My meaning is, grace comes unlooked for, undeserved, undesired, unexpected, in its first visit especially. So that all receivers of it may say as Hagar, the only good word we have of that bond-woman, (Gen 16:13) And she called the name of the Lord that spake to her, Thou God seest me; (Happy are they that can name God from his grace and mercy to them. David calls him, the God of my mercy, Psalms 59:10,17); for she said, Have I also here looked after him that seeth me? "The Lord hath had his eye on me for good, when I was not thinking on him." Grace always comes at first by surprise. How many are there that attend diligently on all the means of grace, and never find grace? when some that come but by accident, (as we think,) grace finds them, and they find it. This is the treasure hid in the field of the gospel; blessed is he that finds it (Matt 13:44). Many dig in this field, and never find the treasure in it. Men should use means (Prov 8:33,34); ministers should design wisely to catch souls, and labour painfully in it: but the Lord, in his application of his grace, passeth by many that

we would fainest have saved, and lights on others we never thought on. And let him do with his own grace as seemeth him good. Little thought little Zaccheus of salvation, when he climbed the tree to see Jesus pass by (Luke 19). If Christ had not called him down, the poor rich publican was as like as any in the company to have let Christ pass on in his journey. When Saul was going his wicked journey (Acts 9), who would have thought that grace would have fallen on him as it did! All partakers of grace, that can remember its first visit, can witness, that their finding of grace was a mere casualty to them. They thought not of it, they sought it not; yet it found them, and was found by them: (Isa 65:1) I am sought of them that asked not for me; I am found of them that sought me not. Seeking is our duty, and finding is our mercy; but both right seeking, and gracious finding, are singly owing to his grace. The apostle, after a deep discourse of the sovereignty of God in dispensing his grace, saith, (Rom 9:30,31) What shall we say then? That the Gentiles which followed not after righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith; but Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness. The cause of Israel's missing righteousness, he gives, (v 32) Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law; for they did not build and believe on Christ as a foundation, but stumbled at him as a stumbling-stone. A most dreadful way of ruin, for men to break their necks on the Saviour. But the apostle gives no cause why the Gentiles attained the righteousness of faith; but his discourse hints it plainly. Grace sent the gospel to them, and grace blessed it to them, in working faith in them; by the which they laid hold on the righteousness offered to them; and so they were possessed of it, and saved by that possession.

APPLICATION. Should we come to the throne of grace for grace? The,

1st, I infer, That every man should pray. Have you found grace already? Come for more; for more grace is needed by you, and more is to be had from the giver. It is a blessed name of God, much to be called upon by us, (James 4:6) He giveth more grace. It is much that he giveth any grace at all; but more, that he still gives more. If he gives more and more grace, you should come more and more for this more grace. If you have never received grace, you must come to this throne of grace, where only it is to be found. This text hath a strong argument in it, as well as a great encouragement. Are men invited to the throne of grace, that they may find grace? Then surely graceless folks should mainly come, and have most need to come. You will say, that the prayer of the wicked man is an abomination to the Lord. True; what then? Therefore, say you, I should not pray. A bad inference. But say you, Were it not better that a man should mend and grow better, and then come, and not till then? This is a perverse method, that Satan befools multitudes with. I pray you, how long may a man be a-mending himself, ere he be one bit better, till the grace of God come and mend him? A sinner never doth know truly his badness, till he see it incurable by all his own doings, and that it is only curable by sovereign grace. Men see a little of the fruits of sin in their walk; and them, or some of them, they think they may remove; and so indeed they may. But the fountain remains still, and will send forth its streams one way or other. Till a man see his heart and nature, he seeth but the outside of sin in himself. It is the sight of sin in our nature, of sin as our nature, that is truly humbling. Then a man seeth himself quite lost, and for ever undone, without any possible ground of hope, unless almighty free grace undertake for him.

In answer to this objection, in all its strength, I say four things.

1. Coming to the throne of grace for grace, is required by God. He commands it as a piece of honour to him, that all should implore his grace. No sinful or miserable circumstances can be in the condition of any out of hell, that can dissolve men's obligations to this duty. The power of sin, and guilt on an ungodly man, disables him quite from the right performance of any command of God; but doth not loose the obligation of God's law upon his conscience. You are bound to pray; you cannot pray. This is your strait; own it. Grace can only extricate you out of it.

2. Secure neglect of prayer, is a great deal worse than a faulty managing of it. Let such folks say then, I will pray, and try to pray: and though I should mar twenty prayers, I will pray still; for it is better to try it as we can, than to neglect it quite. What know you but grace may come in, and help you, when sinking under the weight of prayer?

3. Is not that a good prayer, and fit for your case, (Luke 12:1) Lord, teach us to pray? "Lord teach us to come the right way to the throne of grace?" If you can say no more, say that, and you can say nothing better. An humble groaning to Christ, to be taught by him to pray, hath more of true prayer in it, than many fine words, which men call prayer, and commend as brave praying. 4. Is it not a throne of grace you are called to

come to, that ye may find grace? You want grace, and cannot come, say ye; You want grace, and therefore come, say I. You are not to bring grace of your own working, but to find it of his giving at this throne. Would you have grace? Come, and get it. Men perish under the gospel only for their refusing of the grace of God. And justly are they counted refusers of grace, that will not come where it is to be found: and most righteous is their condemnation.

Inference 2. Should we come to the throne of grace, that we may find grace? Then prayerless people are graceless people. Grace is only to be had at this throne; therefore such as have no business at the throne of grace, are a graceless people. A prayerless person is a graceless person; a prayerless family is a graceless family; and London would be a graceless city, and England a graceless kingdom, if there were no seekers of God in them. But blessed be God, there are a great many. The Lord make them an hundred times more, and that our eyes may see it, as Job said to David about numbering of Israel, (2 Sam 24:3; Jer 10:25) Pour out thy fury upon the heathen that know thee not, and upon the families that call not on thy name. Heathens that know not God, and families that call not on his name, are the same sort of folks, and the same wrath of God hangs over them. Wrath overtakes all that have not found grace at this throne.

Inference 3. It follows also, that the most diligent pliers of the throne of grace, are the greatest receivers of grace: and the greatest receivers of grace, are the greatest comers to, and users of the throne of grace. Would ye try the measures of grace received? Try it by your diligence in praying. Some would fain know how it is with their souls. Here is a short, plain, and sure mark to judge it by. How goes the work of praying? It is a better mark, than you increase in light and knowledge of the letter of gospel-truth; better than to try yourselves by your public duties, and attendance upon all outward ordinances. It is impossible, that a man can be diligent, painful, and serious in plying of the throne of grace, but there will be grace found, more or less, of one sort or other. Every one must say with the Psalmist, (Psa 73:28) But it is good for me to draw near to God; and the oftener the better. He hath not said to us, that we should seek his face in vain (Isa 45:19). And none of the seekers of his face dare say, that they do seek him in vain, unless in a fit of temptation, when they lie against their right. It is also as impossible that the work of grace can prosper, when this highway is unoccupied, as Deborah sings (Judg 5:6). That Christian that lets grass grow on the road betwixt him and heaven, rottenness is entering into his bones, a consumption is coming on upon his soul, and the holy flesh is passed from him, as Jeremiah 11:15. The savour and relish the soul finds in approaching to the throne of grace, is the surest test of soul-prospering. In this I appeal to the consciences of all that ever knew communion with God. Is it not best with you every way, when you are most with him? Do not your burdens grow light, when you cast them on the Lord? Is not your path plain, when his candle shineth upon you; and doth it not shine when you are much in company? Difficulties vanish, and hard work grows easy, when the Lord is with you, and you with him. See how the apostle joins things together, (Jude 20,21) But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. Your faith, your love, your hope, are all to be acted in prayer: and are cherished by prayer, and strengthened by the answer of prayer. Would you have plenty of the grace of God? Here is a plain and sure way taught you by the apostle; and he joins himself with them he exhorts, Let us come to the throne of grace, that we may find grace.

SERMON IX Hebrews 4:16

Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.

The gracious call and invitation contained in this text, hath been often spoke to: an invitation frequently delivered in the preaching of the gospel, and as frequently slighted by most of the hearers of the gospel. It is such an invitation, as if it were delivered in the last day to the miserable company on Christ's left hand, we may think what complying with it would there be. If there were a throne of grace set up then for but one

hour, where mercy and grace might be had in that time of need, think ye not that there would be coming and crowding, crying and roaring, for mercy and grace? But that day will afford no such privilege. Now you have it; and the Lord knows, and next to him your consciences know, how this is entertained. What this throne of grace is; what coming to it is; what boldness in coming is allowed; what ground there is for this boldness, have been spoke to. The last thing in this verse, what blessings may be had by coming, hath been spoke to also; of the mercy to be obtained, and of the grace to be found. Of this last I have handled two things. 1. What is the grace that is to be found? 2. What the phrase of finding grace imports?

There are two things more that remain in the text:

I. The helpfulness of this grace. We are called to come to find grace to help.

II. The seasonableness of this help of grace. It is grace to help in time of need. So our translation carries it, and pretty well. The original runs in fewer words, grace unto seasonable help, or help in due season. Of these two I would speak at this time.

I. I would speak of the helpfulness of grace.

God's grace is a most helpful blessing.

1. It is promised, by him that gives it, as help. (Isa 41:10) Fear thou not, for I am with thee: be not dismayed, for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee, yea, I will help thee, yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness. Alas! who hath faith enough to draw at this deep well of salvation? Every word hath rich food for faith. Whenever God would engage the heart of a poor creature to a dependence on him, he doth it, by promising to be that to them, and to do that for them, that none besides himself can be or do. No man can truly act faith on God, for that he thinks a creature can do for him. You never believe soundly, but when you look to, and wait on God, for that is impossible utterly to the whole creation to give to you, or to do for you.

2. Again, we find the saints beg God's help. Whenever they come to God in earnest, they com to this, Lord, help: for all other help is vain. There is no more common prayer in the Old and New Testament, and to this day, than prayer for the Lord's helping grace. All our prayers, in their greatest variety, centre in this, Help us by thy grace. The great believer, (Matt 15:25) came and worshipped him, saying, Lord, help me. A short prayer, but mighty, and full of faith. A weaker man in faith than this woman, (Mark 9:22) Have compassion on us, and help us, praying for himself and his son; (v 24) he prays for himself alone, Lord, help my unbelief. There is no believer on earth who may not daily pray this prayer.

3. All the people of God find the helpfulness of his grace. All that seek it, find it; and all that find it, find the helpfulness of his grace.

First, I would in a few things shew the helpfulness of grace.

1. The grace of God helps always to purpose, and effectually. This grace helped Paul to labour more abundantly than all the apostles (2 Cor 15:10). I say not, that this is always sensible to the receiver; but only that grace given is always really effectual for the end for which it is given. It is not given in vain.

2. The grace of God helps universally. There is no case wherein it is not helpful. As without Christ we can do nothing (John 15:5); so, through him strengthening, we may do all things, or any thing (Phil 4:13). A Christian can imagine, can foresee no condition, no trial, no difficulty, wherein the Lord's grace cannot help him. So the text runs, that we may find grace to help in time of need. Let the time be what it will, and the need what it will, grace can help in it. It were a sad weakness of faith for any Christian to say, I am in that condition, that the grace of God cannot help me in. His grace is omnipotent.

3. Grace helps sweetly. I mean, that it doth not help as an external help, but as an internal. As for a familiar similitude: A weak and weary, or lame person, may be helped by the strength of another, or by being carried; but this is but external help. This weak or lame person is helped far better, when his infirmity is removed, and new strength given to him, so that he can pleasantly walk and run: (Psa 138:3) In the day when I cried, thou answeredst me; and strengthenedst me with strength in my soul. It is true, the grace of God, wherein our strength consists, is without us, and in him; but it is inwardly applied to us, when strength is found and felt. Therefore is it that believers not only find, by the dispensings of his helping grace, an effectual strength for their work and duty; but a great deal of sweetness and easiness in the exerting of that

gracious help. So Psalm 119:32, I will run the way of thy commandments, when thou shalt enlarge my heart. When he draws, we run (Song 1:4). When such helping influences of grace come on believers, holy obedience becomes in a manner as sweet, easy, and natural to them, as it is to a man that hath bodily strength, to use it in speaking, walking, or working: (Isa 40:31) They that wait upon the Lord, shall renew (or change) their strength: they shall mount up with wings as eagles, they shall run and not be weary, and they shall walk and not faint. (Psa 103:5) Thy youth is renewed like the eagles, is one of the notes in the Psalmist's sweet song. No saint is ignorant of this in his own experience. Who knows not, that at some times their work is heavy, and is a burden too heavy for them; at other times it is as light as a feather; and as pleasant and easy to them, as for a bird that hath wings to fly?

4. Lastly, The grace of God helps very mysteriously. Sometimes its help is very secret; and at other times it is very plain to be discovered. Its help is sometimes so secret, that the saints cannot know or discern it at present, but they are made to know it afterwards: (Psa 73:2) But as for me, my feet were almost gone: my steps had well-nigh slipt, (v 22) So foolish was I, and ignorant: I was as a beast before thee. This is the account he gives of the power of the temptation he was under, and of the bad frame it had brought upon him. (v 23) Nevertheless, I am continually with thee: thou hast holden me by my right hand. He did not know this, till he was brought out of the darkness of the temptation: but then he did discern, that there had been a secret support given him, otherwise he had fallen utterly.

Secondly, What encouragement have we to come to the throne of grace for this helping grace?

1. The proposal and revelation made to us of this grace as helpful, is an encouragement to come for it. Hath the Lord revealed his grace, as only helpful to his people; and should they not come for that help? Your faith is not very strong and active, unless you can catch at the grace of God, without a plain particular promise. I say not, but there are promises many and great of this helping grace, and that faith must build upon them, and doth: but I only mean, that the bare revelation of the treasures of grace that are with the Lord, should, when an interest in the promises is dark, encourage a poor soul to come for a share of this grace of God: (Psa 130:4) But there is forgiveness with thee. He saith not, There is forgiveness for me, but, There is forgiveness with thee. So verse 7, Let Israel hope in the Lord: for with the Lord there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption. Wherefore is this forgiveness, this mercy, this redemption, with the Lord; and why is it revealed; but that the guilty should come for this forgiveness, the miserable for this mercy, the many-ways captives for this plenteous redemption? The Lord's fulness of grace is an argument for our faith, as well as his goodness and faithfulness in making and performing promises of grace.

2. But we have promises also for our encouragement. Promises imply God's fulness of grace; but do express his good will to dispense it, and do bind and engage his truth to fulfil them, to all that take God at his word, and trust him on his word. It is a pity, that ever the exceeding great and precious promises, and precious faith (2 Peter 1:1,4) should be parted. (Mark 10:49) And Jesus stood still, and commanded him to be called: and they call the blind man, saying unto him, Be of good comfort, rise; he calleth thee. They had no promise; but they understood Christ's calling of the blind man, was an act of mercy, and on a design of shewing more mercy. But we have many promises of grace.

3. We have all the experience of the communication of his grace, according to his promises, for our encouragement in coming for grace. Every supplicant for grace should encourage his heart, by all the Lord's dispensings of his grace. How many of these are revealed in the word! and many like them daily are to be seen in the church of Christ. If you have such experiences of your own, build upon them, praise for them, and beg more. If you have none of your own, behold the showers of grace, that have fallen upon many as bad as yourselves, and which have changed them into that same blessed state that you desire to be in.

APPLICATION.

1. Is the grace of God thus helpful? and should we come to the throne of grace for the help of grace? Then we see, that weak Christians should pray most. Such as can do least for themselves, have most need of grace to help them, and should seek it most. Is any man under a clear conviction, by the light of the word, and his own sensible experience, that he is extremely weak, and utterly unable for any good word or work? This man, of all men, should pray most. Manage your sense of weakness, as a call to ask much of this helping grace of God. 2. Surely, then, coming to the throne of grace for grace to help, must be hopeful work. If at any time Satan, or an ungodly world, should tempt you, or your own heart fail you, in fears of the

unprofitableness of seeking God, have this as a ready answer: "I am fit for nothing, his grace can help me in every thing. Whither should I go but to the throne of grace? what can I beg there but his grace?" Say with David, (Psa 57:2,3) I will cry unto God most high, unto God that performeth all things for me. He shall send from heaven, and save me. God shall send forth his mercy and his truth. And will not these save any man? Exhortation. I would give you a few directions in the practice of this duty of coming to the throne of grace for helping grace.

1. Come to seek this helping grace.
2. When you seek it, expect it.
3. When you expect it, receive it.
4. When you receive it, guide it.

Exhort. 1. Come to the throne of grace to seek helping grace. Seeking (as is already remarked) is not expressed in the text; yet it is plainly implied, both in the duty of coming, and in the blessings of obtaining and finding. You must seek grace to help you. Grace will not help to sin, but helps against it; yet, blessed be God, grace can, and will help sinners, otherwise we were in a forlorn state indeed. Grace will not help to laziness, (that were an hindrance, and no help); but grace will help lazy people, and help them out of it. To engage your diligence in seeking helping grace, I would shew you what help grace gives.

1. Grace helps to save you. If people come to the throne of grace, if men pray, and have not salvation in their eye, they come not aright, they pray not. We are saved by grace (Eph 2:5). Nothing but grace can save a sinner: and if it were not the grace of God, and therefore omnipotent, it could not save. Is not it a great help, to be helped to salvation? Is not that a great lift, to be delivered from the power of darkness, and to be translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son (Col 1:13). Who would not prize and desire a saving lift of God's grace? All that have found it, value it: and they that never found it, should (but will not) beg it earnestly. The grace of God brings salvation (Titus 2:11). It brings it near to men in the gospel. This is all that it doth to many. But to some this grace brings salvation, and gives it; plants it in their hearts, and waters it, and makes it grow with the increases of God, till it be ripe, full-grown salvation. Would you be helped to heaven? Employ and implore the grace of God. It only can do it. And must not they perish, and do they not perish justly, that will not accept of saving grace, nor beg it, when they must perish without it?

2. Grace helps to grace. All the grace that is given to us, is but a drop from the great fountain of grace that we make our application to. The first grace that is in us, is a gift and stream of that grace that is with him. That gracious change that is wrought on a sinner, by which, of a graceless, he is made a gracious person; how do you think it is brought about? There is a mystery in it that a master in Israel did not know (John 3:9,10). No similitude from the old creation can fully declare it; yet some of them are used in the word, and gives some light. This work of grace on the ungodly whom this grace falls on, is like a sun-beam darted from the body of the Sun of righteousness, upon a sinner dead in sins, that doth immediately quicken him, and enliven him. It is both light and life. It is all originally in Christ, and out of his fulness given to all that partake of it; (John 1:4) In him was life, and the life was the light of men. (John 8:12) I am the light of the world; he that followeth me, shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life, saith our Lord Jesus. Christ is such a sun that all on whom his gracious beams light, are saved. He quickens all he shines upon. Men perish under the gospel indeed; but it is because the light of it shines only about them, and without them (2 Cor 4:4,6), but not into their hearts. All the grace whereby any, and all the redeemed of the Lord, are converted, beautified, and saved, is from the highest spring, grace in Christ: (1 Tim 1:14) And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant, with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. How came Paul by all the faith and love his blessed soul was filled with? All came from the grace of the Lord Jesus. And every partaker of true grace will own the same original.

3. The helping grace which we should ask, not only helps to salvation and grace, but also helps grace itself. The grace received, must be refreshed and watered, and made to grow, by influences from the same fountain from whence it first flowed, or else it will wither quickly. Therefore we have the grace of God in the fountain to betake ourselves unto, for the helping of his grace in us. For though grace as in Christ needs no help; yet his grace given to, and dwelling in us, needs a great deal. The father of the lunatic (Mark 9:22,24) came to the throne of grace but sorrowfully. What a marvellous change was wrought in him, and that suddenly? In his first address he acted unbelief grossly; in the next he acts faith, professeth faith, and prays

Christ's help against his unbelief. Many did cast out devils in Christ's name; but none could help other folks' unbelief, nor their own. His begging help against his unbelief, was the same prayer with that of the apostles, (Luke 17:5) Lord, increase our faith. And it gave more honour to Christ in his office of a Saviour, and did signify more, both of true faith in Christ, and of an honest heart in the man, than if he had addressed with the highest confidence to the Lord, to cast the devil out of his son. The youth is lying wallowing and foaming, and torn by the evil spirit, in the sight of his tender father: yet no sooner doth the light of faith shine in his heart, but he seeth a devil of unbelief there also; and he first begs that Christ would cast out that, and help his faith. For helping of unbelief, and helping of faith, is the same thing. He that seeks the helping of his unbelief, seeks the removing of it; and he that seeks the helping of his faith, seeks the increase and strengthening of it. And both are done by the same hand, by the same act of grace, and at the same time, whenever and where-ever they are done. And as it is with faith, so it is with all the graces of the Spirit in believers; they do need help of his grace; and it must be sought at the throne of grace. Can you say, I repent? add, Lord, help my impenitence. I love? say, Lord, help its coldness, and blow it up to a flame. Where the true grace of God is, there is still some sense of its weakness, and inclination after an increase therein; and some dependence acted on the Lord, who began the good work, for performing it to the day of Jesus Christ (Phil 1:6).

4. The grace of God helps our infirmities (Rom 8:26). If it were not written, we should think it hard to use the expression. If the Spirit of God plant grace in the heart, is not that fair? if he water his own plants, is not that fair? Nay, but, saith the apostle, he helps our infirmities also. Might not the Holy Spirit disdain to have any dealing with the infirmities of his people? Yes: but he will not. If he take no care of our infirmities, we may, and must be lost thereby. A criminal pardoned by an act of grace, may die of a disease, if not cured; may starve of hunger and cold, if not provided with necessaries; may be slain by his enemies, if not protected. Sense of infirmities should make us beg helping grace.

5. Grace helps in all the work and duty we are called to. Without assisting grace, the least piece of work cannot be rightly done, and by its help any work may be done: (2 Cor 9:8) God is able to make all grace abound towards you; that ye always having all-sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work. There is grace, all grace, and it abounding in God toward his people. From this given to them, there is sufficiency and all-sufficiency, and that always and in all things; and thence flows good work, every good work, and abounding to every good work. Like to this is his prayer, (Heb 13:20,21) The God of peace make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well-pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ. We need grace's help in every good work. No work is truly good, but what grace helps us to. Grace and works agree sweetly in this order. Grace begins, and works follow. Grace works on the man, and makes him a worker: grace passeth on the person and his works, and makes them accepted; and the accepted worker gives grace all the glory, both of his works, and of his own and their acceptance. Whence his help comes, thither his praises go.

6. Lastly, Grace helps in extremities. But of this in the last thing in the text.

This then is the first exhortation, Come to the throne of grace, seeking helping grace. Enlarge and heighten the sense of your need and weakness as much as you will, the supply to be had at the throne of grace is sufficient: (Phil 4:19) My God shall supply all your need, according to his riches in glory, by Christ Jesus. And, in Paul's style, glory and grace change names frequently (Eph 1:6,12,14, 3:16; 2 Cor 3:18).

Exhort. 2. You must not only seek grace to help; but when you seek it, you must expect it. The text runs plainly this way. The apostle implies asking; but expresseth finding, and coming that we may find. Therefore we should come with expectation of finding. The spirit and life of prayer in faith, lieth more in expectation than in asking. Unwise Christians let out the life-blood and vital spirits of prayer, when they let their expectations languish. Here is a common, but unregarded error, in Christians' exercise. When they set their face to pray, they make some conscience of searching out their wants; they labour to improve that sight to the raising of fervent desires of a supply of them: if they yet go hither, to take in a sense of the fulness and freeness of that grace where their help is; yet how rarely are they careful to raise up expectations of that helping grace? Few can say, as Psalm 55:16, As for me, I will come upon God; and the Lord shall save me, (v 17) Evening and morning, and at noon, will I pray, and cry aloud; and he shall hear my voice. Few can charge their souls as he did, (Psa 67:5) My soul, wait thou only upon God; for my expectation is from him.

See how the prophet's faith rose, (Micah 7:7) I will look unto the Lord; I will wait for the God of my salvation; my God will hear me. Looking is a needy act of faith, waiting is an expecting act, and assurance is the highest. If you look to the Lord, you may quickly know he is the God of your salvation; if you know him as the God of your salvation, and your God, you will ask earnestly, wait patiently, and by the same faith prophesy a gracious answer. What do you take praying in faith to be (James 1:6)? It is not only to pray, believing that we call upon the true God, in the name of Christ, and for things agreeable to his will: it is not only that we believe that he is able to give what we ask; but that he will give what is good. But because his grace to help, is not only good, and always good, but nothing is good without it, Christians should beg grace with confident expectations. What means Christ's frequent answer to men: (Matt 8:13) As thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee? and (Matt 9:29) According to your faith, be it unto you? Is it not to tell us, that he measures out his bounty to men, according, to their believing expectations from him? (John 11:40) Jesus saith unto Martha, Said I not unto thee, that if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God? Our way is, if we could see the glory of God, then we would believe. Christ's way is just contrary: we must first believe, and then we shall see the glory of God. We say, If the Lord would glorify himself in performing his promises, and in hearing our prayers, then we would believe strongly. But this is inverting of Christ's order. Martha was a believer in Christ, and expresseth faith several ways in this chapter. It appears in the joint message they sent to Christ, (v 3) Lord, behold, he whom thou loves, is sick, (v 5) Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus. A blessed family, and few like it; all loved of Christ, and doubtless lovers of Christ. But they built more on his love to them, than on their love to him, like humble and wise believers: (v 21) Martha said unto Jesus, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died. Her sister Mary said the same (v 32). It is likely, that none ever died in Christ's presence, when he was on earth; he cured all that employed him. But I know, that even now whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee (v 22). Here was some faith. When Christ promiseth (v 23) that her brother should rise again, she acts faith as to the doctrine of the resurrection, (v 24) I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day. When Christ goes on in preaching himself (vv 25,26) and asks her of her faith; she answered bravely, Yea, Lord: I believe that you art the Christ the Son of God, which should come into the world (v 27). A confession like Peter's (Matt 16:16). What then was wanting in this good woman? Why doth our Lord put such an if thou wouldest believe, to one that did believe so much and so well? Because, notwithstanding her faith in Christ's person, as the Christ, the Son of God, the Saviour of the world; notwithstanding her faith of his power; yet, in this instance of raising Lazarus, she expected nothing. When Christ (v 39) bids take away the stone, she said, Lord, by this time he stinketh: for he hath been dead four days. She that believed Lazarus should rise at the last day, could not believe that he should rise after death had held him but four days. Such is the very nature of unbelief, or of weak faith in true believers; they can, or rather think they do, believe greater and harder things, when not much tried about them, better and more easily, than smaller and easier things that their faith is called to a present exercise about. Let all Christians, in all their approaches to the throne of grace, behold this as written on the open gates to this throne, and hear it proclaimed by him that sitteth on it, Said I not unto thee, that if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God? Some believers are apt to think, that a trembling fearing frame is fitter for them; and that raising of expectation of good from God, will prevent or hinder humility, and lying low before the Lord. But they are quite mistaken that think faith and humility are inconsistent. They not only agree well together, but they cannot be parted: (Hab 2:4) Behold, his soul which is lifted up, is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith. To bottom expectations of grace from God, on the account of any good, real or apprehended, in us, or done by us, is not only destructive of humility, but of faith also. A boaster is an abominable creature at the throne of grace; but a pleader for, and expectant of grace, for grace's sake, is an humble believer, and a right courtier at this throne.

Exhort. 3. You must not only seek grace when you come to the throne of grace, and expect it when you seek it, but you must be careful to receive grace when it is given. Make room for it. What is said by the Lord in the prophet (Mal 3:10) though spoke in another case, is applicable to this: I will open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it. Felt want, and strong faith, make much room for the grace of God, Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it (Psa 81:10). It must be a wide-mouthed soul that takes in, and a well-filled soul that receives a fill of God. How mighty is that prayer,

Ephesians 3:17-19? We have all need not only to get it by heart, but to get it into our hearts, and to send it up to heaven daily from our hearts. Paul makes a special preface to that prayer (vv 14,15). In it he prays for the strengthening of the inner man, by the Spirit (v 16), That Christ might dwell in their hearts by faith (v 17), that being rooted in love, they might measure the dimensions of Christ's love, and know it that passeth knowledge (vv 18,19). Can any man go higher in prayer? Yes, one step higher; that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God. Now, who hath room in his soul for the answer of such a prayer as this is? If we had not these mighty words in this way, we should be tempted to think that it were rather a prophecy of what is to be enjoyed within the veil, than a prayer of faith to be put up by travellers in the way to heaven, and for blessings to be enjoyed in the house of their pilgrimage. But a prayer it is, and some good performance is given within time; though the main measure of the answer of this (as of all the most spiritual prayers of saints in this life) is reserved for the day of the Lord. It is a greater matter, both of duty and difficulty, than most Christians think, to have the everlasting doors of our souls lifted up, and cast open, that the King of glory may enter with his super-abounding grace. Many believers take much pains, and make many prayers, for that grace of God, which yet they receive not, when it comes, and craves room and admittance. Grace comes always in and with Jesus Christ. Whatever therefore hinders his welcome, excludes his grace from entering. Grace comes in and by the promise. If the promise be not received by faith, how can the grace promised be received? Grace comes always as grace, free and undeserved. How can a proud person receive it? And there is pride often working in the discouragements of Christians. They find they want much of the helping grace of God: they ask it, they see it in the promises, and in Christ's hand: but they think, Should such as I lay hold on such a precious gift as his grace? Why not? It is grace, grace offered of grace, given of grace. Do you need it? Why do you not receive it, and make room for it? Some receive not that grace that is tendered to them; because it is not the particular grace they sought, and expected, or because it comes not to them in that way they looked for it in. Others receive not, nor welcome the grace they beg; because they think they cannot receive it. They look on receiving as a great and difficult business, far above their ability. But is refusing of it hard also? Alas! that is easy, because natural to our hearts. Is not the seed of receiving in all sincere asking and expecting of grace from God? Receiving of his grace, is no more but a heart-willingness that his grace may enter in, and act like itself upon us. And this receiving act of faith doth greatly glorify God. Some think it very strange, and hardly credible, that any believer can ask earnestly that grace, which when tendered he is not willing to receive. See how it was with some eminent saints: (Job 9:16) If I had called, and he had answered me; yet would not I believe that he had hearkened unto my voice. Why so? For he breaketh me with a tempest (v 17). But may not fatherly love and correction be together on a believer? (Rev 3:19). Yet the sense of the smart of correction, is a strong temptation to question the love of the corrector. David, or Asaph, (Psa 77:1-3) I cried unto God with my voice, even unto God with my voice, and he gave ear unto me. Who would think that this man refused to be comforted? Did he not pray for consolation? Yet he saith, My soul refused to be comforted. I remembered God, and was troubled: I complained, and my spirit was overwhelmed. There is a peevishness of unbelief, that Christians should watch against. Exhort. 4. You must take care to guide this helping grace of God, when you have received it. Guiding of grace, is an art and mystery that Christians should study diligently. The rule of this art is this, Guide the grace of God received by you, for those ends for which it is given by him.

Now, what ends hath the Lord in giving of his grace? They are only two. 1. For the praise and glory of the giver. 2. For the benefit of the receivers. Guide his grace for those ends, and you guide and use it well. Christians have little of his grace, and complain sorrowfully; not because he gives, and they receive little; but because they guide and manage this richest talent poorly. Dare any believer forbear to say, If I had kept all I had got, and guided well all he hath given, I had been far richer in grace than now I am? Misguiding of grace received is the greatest sin, because an abuse of the greatest blessing. Watch against it, if you love his glory, and your own weal.

II. I come now to the fourth and last thing in the verse, about this grace of God; and that is, the seasonableness of its help.

It helps always, but especially in time of need. On this I shall now only note some few things in general.

Obs. 1. Whatever believers' present case be, a time of need may come; and they should foresee it. Though they know not particular circumstances, yet they should lay their account with it. The Lord gives faithful warnings in the word; faith should take them. We see the times of need that many others come in; and we should take warning by their experience. Every Christian hath found times of special need formerly; the like may come again.

Obs. 2. Christians should pray before the time of need come, for that grace that may help them when it comes. The prophet speaks of hearing for the time to come (Isa 42:23); the apostle, (1 Tim 6:19) of laying up in store a good foundation for the time to come. So here, men must pray for the time to come. Is any man afflicted? let him pray (James 5:13); and because any man may be afflicted, he should pray beforehand.

1. Because we know not but we may be surprised by a time of need; our Lord's argument, (Mark 13:33) Take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is. The Lord rarely gives particular warning of the time when special need is coming. It ordinarily comes by surprise to us. Death may, but sickness, losses, and affliction, usually come on suddenly: and surprising trials are sore and searching ones.

2. We should pray before a time of need come; for often when that time comes, we are thereby disabled for prayer. The distress may be such, that even a believer can do nothing. The night may come, when no man can work (John 9:4). Pray much before it come.

3. Because many prayers have their answer delayed till a time of need comes. Christians think, that every day and hour of their life it a time of need, (and so it is in some sense); but there are some special seasons of great need, of which the Lord is the only disposer; and he fits such times with dispensings of that grace, that his people have many a day begged before. There may be worse reasoning than this: "It may be there are some blessings of grace, that I have oft sought, and have not yet got, that are reserved for me by the Lord, against a time when I shall need them more than now I do."

Thus you see, in the scope of the apostle in these words, that there is strong arguing for constant seeking of God's grace. You are either at present in a time of special need; or if it be not present, it may come. Whatever case a believer is in, his obligation is in a manner equal to this great duty, of coming to the throne of grace, for grace to help him, as his matters do require.

SERMON X Hebrews 4:16

Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.

You have heard that the gracious exhortation in the text, to coming to the throne of grace, is directed with respect to the getting of two great blessings, or of one under two names, God's mercy and grace. Concerning this grace I have spoken to three things. 1. What this grace is. 2. What the finding of this grace is. 3. What is the helpfulness of this grace so found. I also entered upon the fourth and last thing, the seasonableness of this helping grace. The truth I am to speak to, is this:—DOCT. The grace of God is specially helpful in times of special need. My work then is to shew, I. What are those times of need. II. What the helpfulness of grace in them is. Only I would usher in this discourse, with a general consideration of the constant need that all stand in of God's mercy and grace. And that I would branch into four. We need God's mercy and grace, as creatures, as men, as sinners, and as Christians; and that always. 1. As creatures. The native notion of a creature is, that it is a contingent, necessitous being: For his pleasure they are, and were created (Rev 4:11). The Lord did not make all or any creature because he needed them; but he made them that they might need him. He did not build this glorious fabric of heaven and earth, as a house to dwell in, or to contain him (1 Kings 8:27); but he made this world as a stage, on which to display his glorious wisdom and power: and he made some of its inhabitants, angels in the upper rooms, and men in the lower, to be spectators and praisers of his glory. It is not proper to say, that creatures needed their being before the Creator gave it: For when there was nothing but God, there could be no need. Need and want is essential to a creature, and springs up with their being. As soon as the creation received its being by the word of his

power, it needs upholding by the same power: (Heb 1:3) our Lord Jesus upholds all things by the word of his power. The whole creation would fall back immediately into its mother Nothing, if the same power that gave it a being did not every moment preserve it. Would you have a joyful view of heaven and earth? Look on all as in our Lord's hand. Why do the heavens keep their course? Why doth the sun shine so gloriously, move so regularly, and influence the earth so virtuously with his light and heat? It is because Christ upholds all things by the word of his power. He is before all things, and by him all things consist: all things were created by him, and for him (Col 1:16,17). Many are without Christ in the world (Eph 2:12). Many see daily the works of creation and providence, and never think on Christ as the head of all. But it is no wonder, that men that have no eyes to see Christ in the new creation of grace, cannot see him in the old creation of nature. We, as creatures, are needy of God's helping grace and favour: for in him we live, and move, and have our being (Acts 17:28), In his hand our breath is, and his all our ways are (Dan 5:23).

2. Our need of God's grace appears yet more, as we are such creatures, men. We are, through the bounty of God, the most considerable part of this lower creation. Of man some understand that elegant phrase, (Prov 8:26) The highest part of the dust of the world. But there is no earthly creature needy of God's grace but man, even in his natural frame, abstract from his sinful state. The great former of all things hath given to all a being, and to many of his creatures no more. To some of his creatures he hath given life, a nobler sort of being. But to all living creatures, but man, he gives no more, and they need no more; they have not, they need not eternal life. When the breath of the other living creatures goes downward, as the word is Ecclesiastes 3:21, there is an end of them. But man is created in that state, that he must be for ever, and therefore be eternally happy or miserable. This state he is made in, makes him vastly needy of God's grace and mercy.

3. We grow yet more needy as sinners. Sinners are creatures, with this great blemish, of guilt, sin, and corruption. A sinner is needy of a Mediator to deal for him with God; for he cannot deal with God for himself. A sinner is needy of the righteousness of another to recommend him to God's acceptance; for he hath none of his own. The righteousness of a sinner is a plain contradiction. And unless the power of sin had blinded men in the right knowledge of God, and of themselves, and unless it had puffed up their hearts in this darkness, there had never been any pretence made by fallen men to self-righteousness. But now nothing is more common, more groundless, and yet more rooted in men's hearts, than that a sinner can, and may, if he will, bring or do somewhat that may have some interest in, and influence on his acceptance with God. A sinner is needy of a right to eternal life: and this must be bought by another; for he can never purchase it for himself. He is needy of safety from the wrath to come, which is so woefully well deserved by him; and the man can do nothing of himself, but what deserves it more and further.

4. We are needy of the help of grace as Christians, as new creatures. A Christian is a creature, by nature a human creature, a sinful creature; but made a new creature by grace. Yet there are some springs of constant need of grace, in this new creature, the Christian.

1st, The necessary and constant dependance of the new creature on its fountain and author, makes a Christian to be a very needy creature. The dependance of the beams on the sun is not more necessary, than the dependance of a Christian on Christ: Without me (or separate from me) ye can do nothing (John 15:5). The Christian's life is by a continual efflux from Christ; and is to be sought and maintained by a constant dependance on him, as light from the sun. Never was there, nor can there be a room so full of light from the sun-beams, but if either the sun withdraw his light, or if you exclude its light, by closing doors and windows, it immediately becomes dark, and that necessarily. It is so with all Christians. If it were not that the new covenant hath assured us, that there shall be no final and total separating of the fountain from the stream, there would soon be an expiring of all that good that is in the best of saints.

2dly, A Christian is always a needy creature; because he hath much work to do, and most necessary work, and all above his strength. He that hath most work, and least strength, is most needy of help: (Phil 2:12,13) Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you, both to will and to do of his good pleasure. If the exhortation or command had been without the argument, it had been discouraging. What can a man do about his own salvation? It is God that begun a good work in them, and will perform it till the day of Jesus Christ (Phil 1:6). Put hand to your work; for help is near. As the exhortation, Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, hath the height of duty in it; so the

argument, For it is God that worketh in you, both to will and to do of his good pleasure, doth deeply debase man's sufficiency, and highly advance both the sovereignty and efficacy of his assisting grace. And happy is that Christian, who can lay the weight of the command on his conscience, and can at the same time improve the encouragement for believing obeying. Whoever is void of sense of his need of God's assisting grace, looks not rightly on the great work lying before him, and seeth not the great weakness that is in him: (2 Cor 3:5) Not that we are sufficient of ourselves, to think any thing as of ourselves: but our sufficiency is of God.

3dly, In this great work above his strength, the Christian meets with much opposition, both from within, and from without: not always in the same measure; but some always. Special measures of opposition, make times of special need; of which I shall speak. But there is somewhat of opposition that is constant: (Gal 5:17) For the flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other; so that ye cannot do the things that ye would. This flesh and this spirit is in all Christians. If a man were all flesh, he were no Christian; if he were all spirit, he would be perfect, as the saints glorified be. This flesh and spirit lust and strive one against the other: and so they must do; for they are contrary the one to the other. The effect of this lusting and contrariety is, that the Christian cannot do the things that he would. He cannot do all the flesh lusts to, because of the spirit's opposition; he cannot do all the spirit lusts after, because of the opposition of the flesh. Of this combat the apostle speaks largely from his own experience (Rom 7). And the more opposition a Christian meets with, (and I have named but one head of it), the more needy is he of helping grace.

4thly, The Christian's state of absence from the Lord, renders him a needy creature. He is made for the Lord; framed so, that, as a Christian, nothing short of being for ever and immediately with the Lord reigns in his heart as his prize and mark, (2 Cor 5:2,4) In this we groan earnestly, desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven. We that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life. What ails a believer to groan so oft and so deeply? It is to be in heaven with the Lord. And the more heavenly and holy a Christian be, the more frequent and earnest are these groanings. He hath the most healthy soul, who is sick of love: whose heart is sick with desires of being present with the Lord. The believer that is most assured of heaven, groans deepest. Unbelievers run on in sin, and sing to hell; while hell groans for them: and sad will the meeting be. We find Paul groaning for himself, only for two things; the body of sin and death, its dwelling in him (Rom 7:24) and his dwelling in the body. We do not, nor can we know the vast difference that is betwixt the happy state of the saints in heaven, and the best state of believers on earth. We do but guess in the dark; and our guesses are but negative; that they are removed from all the evils we find here; no sin, no clouds, no death, no crying, nor any thing to complain of. But these negatives taken in by faith and experience, with the foretaste and firstfruits of that good land, make believers groan to be possessed of it, although they go, as Abraham did, (Heb 11:8) not knowing whither. Heaven will be a blessed surprise to all the possessors of it. They will find it a far better state than their highest thoughts and largest desires could point forth. But, besides these springs of constant need, there are special seasons of Christians need of God's grace. And they are easily known by this general rule. That time that comes on a believer, wherein he is in great and special danger, from which only present supplies of grace can preserve him, that is a season of special need of grace. And in the prospect of, or in such seasons, Christians should ply the throne of grace.

Of such times of need, I would speak to six of them. 1. The time of temptation. 2. Of a spiritual decay. 3. Of high enjoyments and attainments. 4. Of affliction. 5. Of special duty and service. 6. Of dying. These are all seasons and times of special need of God's grace. And how such render Christians needy of grace, and how helpful his grace is in such times, is all I mind to say on this scripture.

I. The first time of need, is the time of temptation: An hour of temptation (Rev 3:10), A time of temptation (Luke 8:13), A day of temptation (Psa 95:8).

But because temptation is of large signification, and of sundry sorts, and from various quarters, I shall confine myself to that sort that is from Satan. And on this head would confine myself to these three: 1. What temptation is. 2. What need of grace to the tempted. 3. How grace helps in time of temptation.

1. What is temptation? As we are concerned in it, three things are in a temptation. An outward object, the occasion; inward corruption, that is as fuel for the temptation; and Satan's motion to sin, and his working on these two, to hatch sin. He is but twice called the tempter; first, when he came to Christ (Matt 4:3); and

again, when he comes to Christians (1 Thess 3:5). These three are not necessarily in all temptations. In his tempting the first and second Adam, there was only an outward object, and a motion of Satan. But in all men besides, these three are in all temptations. And the Spirit of God in the word gives the name of temptation to all of them: (1 Tim 6:9) They that will be rich, fall into temptation. Few either of the poor or of the rich believe this. (James 1:14,15) Every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death. Hence the difficulty is great in discovering Satan's hand in tempting; because there is inward corruption in men, that acts and works of itself, as well as it is fit to be acted upon by Satan. If temptation from Satan came to a sinless man, the tempter might be easily known: but when it comes to a sinner, who hath an active principle of corruption in him, that prompts him to the same sin that the tempter tempts unto, it becomes very hard to a man to say, "This motion is of the devil"; and "This is of my own corrupt heart." And here seldom doth the devil get his due. Some blame the devil more than he deserves, and excuse themselves more than they should; and some excuse the devil, and blame themselves more than they ought. What shall we do here? How shall we know when temptation riseth from corruption within, or from the devil without? There is no very great need to know it exactly; as in some cases it is very hard to know it. Temptation is so natural to us, that if the devil be the first mover, it seizeth so quickly on our corrupt heart, that we may justly take the blame to ourselves. The workings of the Spirit of God on the new creature, and of the spirit of Satan on the old man, are great mysteries. It is far wiser work to set about resisting of our spiritual enemies, than to perplex ourselves with questions about their order. Therefore, 2. What need is there of the grace of God to help the tempted? This is plain. Every one that is in this case, knows his great need of grace. Yet, to make them that are not in it pity them that are, and to direct them that are in it to entertain a deeper sense of their need of God's grace, I would shew how needy a person under temptation is of the helping grace of God. This appears in these:

1st, Our Lord Jesus Christ commands us to pray against temptation. He doth not so command us to pray against affliction. In that pattern of prayer (Matt 6:9-13), (the words whereof are better known, than the deep sense and meaning of the words is understood), there are but two petitions for spiritual blessings for ourselves. One is, for the pardon of sin, that relates to the state of our persons: the other is, for sanctification and preservation; and that is expressed thus, Lead us not into temptation. Sanctification is prayed for, in praying against temptation; and much of sanctification is acted in making such a prayer. But may not a man enter into temptation, and come well out of it again? Yes. But, in that case, more thanks is due to the Lord's grace and mercy, than to his own good conduct. Christ would have you to be afraid of temptation, and to pray against it: (Matt 26:41) Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation. Whatever temptation a man rusheth confidently upon, he usually falls by. In temptation, no believer is safe, but the self-diffident and fearful; and fear of temptation acts in praying against it. Peter failed in his fearlessness. His going to the high priest's hall after the warning his Master gave him, was rushing on a temptation; and so came on it. It must therefore be a case wherein one is very needy of grace to help, that Christ bids us pray against.

2dly, We find the whole armour of God is provided and prepared on purpose for the case of temptation (Eph 6:10,13). The apostle is sounding the alarm of war to all Christians. He shews them where their strength lies, (v 10) Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. He shews them their weapon of war (vv 10-19), and tells them how to use them. Their armour is that of God. No armour but that that is from heaven, is proof against the batteries and assaults of hell. How doth the devil laugh at, despise, and pierce through that soul, whose armour is forged and framed on earth? This armour of God the Christian must put on, and take to himself. It is not enough that he know it, and have it lying by him. It is no armour to him, till it be put on by him. And why such armour, and so put on? (v 12). Because of such dreadful enemies as we have to deal with: For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, (enemies formidable, and dangerous sufficiently against them that have no more but flesh and blood to oppose them with), but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. What but the whole armour of God can secure a poor believer from all the armies of hell?

3dly, Our blessed Lord Jesus himself was tempted, that he might succour them that are tempted (Heb 2:18). There are several states and conditions that believers are in that Christ himself was never in. We are oft sick and weak in body; Christ was always in sound and perfect health of body: for sickness is a

consequent of inherent sin, and corruption of nature; and of that Christ had none. Many particular distresses we meet with, and wrestle with, that Christ knew not by his own experience. But this sad case of temptation he knew and felt. But, ye may say, if Christ had never been tempted, had he not been able to succour them that are tempted? Yes, no doubt; for no bounds can be set to his divine power as God. What then doth his experience of temptation signify to the succour of the tempted believer? It is the ground of his sympathy with them; and sympathy draws forth his helping grace. It is a ground for the faith of the tempted to act upon. How sweet is this thought to a Christian thus exercised: "I am indeed a tempted believer; but I have a Saviour that was tempted himself, and remembers it still, and pities them, and will help them that are in that case, that was once so grievous to himself?"

4thly, A tempted person is needy of God's helping grace, because sin came in at first by temptation. Temptation was the door that sin came in by, and entered into the world of mankind. How sin came in upon the angels that fell, is deeper than that we can know it. And it is no great matter for us to be ignorant of it. We know they are now the worst, and most wicked, and most miserable of all the creatures; and that originally they were of the most eminent order (as one well said), "The Lord wisely would not declare the nature of that disease he was resolved never to cure." And so we must leave it in the dark. But as to sin's coming into the world of mankind, we have more light. The Lord created the root of mankind upright and perfect, first the man, then the woman. In their created state, there was no sin in either of them. But temptation was so applied by Satan, that it quickly begot sin. This argument the apostle useth, (2 Cor 11:3) I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. If Satan did prevail to bring in sin by temptation upon the sinless and perfect; what may he not do on sinners, in whom he hath so much interest, and over whom he hath so great advantage by somewhat of his own in them?

5thly, There is great need of the grace of God in a time of temptation, because of the frequent sad effects of temptation, unless present help of grace be given. Rarely doth a temptation and our hearts meet but some fire of sin is kindled. I would name a few of those effects of temptation.

(1.) Temptation doth often discover hid and unseen evil, and brings it to light. It brings forth that which the person, before the temptation, never thought was in him. So it is with the ungodly, and the godly themselves. When Hazael was told by the prophet Elisha, what mischief he would do to Israel, he said, (2 Kings 8:13) But what, is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing? But (saith Elisha) the Lord hath shewed me, that thou shalt be king over Syria. "Then thou wilt have power, and will to do it." What wickedness will not that man do, whom Satan tempts, and whom God leaves? David fell dreadfully by temptation. And so did Hezekiah, (2 Chron 32:31) Howbeit, in the business of the ambassadors of the princes of Babylon, who sent unto him to inquire of the wonder that was done in the land, God left him to try him, that he might know all that was in his heart. When the vessel is broached by a convenient temptation, that liquor will come out that was never thought to be within. When Herod feared John and observed, or preserved him; when, on his hearing him he did many things, and heard him gladly; who would have thought he would have beheaded him? (Mark 6:20,21). But a convenient day came; a day when Herod lay fair for temptation; and a day that Satan, and Herodias and her daughter, his servants, laid the temptation before him: then the poor wretch was soon overcome. But indeed it was more strange, that such a king as Herod should hear such a prophet as John Baptist preach, than that he should murder him. At least, it is, and hath been far more usual to bad kings, to slay prophets, than to hear them gladly. Peter was so confident in his courage, that, in a manner, (though against both grace and good manners), he gives the lie to his Master, (Matt 26:31-35) Then said Jesus unto them, All ye shall be offended because of me this night, (v 33) Peter answered and said unto him, Though all men should be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended. As if he had said, "Lord, at least except me out of this all thou speakest of." Because he would not take the general warning, Christ gives him a particular one, (v 34) Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, that this night before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. Will not Peter believe Christ speaking so peremptorily and plainly? No: (v 35) Peter said unto him, Though I should die with thee, (or for thy sake, as John 13:37), yet will I not deny thee. Likewise also said all the disciples. So loth and backward are even godly men to own that to be in them, that they do not see and feel at present working in them. These words Peter and the rest spoke, (bating that awful fear that should have seized on them, from such a warning as

Christ gave them), were words of duty; and were doubtless the honest expressions of their present thoughts. Yet when the temptation came, Christ's warning took place, and their resolutions vanished like smoke. They all forsook him and fled. Peter followed afterward, and denied him shamefully. The voice of a damsel overthrew this man, that had courage to draw his sword in his Master's defence against armed men (John 18:10). He denied he knew his dear Master; when, if he had owned him, and himself as his servant, there was no danger. John was there, and at the cross too, without any harm.

(2.) Temptation often brings on a great and sudden damp and eclipse on the work of God's grace in the heart. It is as the smoke of hell in the soul, that darkens the room; so that a believer cannot see what of God is in him. It is, as Christ calls it, (Luke 22:31) a sifting a man as wheat. Wheat, and chaff, and dust, are then mingled together. No believer in this case can give such a clear and distinct account, nor have so plain a discovery of God's work in him, as before and after the temptation. Christians give the devil the advantage he seeks, when they judge of themselves and their state in the fit of a temptation. Act grace diligently when in temptation, and try your state as carefully as you can when you are out of temptation.

(3.) Temptation increaseth greatly and suddenly, seen and known corruption. If temptation come on a latent hid corruption, it may bring it forth: but if it come on a known corruption, though it was not so powerful before, temptation will make it rage. The temptation came on Judas. For as hateful as his name is justly to all Christians; yet, before he fell, no man suspected him; only Christ knew him. When Christ gave the warning (John 13:21) that one of the twelve should betray him; all the eleven said, Is it I? and at last the traitor said so; and was answered (Matt 26:21-25). The lust the devil acted on, was his covetousness. He was a thief, a lover of money; and the devil put him at last upon a bargain that was his ruin. For a servant to betray his master, and such a master; for a sinner to sell the Saviour of all sinners that are saved, for so inconsiderable a sum, after so fair a warning of his sin and ruin by it, was a proof of the mighty power of temptation over a man. The apostle Peter chargeth Ananias thus, (Acts 5:3) Why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost? The filling of his heart was Satan's work, as Peter saith: Why then doth he ask the man an account of, or charge him with Satan's action? Because the devil can fill no man's heart with a sinful purpose, till the man give way to, and comply with the devil's working.³ What is that help that grace gives to the tempted? We have heard how temptation renders a man needy of grace; now let us consider how this grace can, and doth help in this case. Paul, in his temptation (2 Cor 12:7-9) betakes himself to the right course? to prayer to the Lord; and thrice he besought the Lord, that it might depart from him. He is answered, My grace is sufficient for thee. We would be apt to think, that Paul's great stock of grace, and manifold experience, and his late extraordinary enjoyment, might have been sufficient to have supported Paul in his conflict. No: they could not. Our Lord saith not, "Thy grace is sufficient for thee, which I have abundantly bestowed on thee"; but, My grace is sufficient for thee. So the apostle exhorts another, (2 Tim 2:1) Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus; and Ephesians 6:10. There are many enemies of the grace of God, because few are partakers of it. Such as have not felt the power of it on their own hearts, will always pick quarrels with the pure doctrine of grace. Some cannot receive this plain gospel-truth, That a man must be constituted righteous in the sight of God, only through the righteousness of another person, even Jesus Christ, imputed to the sinner of free grace. And some that own this truth, stumble again on this other truth, That the sanctification of a justified believer flows from the constant supplies of grace from Christ, their head and root. They think, that there are habits of grace implanted in the new creature, (and this is not to be denied); and if they guide well what they have received in the grace of regeneration, they may live well, and grow on to perfection. But it is not duly minded in men's spiritual exercise, that no stock of grace was ever given to any believer, to take him off the sense of his need of daily dependance on the original grace in Christ Jesus. But the greatest receivers always act their dependance most humbly, and see their need of it most clearly, and find the benefit of that dependance most comfortably. Observe also our Lord's argument for the encouragement of Paul: For my strength is made perfect in weakness. What is Christ's grace in the answer, is Christ's strength in this argument; what is sufficiency in the one, is making perfect in the other. As if Christ had said to Paul, "I see the devil is too hard for thy weakness; but thy weakness, supported by my strength, shall be too hard for Satan." Now, see how Paul improves this answer, Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. No wonder he gloried in Christ, and in Christ's grace bestowed on him; for that any Christian can do: but this glorying in infirmities,

is an exercise of grace only found with such fathers in Christ as Paul was. Who is not humbled, and afraid of his infirmities? Here is a believer that glories in them. But why? and how? That the power of Christ may rest upon me. Infirmities as infirmities, having nothing in them to excite glorying; but infirmities as opportunities for displaying of the glory of Christ's grace in helping under them, are to be gloried in. Christ acts on them, and the sensible believer employs him therein. Our weakness is the field his strength is glorified in. Whoever doth not own his infirmities, forfeits the assistance of the grace of Christ. The grace that helps in temptation, is Christ's grace: the employing of him for it, and drawing it from him, is by faith, and should be the Christian's work.

How doth this grace help the tempted believer? 1st, In discovering of Satan's wiles and devices (Eph 6:11). He hath fiery darts (v 16) and he hath wiles also. His most dangerous temptations are his most cunning ones. This serpent hath his subtilty (2 Cor 11:3). The less they be perceived, the more dangerous temptation is: and the more clearly they are seen, the more easily they are overcome. The apostle owns this, (2 Cor 2:11) Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices. Satan gets greatest advantage of them that are (and because they are) ignorant of his devices. The case the apostle speaks of, is that of the incestuous Corinthian. He had sinned greatly; the church had not resented it as they ought. Paul, in his first epistle (chap 5), chargeth them for their want of zeal, commands them to cast out that scandalous member. The Lord blesseth that letter and his advice, both to that church and to the offending person. Now, here lay Satan's device: he that had puffed them up with pride and security in their former carriage toward that offender when impenitent, seeks also to stir them up to an uncharitable severity towards him, when renewed again unto repentance. And of this kind are many of his wiles. He drives men to extremes on each hand. Thus many professors are like the devil's footballs, kicked about from one extreme to another, and seldom are kept in the right midst. The devil keeps men asleep in sin as long as he can. If they awake against his will, he runs them on despair; if faith be wrought in them, he labours to make them turn the grace of God into wantonness. The instances of his devices are innumerable. The multitude and danger of his wiles must be great, if we consider, 1. His created state: a spirit more knowing than man. A sinless angel is a higher creature than sinless Adam was. 2. By his fall he hath lost happiness and purity; but retains his knowledge, which his corruption hath turned into craft, malice, and wiles. 3. His long experience in cheating of men. 4. That in men that his wiles are proposed to. It is to the heart, deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked (Jer 17:9). It is to the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts (Eph 4:22). Such a devil dealing with such a deceitful heart, must have many dangerous wiles. Christ's grace only can enable a man to discern them; and it should be much prayed for. Many have been skilful in the theory and knowledge of the doctrine of Satan's wiles, that have been, notwithstanding, prevailed upon by them. A man must know his own heart well, and observe its motions narrowly, and be much at the throne of grace, that would know Satan's particular wiles on himself.

2dly, Grace helps the tempted, in helping to hate the sin they are tempted to. Many believers, though they cannot tell well whence the wind comes that drives them, whether from their own heart, or the devil; yet they know whither it drives them; to sin that they are averse from. Tempted Joseph spake like a man that had present assistance of grace, when he said, (Gen 39:9) How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God? As far, and as long, as the sin tempted to, stands black and ugly in the eye of the tempted person; so far, and so long, is the temptation ineffectual. Temptation prevails, when the sin tempted to takes with the heart and will; (James 1:14) A man is tempted, (i.e. successfully,) when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Sin was without him, but near to him by the temptation; now it is within him, and it is his sin. The temptation to numbering of the people, took with David; but his command about it was abominable to Joab, a man far short of David's grace, if he had any (1 Chron 21:6).

3dly, Grace can help the tempted to resist and stand (Eph 6:13). No man is overcome of Satan till he flee and yield. Resisting is overcoming of him: (James 4:7) Resist the devil, and he will flee from you, (1 Peter 5:9) Whom resist, stedfast in the faith, (Eph 6:16) Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the devil. They are darts, they are the devil's darts, they are fiery darts, there is an all of them; yet by faith you may be able to quench them all. Why is so much said of faith? Because, as Christ's strength is the believer's strength, so faith is that only in a believer that acts on this strength, draws it in, and acts in it. Separate faith from its object, Christ, either in justification or in

sanctification, and it becomes an imagination, a vanity, a nothing. Now, consider how cunningly Satan deals with believers, and how simply they are gulled by him in temptation. He persuades, and often prevails with them, to lay aside the shield of faith, when they should mainly use it. How foolish were that man that would yield his arms to an implacable enemy? Christ knew Peter's danger, and provides graciously for it: I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not (Luke 22:32).

4thly, The helping grace of God assists tempted believers, in preventing an utter foil by Satan, and in recovering them from a begun foil. So did Christ for Peter; and Paul (2 Cor 12:8,9). The devil never gets all his will on a believer: nor are any wounds he gives to a saint, mortal in the issue; whatever they be in their own nature, in believers' fears, or in the devil's design. All the glory is due to the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

5thly, lastly, Grace can rebuke the tempter, and call him off. This Joshua the high priest needed and got: (Zech 3:2) And the Lord said unto Satan, (who was standing at Joshua's right hand to resist him, when he is standing before the angel of the Lord, verse 1) The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan; even the Lord that hath chosen Jerusalem, rebuke thee; is not this a brand plucked out of the fire? This mercy was the first thing in Paul's prayer, (2 Cor 12:8) For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. This messenger of Satan was of Christ's sending and giving: there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet me (v 7). "Lord save us from such gifts," will Christians be apt to say. There is no reason to pray for them. If the Lord see them needful, he will send them. But it is comfortable, that all the devil's assaults are of Christ's ordering. He must have Christ's leave to tempt (Luke 22:31); and our Lord, when he pleaseth, can, and will call him off. When Christ was tempted (Matt 4) he resists all his temptations by the word, as his people should: at last he put forth his divine power, (v 10) Get thee hence, Satan, &c. Then the devil leaveth him (v 11). This we cannot do, but Christ can do it for us. It is a blessed promise, (Rom 16:20) The God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen. Poor tempted Christians think, that they are not only in Satan's sieve, and in his hands, but that they are often under his feet. But lift up your heads by faith on this promise. Complete victory is coming; and the faith of it should not only encourage you to resist, but this faith is a present victory: Faith is our victory (1 John 5:4). The believer (not only shall be, but) is an overcomer.

SERMON XI Hebrews 4:16

Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.

The Lord hath been pleased so to order and determine the state and condition of his children, while they are in this life, that they shall be constantly needy. This dispensation we should submit unto with all quietness of mind, not quarrelling with the wisdom and mercy of our God therein. Yea, more than submission is called for. There is a further duty required, though it be hard to perform it, to take pleasure and to rejoice in this needy state, that the power of Christ may rest upon us. For as the Lord hath laid us, or left us, under manifold necessities; so hath he laid up, and is ready to lay out, of his grace for helping us under them. And surely such wants as lay us open for those supplies of his grace, will be found to have a great deal of mercy in them, in the issue. The exhortation in the text implies, that grace can help in every time of need. There are some times of need, contrived by the Lord on purpose, that the helpfulness of his grace might the more shine and appear. I was speaking last day from this truth, That there are some special necessitous times, in which believers are specially needy of Christ's grace, and in which his grace is specially helpful. I have spoke to the first of these times of need: A time of temptation. Though all believers be not always tempted; yet there is no saint on earth who is out of the devil's gun-shot. No saint on earth hath reason to expect, that (if I may so speak) God should serve the devil with a *Noli prosequi*. God gives not, in this life, an utter discharge to the devil, from meddling with, or molesting of any saint. Till we come to heaven, this adversary must be expected and prepared for. This world is his dominion; he is the wicked god of it (2 Cor

4:4). And all the wicked in it, are his people, subjects, and children: and all the remaining corruption in the saints, is of the devil.

II. The second time of special need of God's grace, is the time of a spiritual decay; a decay in the new creature, a decay in the work of God in the heart.

This passeth under many names in the word, and well known in the sense and experience of believers. Sometimes it is called darkness (Isa 50:10). It is the misery of a natural state, that they that are in it, are darkness. It is the blessedness of a renewed state, that the partakers of it are light in the Lord. Their duty is, to walk as children of light (Eph 5:8). Though they that are made light in the Lord, are never suffered to become darkness again; yet they may walk in darkness, and have no light; and the days of that darkness may be many, as the wise man saith (Eccl 11:8). We all know what natural darkness is. All the natural light of the world is from the sun; and therefore natural light and darkness, day and night, have their vicissitudes and revolutions, according to the shining or not shining of the sun. All the spiritual light believers have, is from the light of God's countenance. As the Sun of Righteousness ariseth on them (Mal 4:2) or withdraws from them, so is their spiritual day or night; so do they walk in darkness, or in the light of the Lord. Sometimes this decay is called death, and deadness; a state of inability and inactivity, for working and doing what they are called to. Hence so many prayers for quickening, especially in Psalm 119. Natural death we know not; but sickness, weakness, and fainting, we do know. Spiritual death is known and felt by none that are under its total power; but a weakness in spiritual life, saints do know.

Of this decay I would speak, in handling three things. 1. Whence it comes. 2. How needy such are of God's grace. 3. How grace doth help in it.

1. Whence comes this decay on Christians? It is a state too common to be questioned, and too plain to need to be proved, that true Christians are, and may be in it. I would name some of its springs and causes.

1st, It flows from the infant, infirm state of the new creature, in its first forming. It is a new-born babe (1 Peer 2:2). When the first man was made, he was as perfect and strong a man the first hour he was made, as ever he was in all his life. He came out of his Maker's hands a perfect man. But the new creature is born a weak thing, and is to grow up to the stature of a perfect man in Christ (Eph 4:13); and will never come to its full growth, till it come to heaven. None on earth knows what a perfect Christian is. There are degrees of perfection on earth; in respect whereof some are less, some more perfect. But the most perfect labour greatly under imperfection (Phil 3:12-14), and press most after perfection. I will not speak of the wise design of God, in framing the new creature thus. Only the glory of its preservation, and of its perfection, is not due to the new nature in believers; but to the original of it, God the Father; to the blessed root thereof, Jesus Christ his Son; to the inhabitation of the Spirit; and to the great security of the new covenant.

2dly, The new creature is not only in an infant, weak state, but it is planted in a bad and unfit soil for it. It is planted out of its element. Heaven is the proper element and country whence the new creature came, whence it is maintained, and whither it natively tends. But it is planted here in the heart of a sinner. Now, the heart of a man, though mended by grace in part, is a very unfit and unsuitable soil for such a foreign heavenly plant, as the new creation is. And hence it is, that the grace of God in us is endangered by the place of its residence.

2dly, There is also much corruption remaining in the heart of a believer, as noisome weeds growing near this precious planting of the Lord. The Lord never designed to root all corruption out of the hearts of his people in this life, by the first planting of his grace in them; but only to give that grace that shall break the dominion of sin, and that shall maintain a war with indwelling sin, and at last shall prevail completely. So that it is plain, that on the account of those three, if there were no more, Christians are very liable to spiritual decays. And it is sadly confirmed from frequent experience. It may be in some, the work of grace was in best case when it was first begun; and that, from the day of their conversion, to the day of their being glorified, they never had much of any remarkable growth. But this is their sin, and their shame.

2. Hence you may see, how needy such persons are of the help of the grace of God. An inward decay in the work of his grace in us makes us very needy of help from the fountain of grace in him.

For this decay gives great advantages to our spiritual enemies to attack us, and lays us under great disadvantages in resisting them. I am apt to think, (I cannot now give the reasons of it), that the devil knows the frame of our hearts, though he does not know the heart immediately: that is God's property, Acts 1:24), and the condition of the work of God in us, a great deal better than we ourselves ordinarily do. Great is the intimacy he hath with our spirits, especially with the remaining corruption in them. Great is his craft, acquired by observation, practice, and experience, as well as by his malicious sagacity. And when he seeth a believer in a bad case, if he have permission, he will improve that desired opportunity to make their bad case worse. Psalm 71:11,12 David prays for hasty help from God, on this argument, his enemies saying, God hath forsaken him: persecute and take him, for there is none to deliver him. Caleb and Joshua encourage Israel to go in and possess the land (Num 14:9) by this, Their defence is departed from them, and the Lord is with us: fear them not. It is from this bad case that believers are in, that Satan hath so easy and speedy victory over them at some times, more than at other times. When it is well with the new creation within, Christians can keep the devil at a bay and stand; when it is otherwise, he prevails immediately; we are disarmed, and his darts pierce and enter. There is some ground to suspect, that David's heart was not in so good a frame as usually, some time before his foul fall (2 Sam 11). As to Peter, it is plain, his vain self-confidence gave Satan an opportunity to sift him, as he did.

3. How doth the grace of God help in a decayed state?

1st, Grace helps, in preserving life at the root. There is some witness for God kept up. I sleep, but my heart waketh, saith the bride (Song 5:2). It is well all was not asleep. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak, saith meek Jesus, in his agony in the garden to the three distempered disciples (Matt 26:41). These same three sleep in the mount of transfiguration (Luke 9:32), and in the garden of agony. Paul found this witness preserved in his captivity to the law in his members (Rom 7:23).

2dly, Grace helps under a decayed state, by making a secret growth downward: A growth, that the believer cannot feel in himself, and that others cannot quickly perceive; yet it is a real growth, and will in God's due time appear. We commonly value most that growth in grace that hath fair blossoms and fruit, appearing to our comfort, and to the Lord's praise before others. And it is indeed desirable, and to be studied (Matt 5:16; John 15:8). But there is a growth that may be carried on in the root only, in the rooting grace of a Christian: as in clearer discoveries of indwelling sin in the heart, and in more self-diffidence and self-distrust. Paul had this fruit (2 Cor 1:8,9). It is a sad thing, that many Christians are so fond of themselves, of the good that is in them, that the Lord seeth that nothing is so fit to cure them of this, as leaving them to themselves. And when this leaving of them to themselves hath brought them to a discovery of themselves, and that discovery hath wrought a distrust of themselves, and that distrust hath taught them faith in God; then the Lord hath reached his end on them, and will change his way with them. 3dly, Grace can revive the decayed state of a believer: (Psa 23:3) He restoreth my soul. He reneweth their strength (Isa 40:31). Thy youth is renewed like the eagles (Psa 103:5). This is impossible in nature, and as to our bodies; but as to our souls, and the work of God in them, it is what is promised, and often done. Old people may, and do often, in their folly and vanity, counterfeit youth; but all their arts cannot make themselves one hour younger. But the Lord can renew the youth of the new creature, and make it better with him than ever it was. David prays for it, (Psa 51:10) Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. Peter got a new conversion (Luke 22:32). They both had been converted and renewed before; but they fell under a sad decay, and needed this restoring grace, and got it. So much of the second time of need. I proceed to a third, not so common.

III. A time of special enjoyments, is a time of special need of God's helping grace.

You may think it strange, but it is true, that they that receive most of the Lord's gracious bounty, stand in most need of grace to guide it well. Concerning this season, I would speak in five particulars. 1. Most Christians know what those enjoyments are by experience, although in various measures. It is very suspicious, that that person is an hypocrite, that is always in the same frame, let him pretend it to be never so good. The true Christian's sky is never long clear, and without clouds. Change of weather and ways, is

usually found by travellers to heaven. It is to be suspected, that he is not right who hath no changes (Psa 55:19). These special enjoyments are of several sorts.

1st, There is some special nearness to God enjoyed by Christians at some times. We are not at all to be offended at, but rather confirmed by the reproaches of the ungodly, that are utter strangers to such enjoyments, and cannot endure nor understand the scripture-names of such blessings that they themselves are unacquainted with. What is more frequent in the word, than this nearness to God? What is better known in the experience of saints than this nearness? He makes gracious approaches to men's spirits, and causeth them to approach to him (Psa 65:4). They find it good for them (Psa 73:28). The first gracious change wrought on a soul, is by bringing a distant sinner near to God: (Eph 2:13) But now in Christ Jesus, ye who sometimes were far off, are made nigh by the blood of Christ. "Whenever the virtue of that blood came upon you by the Spirit of Christ, God came near to you, and you were brought near to God." But besides this nearness that is begun in the first application of grace, and changeth their state; there is more nearness given by the Lord, and enjoyed by his people, for the cheering of their hearts, and bettering of their frame. Exercised Christians are able to give a distinct account of their having of this nearness at some times, and of their want of it at other times. How much of both are in the Psalms of David? And such as can understand the nearness to, and distance from God, so frequently mentioned there, as only the psalmist's sense of God's favourable or cross providence towards him in outward things, are to be pitied for their ungodly ignorance, and despised for their expounding the words of a man after God's heart according to the carnal sentiments of their own.

2dly, There are effusions of the Spirit spoke of in the word, and found by Christians, which are special enjoyments. Sometimes they are found in the performance of spiritual duties of worship; sometimes in the exercise of grace. Grace should be acted in all duties of worship; but it may be, and should be acted out of any formal duty. You should never pray, but there should be acting of faith and love on Christ. But, God be thanked, you may act faith and love when ye do not pray, when you are about no settled spiritual duty of worship. There is a being in the fear of the Lord all the day long (Prov 23:17), A walking up and down in the name of the Lord (Zech 10:12), A doing of every thing in the name of the Lord Jesus (Col 3:17). Every believer hath the Spirit of Christ: If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his (Rom 8:9). But there are some singular pourings out of this Spirit promised and bestowed, and well known by believers? and they are precious enjoyments. This Spirit the world cannot receive; because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him; but ye know him, for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you, as Christ saith (John 14:17).

3dly, There is communion and fellowship with God much spoke of in the word, well known by believers (1 John 1:3). But I shall name no more of these enjoyments.

2. As all Christians know what these special enjoyments are, so all of them do greatly desire them. This is so sure, that many do over-desire them. This desire ariseth,

1st, From the genius and instinct of the new nature. What is more natural to the new creature, than kindly breathing after heaven? When a poor soul hath got of the water of life from Christ, it becomes in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life (John 4:14). Immediately the soul saith, "What shall I do to be saved? when shall I be saved?" Now, if desires of heaven be the native breathing of the new creature, surely breathing after much of heaven upon earth must be so too; for the highest enjoyments of God on earth, are far short of what is reserved for heaven.

2dly, Experience of first love, and of the first gracious welcome he gave to the believer, when he first fled to the city of refuge, makes them desire more of those enjoyments.

3. These special enjoyments are very profitable, as well as pleasing. They are given for profit, and do usually profit.

1st, They are supported under tribulation: In the multitude of my thoughts within me, (and doubtless they were sad ones), thy comforts delight my soul (Psa 94:19). Usually much affliction, and joy of the Holy Ghost, are together (1 Thess 1:6). The promises are fitted for distress, and the performance of them given to Christians under it. Some distresses are so great, that nothing can bear up under them, but a special appearance of divine grace; and in that case such blessings may be more importunately begged.

2dly, Special enjoyments do fit and strengthen for work and service. There is a joy of the Lord that is the believer's strength (Neh 8:10). Elijah's double meal was to strengthen him for a forty days journey in the

wilderness; and the extraordinary manifestation he had of God, was to fit him for his translation (1 Kings 19). Many saints have found this so often in their experience, that they do with fear receive singular enjoyments of God, because they have so oft found them followed with some special trial and difficulty.

4. Although most Christians have somewhat of these special enjoyments, and all desire them, and they be profitable in themselves; yet special spiritual enjoyments are dangerous, and render a man very needy of the helping grace of God.

1st, Because they do usually expose to special temptations. Satan is a constant enemy to all Christians. But there are two times especially that he would faintest assault the believer; when he is at his worst, and when he is at his best. Let believers be never so low, if Satan get his will, he would bring them lower. No man is as low as the devil would have him, but he that is in hell; but thither he cannot bring a believer. If a Christian be never so high, if the devil be let loose upon him, he will quickly bring him down. Do not think, that the devil will fear to engage a believer, even when in his best state. He that had the boldness to fall on sinless Adam in paradise, will think it an easy matter to deal with any sinful man in this wilderness. He that had the impudence to tempt our almighty sinless Saviour, will he have either modesty or fear in tempting a feeble believer? You whom the Lord makes at any time to ride on your high places, bless him, and yet fear your adversary.

2dly, There are some special corruptions that are apt to grow under special enjoyments, as weeds by warm sunshine. If there were any such enjoyment of God to be found in this life as would remove corruption altogether out of the heart, there would be no fear of abusing it: but now, when the greatest enjoyments that can be had in this life, are given to them that have a body of death dwelling in them, there are some workings of that remaining corruption that are very ready to appear in this case. As,

(1.) Pride of heart; spiritual pride. All pride is a spiritual sin; but pride that riseth on spiritual blessings received, is specially spiritual pride. Pride on the account of beauty of body, or strength, or riches, is a carnal foolish pride. If it rise on the account of gifts and endowments of the mind, it grows yet a worse pride. But if the gifts of God be yet of a more high and noble kind, as his special love, and the precious fruits of that love, in begun conformity to Christ, and communion with him; if pride rise on such grounds, it is yet the worst of all sorts of pride. For the more gracious the gifts of God be, and the more eminently they be of free distinguishing grace, and the more plainly the design of God in giving those gifts be to glorify the grace of the giver, and to save the receiver, to the praise of that grace; pride of heart on the account of such gifts, is yet the worst of all pride. Now, that such a corruption may grow under special enjoyments of God, is past all doubt. (2 Cor 12) Paul speaks of his being lifted up unto heaven, like a man that had not fully recovered himself: I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether out of the body, or in the body, I know not: God knoweth) (v 2). It was a long while since; but in the time of the enjoyment, and fourteen years after it, he could not tell whether he was in or out of the body. He never speaks plainly of it, till he came to speak of his infirmities, (v 7) Lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. Where we may perceive plainly, that whatever was in that extraordinary enjoyment Paul had in that vision from heaven, or in that visit to heaven, that was allowed him; when he came back, he found the same heart he had formerly felt, and the same body of death he so often had groaned under before. Although we know not what Paul enjoyed in that time, nor what the nature of that exercise by Satan was that he was put to: yet the Lord's design, and Paul's danger, is plain. It is indeed a marvellous passage. Such an extraordinary person as Paul was, the chief of the apostles, and most eminent saint in all the New Testament, after such a great revelation, must be exercised with hell, to prevent harm by his being in heaven, before he was fully ready and fit for heaven.

(2.) Contentedness with a present good condition, and dullness of desires after a better state, is a common corruption that is apt to rise up under special enjoyments. If the disciples be on the mount of transfiguration, and Christ be glorified in their sight, and glorified saints from heaven in his company; then it is good to be here, say they; not minding that which was more needful for them and all the church. And if they heard (as is most likely) the discourse of Moses and Elias concerning the decrease of our Lord which he should accomplish at Jerusalem (Luke 9:30,31), they were the more faulty. It is very hard to be truly

desirous of heaven, when we have much of heaven on earth; yet it may be attained, and grace can help to it. Of which in the last place.

5. The grace of God, as it is needed, so it is useful and helpful to believers under special enjoyments. 1st, Grace can humble the soul under them, and by them. Though Satan make them temptations to pride, the Lord can sanctify them to be means of humbling. Great comforts do not natively tend to humble us; but all discoveries of the glory of God are humbling. Isaiah found it so, (Isa 6:5) Woe is me, for I am undone; for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts. The vision was great and glorious; it was a sight of God in Christ; as John 12:41, These things said Esaias, when he saw his glory, and spake of him. We would be apt to think the prophet should rather have said, "Happy am I, that I have seen now what I never saw before, what few, if any, besides me, have seen." But such was the impression the Spirit of God made on the heart of this man, that this extraordinary manifestation of God effects him with more deep self-abasement than ever he had before. Happy is the man that lies still the more low in himself, and before God, the more highly the Lord exalts him. Job found this fruit of a clearer discovery of God (42:5,6). Jacob (in Genesis 32:30) called the name of the place Peniel: for I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved. This place where he wrestled all night with the Lord, where the Lord blessed him in the morning; this place he calls Peniel, to be the name of it to him and his seed; that whenever they saw the place, or heard of it, they might remember, that there the great God and a poor man met in great familiarity, and the man was not consumed. Jacob wonders, that his life was preserved in such a meeting. Near approaches of God to his children, are sometimes too hard for them to bear. This made one eminent saint cry out under such a high enjoyment, "O Lord, destroy me not with thy glory"; and another, "Hold thy hand, O Lord; thy servant is a clay vessel, and can bear no more." And both these were persons not oppressed by his wrath, but overcharged with his love and glory.

2dly, Grace can help to record and remember special enjoyments. There are some spiritual enjoyments of God, that are like lightning, that dart from the one end of heaven to the other, that make a dark night to become like the morning. They come quickly, and they are quickly gone; they are of speedy access, and of as sudden a recess. But though they be but short in their continuance, their fruit may remain. And one way for making their fruit continue, is, to remember and record them. I will remember the years, the works, the wonders of the Lord (Psa 77:10-12), I will meditate, I will talk of them, saith the saint. Thus David prays for Israel, (1 Chron 29:18) Keep this for ever in the imagination of the thoughts of the heart of thy people. What was this he prayed for Israel's remembering of, and for the Lord's keeping in their minds? It was, that they might remember with what joy they made their willing offerings for the service of God. We have a gracious promise of Christ, (John 14:26) The Holy Ghost shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you. And this promise we should plead, for bringing to our remembrance the things Christ hath done for us, as well as for what he hath said to us. And no man can imagine (but they that feel it) how one of these remembrances will fortify the soul in a day of distress. Spiritual things are so unlike to carnal things, that all comparisons betwixt them must needs halt greatly. That a poor, hungry, starving man, should, in a dungeon, or desolate wilderness, be refreshed, and made strong, by the bare remembrance of a feast he had seven years ago; this is impossible in nature. But in spiritual things it is otherwise. The savoury remembrance of a spiritual enjoyment long since past, can bring back the taste, and power, and virtue of it, to the soul that wants it. Believers are usually upon their recovery from a sad disconsolate state, when they are exercised in remembering with savour their former enjoyments. Thus saith returning Israel, (Hosea 2:7) I will go and return to my first husband: for then it was better with me than now.

3dly, Grace can help to improve enjoyments, to desires of, and endeavours after perfection. We must not say, when it is well with us, It is good to be here; but rather, It is good to be there, where it will be a great deal better. (Phil 3:13,14) This one thing I do, (it must be a great thing doubtless that is Paul's one thing), forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark, &c. There is a forgetting that is our duty; and a remembering that is our duty also. To remember, so as to support our faith, and feed our praising of the Lord, that is duty: but to forget attainments, so as to press after the mark, that is another duty. Alas! we are bad, both at right remembering, and right forgetting. You and I think, that if we had but a little of what Paul had in one day; if we had but a

little of what he had that night he lay in the stocks, when he prayed, and sang praises unto God (Acts 16:25), we could never have forgotten it as long as we had a day to live. But Paul could forget all in his ardent desires of perfection. And so must you; and this grace can teach you.

These special enjoyments of God are but rarely felt. Dote not on them, neither despise them. Mock not such as know them in their experience, though ye do not. If you be sound believers, ye may live in your souls, and live to his praise, without enjoying any thing very extraordinary. But if the Lord grant singular communications of himself, know that it is a season of special need of grace to guide them well. They would return more frequently, and would rise and spring higher, and last longer, if they were better improved. The greater the blessing be, the more provoking is the abuse of it; the greater the blessing be, the greater is the difficulty of guiding it well: and the more difficulty be in our work, the more is our need of the grace of God; and the more frequent and fervent should our applications be to the throne of grace for that needful, helpful grace.

SERMON XII Hebrews 4:16

Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.

Having spoke of the need of God's grace, and of its helpfulness in general; I came to condescend on some seasons wherein the grace of God is specially needful and helpful. Of them I named six; three of which I have spoke to, and the other three remain to be handled.

1. The first season named, was the time of temptation. There was never a believer so little beloved of Christ, as to be given up as a prey to Satan; and never lay a believer so near Christ's heart, but the devil may get him into his sieve. Therefore let us never flatter ourselves in a state of security from disturbance by the devil. Blessed be God, we are brought into a state of safety from ruin by him.

2. A season of spiritual decay: soul sickness, a weakness in the new creature. There are some people that never knew by experience what bodily sickness means, but have enjoyed perfect health all their life. But I am apt to think, that few, if any Christians, find it so as to the new creation in them.

3. A season of special enjoyments. Though these two seem to be very far from, and contrary to one another; yet they agree in this, that in both grace is needful and helpful. The unaccountable wisdom and sovereignty of the Lord our God, shines in his conduct of his people. Some of them have extraordinary receivings; others know little what they mean. There are some Christians, whose way to heaven lies all along in the depths and in the vales, when others ride on their high places. Now, these singular manifestations from God, though desirable and profitable, yet are not without special dangers. To prevent which, the Lord provides and ministers special physic to them: and it is strong and unpleasant; but the physician can bless it; as Paul's experience witnesseth (2 Cor 12). He had been in heaven, he knew not how; he had heard, he could not tell what when he came back. But he well knew what he met with on his return, and how needful and useful it was for him. Lest he should be exalted above measure with what he had seen and heard in paradise, hell is sent to humble him. May we not infer this, How unfit are believers, while in the body, and a body of death is in them, to be in heaven, when any special enjoyment of heaven must have so dreadful a remedy administered to prevent hurt?

IV. A fourth season of special need of grace, is the time of affliction.

Afflictions are of many sorts and kinds. I am apt to believe, that though there be some likeness in the afflictions of many, yet every afflicted man hath a particular affliction of his own. As it is with people's faces, so it is with their crosses. For as many thousand faces as are amongst mankind, though all are somewhat like, yet every one hath some distinction. The world is full of crosses; yet every afflicted person hath his own cross. Our Lord hints at it (Matt 16:24) Let a man take up his cross. The Lord appoints a proper cross for every one: though people are ready to think and say, that their cross is unfit for them, and that they

would bear another cross better. In crosses we must neither choose nor refuse. David's case was singular (2 Sam 24). The Lord chooseth for us, and we must not, cannot refuse: (Job 34:33) Should it be according to thy mind? he will recompense it, whether thou refuse, or whether thou choose, and not I: therefore speak what thou knowest. There is a general distinction of afflictions. Some are from God's hand, for sin, or trial, or prevention: and some are from man's hand, for Christ's sake, and the gospel's. In all of them grace is helpful and needful.

But I would speak only something in general, that every one may apply to themselves according to their experience and exercise; and that on these two heads: 1. The needfulness of grace to the afflicted. 2. The helpfulness of grace to the afflicted, whatever their affliction be.

1. I would speak of the need of the grace of God to the afflicted. Some sense of this is engraven on the hearts of men by the light of nature. The Heathen mariners in the storm express this, (Jonah 1:5,6) What meanest thou, O sleeper? Arise, call upon thy God, if so be that God will think upon us, that we perish not. A sad case! A Heathen shipmaster challenging a godly prophet for his neglect of seeking God! He calls him by a shameful, but well-deserved name, O sleeper. The storm came on for Jonah's sake, as he told them (v 12): yet he is the securest person in the ship. He only knew God, yet he is last in calling on him. An honest Pagan may outdo a distempered prophet, in some things, at some times. This sense was expressed greatly by the king, nobles, and inhabitants of Nineveh (Jonah 3:5-10). And they again go far beyond Jonah. They believed God on Jonah's preaching, repented, prayed, and fasted, and the Lord repented of the evil. But Jonah was not grieved at all (4:1,2). If it were not for his excellent prayer (chap 2), and that he was a prophet of the Lord, and the penman of the Holy Ghost, to record his own sin and shame, for the benefit of the church; we should be tempted to question this man's grace, of whose fearful sins we have so large an account. He rebels against the Lord's call to preach to Nineveh. When he flees, the Lord overtakes him by a storm, takes him by the lot; he is cast into the sea, schooled in the whale's belly three days and three nights; a miraculous chastisement, and a miraculous preservation. He now obeys the repeated call. But when his labour had a gracious effect, he is displeased exceedingly, and prays most sinfully. Jonah's instance should teach ministers and Christians to pray more, Lord, lead us not into temptation. As nature's light teacheth afflicted people their need of the Lord's grace and mercy, the word declares it more plainly (James 5:13; Psa 50:15; Hosea 5:15).

This need of the helping grace of God in affliction, I would instruct in these:

1st, Affliction-sins are readily fallen into without the help of the grace of God. Such sins, I mean, that affliction doth easily and naturally tempt unto; as fretting, impatience, murmuring, and quarrelling with the hand of God. It is sadly and frequently seen, that affliction hath not only brought along with it discovery of sin, but also the actings and workings of more corruption, than either the person himself, or any else, thought was in the man. It was a sad character of a very bad man, (2 Chron 28:22) And in the time of his distress did he trespass yet more against the Lord: this is that king Ahaz. This is a man noted for a never-do-well. A brother in the same office, and in the same iniquity, said, Behold this evil is of the Lord; what, should I wait for the Lord any longer? (2 Kings 6:33).

2dly, Affliction-duties are only practicable by the help of the grace of God. Every cross hath its work, as well as its trial. There is that required and called for in affliction, that craves a special assistance of the grace of God for the doing of it. It is remarkable, that the great duty of the afflicted is expressed by two negatives, Hebrews 12:5 from Proverbs 3:11, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him. What then is the positive duty? It is that which is neither of these two. If the affliction be light, we are apt to despise it; and if it be heavy, we are as apt to faint under it. But, saith the Holy Ghost, see that ye do neither. If it be never so light, do not despise it; if it be never so heavy, faint not under it. And there is no small need of grace to preserve us from those extremes, and to keep us in the right midst.

3dly, The consolations of an afflicted state are very needful, and grace only can furnish us with them. Be ye assured of it, that never did a Christian bear up patiently under God's heavy hand, but by the strong secret working of some consolation. It is true, we value and seek most that consolation that comes in as a great flood of sense, and that doth swallow up the bitterness of affliction. This the Lord can, and sometimes doth give to his people. But there is a secret, silent spring of consolation, that is a profitable, and more common in

the Lord's way with his children. Of this the apostle speaks in 2 Corinthians 1:3-5. Everlasting consolation, and good hope through grace, are his blessings (2 Thess 2:16,17).

2. Wherein doth the helpfulness of grace consist, in an afflicted state?

1st, God's grace helps with light to know God's mind in affliction. It is dreadful to be struck in the dark, when a man neither seeth the path he walks in, nor the hand that smiteth him, nor the weapon he is smote with. The great blessing that grace can help us to, is, to know what the rod means, what its voice is, who hath appointed it, and what of God's name is written on the rod (Micah 6:9). Job was very earnest for this light, (Job 10:2) I will say unto God, Do not condemn me; shew me wherefore thou contendest with me. Elihu adviseth him well, (Job 34:31-32) Surely it is meet to be said unto God, I have borne chastisement, I will not offend any more. That which I see not, teach thou me; if I have done iniquity, I will do no more. Many a poor believer has been put to this, that if he had all the world, he would have parted with it, to have known God's mind in his afflictions. Sometimes by the light of the furnace, we come to know our hearts and corruptions, and thereby what God smites for, and calls to. The Lord can, by the teachings of his word and Spirit, and by the wisdom of his providential dispensations, engrave that particular meaning that is in his heart, on the rod that is in his hand, that men may know it. And happy is that person that is so dealt with. But it is indeed harder to be sincerely willing to know and admit of God's mind in affliction, than it is to find it out. But his grace can help to both, and the throne of grace should be much plied for both.

2dly, Grace can give in strength and support under affliction: (2 Cor 4:16) For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. It is a wonderful thing, to see how much pain, sickness, and torment, a poor frail body is able to bear. We think how close and sticking a thing is life, that is not squeezed out by such a stress. Yet the frailty of the flesh, in bearing the distress of the flesh, is a small thing, in regard of the frailty of the heart in bearing of God's rebukes: (Prov 18:14) The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity; but a wounded spirit who can bear? Yet many have borne it; but surely by divine support. It is the common sense of distressed Christians, that they have been put to bear such burdens; that they thought at first would surely have crushed them. The reason of their wonder is, because the weight of the burden upon them was sensible; but the everlasting arms underneath them and their burden, were not seen (Deut 33:27).

3dly, Grace helps in affliction, by enabling the afflicted to believe, that there is love in the afflicter. He saith it, (Rev 3:19) As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten; and he can make us believe it. Nothing but his mighty grace can do it. Nothing is like anger than affliction, especially when severe. Nothing is more difficult to believe, than that which, to all our sense and reason, is ruining to us, should be in love in him that doth it. Who can believe this without the help of grace? and how great must that help be, that enableth a man to believe so unlikely a thing?

4thly, Grace helps in affliction, by teaching to profit thereby: (Heb 12:11) Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous; nevertheless, afterwards it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness, unto them which are exercised thereby. The fruit of sanctified affliction is a great mystery, as all spiritual fruit is. You cannot tell how you profit by the word. I am afraid, that there is but little profiting at all; but they that do profit cannot tell how they profit. They may see the seed sown, they may find it sown in their hearts, they may perceive its fruits in their worship and walk; but how the grace of God works with the word in making them profit, is too deep for the most discerning Christians. It is some way more mysterious how the Lord works out profit by afflictions. It is indeed often found, blessed be his name. Many can say with David, (Psa 119:67) Before I was afflicted, I went astray: but now have I kept thy word, (v 71) It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes. But none can tell how the grace of God makes the bitter seed of affliction bring forth the peaceable fruit of righteousness. And where is that saint, who, when the Lord is writing bitter things against him, and multiplying his wounds, can say in faith, "Now, at this time, and in this manner, the Lord is sowing that seed in me, that shall spring up in fruits of righteousness, to his praise, and my certain profit; and the day will come, wherein I shall bless his name from my heart, for all the sorrows I now feel and mourn under?"

I shall say no more of this head of affliction; but only would give you this warning. Afflictions are very common, and much complained of. Some professors spend all the little religion they have upon their afflictions. Take heed to your hearts under afflictions. It is to be bewailed, that many Christians, their

afflictions come on them they know not whence, they lie on them they know not wherefore, and they go off they know not how; that, if I may allude to such sacred words, and apply the phrase to such a sinful frame, afflictions come on many, and they feel the smart of them, but know not whence they come, nor whither they go. They come on them when they are sent, and go off when they are called; but they neither knew what God meant by them, nor did by them. No Christian can ever make a spiritual and hearty song of praise for afflictions, unless there be some sense or hope of profit thereby. If the profit be seen, the wisdom and love of God in afflicting, will be heartily acknowledged.

V. The fifth time of special need of the grace of God, is, a time of special duty and service to God called for.

All the course of our life is to be constant service. We ought to live to his praise. We are made as creatures, and as new creatures, for this end (Isa 43:21; 1 Peter 2:9). But there are some seasons in which special work is called for, and then there is great need of grace to help in that hour. It is a mighty word of the preacher, (Ecc 8:6) Because to every purpose there is time, and judgment; therefore the misery of man is great upon him. And it is only the wise man's heart that discerneth time and judgment (v 5). I would name four of those times.

1. The time that men are called to believe on Jesus Christ, and to secure their eternal salvation by a full closing with him. This is a now, a day, an accepted time, a day of salvation (2 Cor 6:2). All that hear the gospel, are bound by the call of God in it, and warranted by the promise of it, to receive by faith Jesus Christ, and eternal life, every time they hear the gospel. But sometimes this duty is specially called for; which, if neglected, may be of fatal consequence to men. Hence that exhortation, (Isa 55:6) Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near. When Christ is knocking at the door of the heart, then it is special duty to open to him (Rev 3:20). This was the day Jerusalem had, and neglected; and that that Christ mourned over them for (Luke 19:41,42). Unspeakable is men's need of the prevailing help of grace, when their hearts and consciences are warmed with the calls of grace in the gospel. In such seasons, the everlasting bargain is either fixed by the power of grace working faith in the heart; or people are left to themselves, and are farther from heaven than ever.

2. Some special call to men to give their testimony to Christ and his gospel by suffering. The Lord comes and craves men's testimony to his truth, and chargeth them thus: "If thou hast any love to me and my honour, I demand thy witness, venture thy all, take up thy cross." Many Christians have neglected such trying seasons, which in vain and sorrowfully they have wished for again. There is much of God's grace needful to discern these seasons, and wisely to improve them.

3. There is another remarkable seasons of men's need of God's grace to help them in; and that is, the season of the Lord's calling them to a duty-trial; a duty called to by way of trial. The Lord gives the call to try men; and very great are the consequences of obeying or disobeying of such a call. Many instances are of this in the word. One is in Numbers 14. The passage is plain and awful. When Israel had been above a year in the wilderness, twelve spies are sent to view the land: they all bring back an evil report, save Joshua and Caleb: the people murmur; God threatens them with judgments: they seem to be sensible of their sin; it is like by the plague that slew the ten false spies (v 37), and by what Moses spake to them. They acknowledge their sin; and resolve to go up next morning (v 40). Moses tells them, they now sinned again, and that the Lord was not among them (vv 41,42). What severe dealing is this? The Lord was among them yesterday, not this morning: they were bid go up yesterday, they are forbid next morning. Because they did not what the Lord bid them do in his time, he will not protect them when they do the same thing in their time. Thus Saul was tried twice (1 Sam 13). Samuel bid him tarry for him seven days at Gilgal: Saul tarried six days, and part of the seventh, and then offered sacrifice; not, as I think, that he did invade the priest's office himself, but command some priest to do it. Profane princes never want profane chaplains. What a severe sentence doth Samuel pronounce against him (vv 13,14)? Again, the same man is tried with another duty (1 Sam 15), and fails therein, and is punished therefore.

This sort of trying men by duty, is like that in 2 Kings 13:14-20 which Elisha did put Joash unto. How many of the people of God, through the want of the present help of grace in some duty-trials, have stepped

into such paths, and have fallen into such pits and snares, as they have never got well and clearly out of, as long as they lived?

4. It is a season of great need of grace to help us in, when the Lord, by his providence, puts several things in a person's choice, and leaves them to choose. The fullest of this kind was that offer made to David about judgments (2 Sam 24:12,13). A hard choice; but David did choose wisely. His son Solomon had another offer; but it was of blessings, and not of judgments, (2 Chron 1:7) Ask what I shall give thee. And he chose wisely: and by his choice proved, that he had already received a good measure of wisdom. Moses had a great offer, and things of vast difference were in his choice; and he chose like a man taught of God (Heb 11:24-26). Moses, in his last sermon to Israel (Deut 30:15-20) puts them on choosing: I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live: that thou mayest love the Lord thy God, and that thou mayest obey his voice, and that thou mayest cleave unto him: for he is thy life, and the length of thy days. So did his successor Joshua, when he had settled Israel in the promised land, a little before his death: (Josh 24:15) Choose you this day whom you will serve. Elijah did so with apostate Israel (1 Kings 18:21). Somewhat like this is laid before men in the daily ministry of the word. The curse of the law, or the blessing of the gospel, is in men's offer; and men get as they choose. If men refuse the blessing, the curse belongs to them; if they receive the blessing, they are delivered from the curse. But the choosing I mean, is that the Lord puts men often to, in the several turns of his providence towards them: (Psa 25:12) What man is he that feareth the Lord? him shall he teach in the way that he shall choose. Many gracious promises are in the word, of God's guiding of his people; many prayers put up by saints in the word for this gracious guiding; and many praises rendered to the Lord for their blessed experience of his guiding. Who can walk safely through this wilderness, without the pillar of cloud by day, and the pillar of fire by night? How many of men's sorrows may be laid on their being left of God, in choosing for themselves? and how many of our mercies are owing to the Lord's gracious guiding of us in doubtful cases? But it is a very hard thing to ask direction from God.

Three faults are common in this practice.

1. Pre-engagement of heart. As it is a great sin after vows to make inquiry (Prov 20:25); so is it to ask direction from God, when men are resolved on the way they will take. An eminent instance of this sinful frame, we have in Jeremiah 42 and 43. They sought counsel of God by the prophet in a great strait; they promised to follow it whatever it was: God gives his mind; they reject it, because it suited not their inclinations. It is no easy thing to ask direction of God, with an undetermined frame.

2. Pride of understanding. Men think they are wise enough to choose their own way. Therefore that command should be much minded, (Prov 3:5-7) Trust in the Lord with all thine heart: and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths. Be not wise in thine own eyes. And that other word, (Prov 20:24) Man's goings are of the Lord; how can a man then understand his own way? (Prov 16:9) A man's heart deviseth his way, but the Lord directeth his steps.

3. Haste. Men wait not for God's counsel (Psa 106:13); and therefore go without it, and stumble in dark paths. He that believeth, maketh not haste (Isa 28:16). A little more patient waiting on the Lord, as Psalm 40:1, hath often brought in determining light in doubtful cases.

So much for the fifth season of need of grace.

VI. The last time of need of grace is, the time of dying.

It is indeed the last; for he that is helped by grace in that time, will need no more help of grace to eternity. This time of dying, is what we should all think on; and if you think aright on it, it will not be unwelcome to hear of it.

On this I would shew, 1. The need of grace. And, 2. The help of grace in this last and greatest time of need.

1. I would speak of the need of grace to help in this season. Though all men have some conviction of it; yet, to strengthen that conviction, I would speak to a few things about it. 1st, This time of need is unavoidable. It is a time that must come. Other times of need may come, and may not come. We may be

tempted, we may be afflicted, we may be tried, we may be cast down, and we may be lifted up again: but die we must. It is appointed unto men once to die (Heb 9:27). As sure as we live, we must die. We live our appointed time, and we die at our appointed time (Job 14:5,14), and all our times are in his hand (Psa 31:15; Eccl 3:2). There is a time to be born, and a time to die (v 11). He hath made every thing beautiful in his time. That man must have better eyes than those of flesh, that can see any beauty in death. If there had been but two or three of mankind, that had lived from Noah to this day, and had been privileged with an exemption from this general appointment, every fool on earth would have dreamed, that, it may be, he shall partake of the same privilege also. But when all that ever breathed from Adam to this day, are dead, (save the present generation, whom a few more years will sweep away, as it hath done their predecessors); what folly is there in men's thoughtlessness of this unavoidable fate? But if you say, All shall not die, but be changed, as 1 Corinthians 15:51 and 1 Thessalonians 4:17; consider, that this change is to them, as death is to us; and it may be will be as terrible to the saints alive then, as death now is. As believers now dread not death, and to be dead, so much as they fear to die; the state of the dead in Christ is not terrible, but the passage to it is: so they that are changed at Christ's coming, may have the same sentiments, till the change be wrought on them. It is (though none knows the particular manner of it) a putting off of mortality and corruption, and a putting on the robes of immortality and incorruption. The same is done as to every saint at death and the resurrection. Both are done to every believer in an instant, who are found alive at Christ's second coming. Elijah's translation (2 Kings 2), and Enoch's (Heb 11:5) were emblems of the change on believers at Christ's second appearance; as the raising of Lazarus, and others, both in the Old Testament and New, were of the general resurrection: and in special manner they spoke of, (Matt 27:52,53) And the graves were opened; and many bodies of saints which slept, arose, and came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many. But whatever the change on saints at Christ's coming be to them, and if it may be thought a more easy trial than natural death is; it is certain, that the change that shall then pass on the ungodly, will be far more dreadful than bare dying is now. This is then the only exception from the general appointment on all men once to die. How amazing then is the stupidity of men, that so few seriously think on it, and prepare for it? that so many men and women, that are under the sentence of death; that have the seeds of death in them; that live in a world wherein all things that have life, are dying before their eyes: that live on creatures that lose their lives to support theirs; that have so many warnings of death's sure and speedy approach, are yet, after all, surprised by it when it comes, as if they had never heard of it? This stupidity is both a sad sign and effect of the plague of unbelief. Judgment and eternity, that follow at death's heels, are matters of pure faith. But death is obvious to sense, reason, and universal experience. Yet men only think they may die, and do not entertain the persuasion with assurance into their hearts, and serious daily thoughts, that they must die.

2dly, Dying is not only unavoidable, but it is a new trial. None can tell what dying is. Many know what it is to be sick, to be in great pain, to faint and fall into a swoon, which is a little image of death; as also the Heathen poet called sleep death's elder brother: but none knows what dying is. It was a very sensible word a dying Christian in this city spoke to myself, when visiting him a few hours before his death, "No man can tell another what dying is. I feel I am dying; but I cannot tell you what it is." Death is a path that you never trod before; you never walked in it hitherto; you may have thought yourselves to have gone a good way in the valley of the shadow of death, but you never walked through it. Paul died daily (1 Cor 15:31); he was in deaths often (2 Cor 11:23): yet he was a living man then, when he said so; and he died but once. All new trials require new supplies of grace; and the trial of death is quite new. When we are tempted one day, we may know what temptation is thereby, and be thereby fitted for the next: but no past experience can teach us fully what dying is.

3dly, Dying is not only a necessary, and new trial; but it is such a trial, in which a man's all is concerned for eternity. Immediately on death follows judgment (Heb 9:27). Death is the dark trance betwixt time and eternity. While we live, we are in time; when we are a-dying, we are leaving time, and passing into eternity; when we are dead, we are quite and for ever out of time, and are in eternity for ever. If a man miscarry in this passage, if a man stumble in the dark valley of death, if he fall here, he falls for ever. I would not have people to imagine, that the stress of their salvation depends on their frame when a-dying; for some Christians, when near to death, have neither the use and exercise of sense or reason, much less of grace. But

surely, when the case of men's bodies permits acts of a man, or of a Christian, there is great need of grace to enable us to die well. 4thly, Dying is a great trial of faith. Though we know not fully what dying is; yet we may know so much of it, as to be convinced, that it is much harder to die in faith than to live by faith: and yet living by faith is the hardest thing we have to do in this world. To trust in an unseen God; to believe his unchangeable love, when we feel his anger, to trust his bare word, when we see no appearance of performance, but many to the contrary, are no easy things to the best. Our frequent experience of the difficulty, and of our many failings in this daily exercise, of living by faith, may justly make us sensible of our need of great help of grace, when we shall be called to the new and more hard work of dying by faith.

To inforce this a little, consider,

(1.) Usually when death draws near to men, and they draw near to it, the eye of the mind is clearer, and the conscience more tender and sharp-sighted, in the review of their life and actions. Many never saw their lives well, till they are just at the end of them. And many believers walk so, as a spiritual review of their ways breeds no small storm in their consciences, and trial and shaking to their faith. Though death be a dark valley, yet great light of convictions and challenges springs up in it. Woe to them that never know, till they are a-dying, what an awakened conscience is. Ways that are pleasing to men, when the evil day is put far away, look frightfully on them when that day approacheth, and is very nigh.

(2.) A dying time, is a time wherein the devil is very busy. He fetcheth then his last stroke on saints, and on sinners. He doth his utmost to secure the damnation of sinners, that he may not lose them at last. The devil's death-hold of a dying sinner is a strong one. He also doth his utmost against believers, if not to mar their salvation, yet to hinder their consolation. The devil's parting-blow hath been dreadful to many a saint. It is a weighty word (Heb 2:14) where he is said to have the power of death. It is true, there it is said also, that Christ overcame him, and through death. Death is properly and strictly in the devil's dominions. Sin and death are properly the devil's, though the Lord hath the wise ordering of both. He permits sin, and inflicts death; and death lies near the devil's great prison, hell. Through the valley of death there are two passages; one leading to hell, and another to heaven. Most fall into the pit; others are brought through safe and sound, by the skill and mercy of their blessed guide, Christ. It fares here with believers as with Israel, and with unbelievers as with the Egyptians, (Heb 11:29) By faith they passed through the Red Sea, as by dry land; which the Egyptians assaying to do, were drowned.

(3.) Judgment and eternity, when near, and seen at hand, are awful things: and a near view of them will try faith greatly. This view blows away the presumption and hope of the hypocrite; (Job 27:8) What is the hope of the hypocrite, though he hath gained, when God taketh away his soul? (Job 11:20) Their hope is as the giving up of the ghost. His hope lived as long as he lived; and when he dies, it dies also. Woe to them that have a dying hope, a hope that cannot outlive death. Christians are begotten to a living or lively hope (1 Peter 1:3). He hath hope in his death (Prov 14:32). The man's body dies, but the Christian's hope and faith lives. He lies down in the grave in hope (Psa 16:9). He dies in that faith he lived by (Heb 11:13).

2. What is the helpfulness of grace, in this time of great need, a time of dying. I am speaking to living men, but to such as must die, and know not how soon. I shall only insist on one thing at this time. The grace of God helps believers, by strengthening of their faith. That is the help they mainly need in that hour. And this help stands in these:

1st, When a dying believer is helped by grace to see death in Christ's hand. There is a vast difference betwixt death in the devil's hand, who hath the power of it; and death in Christ's hand, who is master both of death and the devil: betwixt a man's seeing death approaching, and the devil behind it, and with it; and a man's seeing death coming on him, and Christ with it. Paul's triumph rose on this ground: (1 Cor 15:55-57) O death, where is thy sting? O grave, (or hell), where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ. That by which death stings men, is sin unpardoned, and God's holy law binding sin and wrath on their persons. Victory over both sin and the law, comes by Jesus Christ. When this victor, and victory in Christ, is seen by a believer, death is defied and despised, as a stingless overcome thing. Much and strong faith is needful to enable a man to play on the hole of his asp. Christ reveals himself to John almost dead with fear, (Rev 1:17,18) Fear not; I have the keys of hell and of death. "Behold them in my hand, and behold me as the lord of them." Should a believer in Jesus fear any thing that Christ hath the power of? The bitterness of death

is past to all believers, by Christ's death, and victory over it. And if their faith was strong, their fears would be small.

2dly, To have faith enabled to look through death, and beyond death. If a man's eyes be fixed on death only, and see no further, it is death to look on death: but when the believer's eye of faith is so quickened, that he can look through the trance of death, and see within the veil, where Christ is, that is a blessed help of grace. Christians' faith and hope enters within the veil (Heb 6:19). And a view within the veil is specially desirable and useful, when the Christian is walking in the valley of the shadow of death (Psa 23:4).

3dly, Faith is helped, when the dying believer is enabled to cast his anchor on God in Christ confidently in this last storm. This last act of faith is a great one. The more sensible a man is that he is on the point of eternal ruin, the nearer he is to drop into hell without divine help; the more sensibly he acts faith. Then the clings and graspings of faith on Christ, are sensible and strong. When a believer looks on himself, and on his way, and seeth nothing in them pleasing or staying to his soul; he looks into the dark passage before him, and it is frightful to heart and flesh; he looks on judgment and eternity as just at hand, and his thoughts are swallowed up with their greatness. In this case to stay his soul, and say with dying David, (2 Sam 23:5) Although my house be not so with God, (Though my heart, my ways, be not so with God as they ought to have been); yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure: and this is all my salvation and all my desire, requires singular help of the grace of God. To shut the eyes, and give the hand to Christ, and to quiet the mind, by trusting our guide in this last step, is a mighty blessing. I would conclude this discourse with these four:

1. It is a great mystery of faith, and a great trial of faith, that the way to eternal life should lie through the midst of this dark valley of death. Our Lord Jesus Christ bought eternal life for us, by the price of his blood; he went through death to take possession of his kingdom and glory: and yet his people must go through death to take possession of the gift of eternal life. If there were any allowed room or place for prayer in this affair, how many, and how earnest prayers would we make to be delivered from going in this way to glory? But after a life of trials, temptations, and manifold tribulations, this last is still before us; and we must pass through, and set our feet in the cold waters of this Jordan, ere we enter the heavenly Canaan. After all the lively hopes of heaven, and sweet foretastes of it, we have had; after our faith hath risen us to a full assurance; yet through death must all the heirs of glory pass.

2. There is no wisdom like that of preparing for this awful hour; (Job 14:14) If a man die, shall he live again? All the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come. "I will think on it, I will look for it, I will prepare for it." Men are wise or foolish, according to their faithful diligence, or unbelieving negligence, in this preparing for death. Many have bewailed their neglect; never did any repent their diligence, in this work.

3. There is no right and sure way of preparing for death, but by seeking saving acquaintance with Jesus. If you set about the study of holiness without Christ, you mistake your way, and will never reach your end. But labour to be intimately acquainted with Jesus Christ, and the communications of his grace will make you holy. Death deals with men, and billets them into their eternal quarters, in heaven or hell, as men are in Christ, or out of Christ. Their works, according to which they are judged, are but the fruits and effects of their different states. These two different states of men in this life, in Christ, or not in Christ, are the foundation of the two different states in the next life, in heaven, or in hell; though all in Christ are holy, and all out of Christ are unholy.

4. There is no life truly comfortable, but that which hath a comfortable prospect of death and judgment. Never envy the condition of them who seem to be the only cheerful men in the world, whom one quarter of an hour's serious thought of death and judgment, is enough to make them like Belshazzar at his great feast (Dan 5:6) whose countenance was changed, and his thoughts troubled him, so that the joints of his loins were loosed, and his knees smote one against another. Amazement seized on soul and body. How can a man be said to live comfortably, that dare not think of death, for fear of marring his comfort? Miserable is that consolation that cannot bear a serious thought of an approaching unavoidable thing. This is the wisdom and mercy of the Lord to his people, that their true consolation doth not only stand and abide in the view of death and judgment, but it ariseth from that view that is so terrible to all natural men. This is the blessedness of believers, that this grace allows them a right to, and can give them a possession of. And therefore we should

come to the throne of grace for it. Then you are happy Christians, when serious thoughts of death breed serious joy.

SERMON XIII Hebrews 4:16

Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.

You have heard of the helpfulness of the grace of God in time of need, both in general, and with particular instances of some special times of need. The last whereof is the time of dying. This I left off at last day, and would speak a little more to it; and then conclude all in a few words.

Death is a theme of great importance, and of very obvious influence. If people would let it enter into their serious thoughts, and would take a serious and steady view of it, they would quickly find more in it and about it than ever they did, or could hear, by all that is told them. Next to the saving illumination of the Holy Ghost, with and by the word, there is no better school for men to learn, weigh, and duly to understand the things of God in, than a frequent and near view of death. What an edge would this put upon our praying, hearing, worship, and walking? Every thing that is done by men as dying persons, is usually well done. I shall only add this, That there are some sorts of dying that are very desirable, in which the grace of God is very useful and needful.

1. Patient dying. Dying is not properly a duty, but a suffering. It is not our act; but there is a manifold exercise of grace called for in dying. Never did any man act in dying but Jesus Christ: he could lay down his life, and take it again (John 10:17,18). We cannot lay down our lives; they are not our own. We are bid keep them as long as we lawfully can: and when the great command comes, Return, we are to yield obedience to it. It is a great blessing, to have patience for dying, and patience in dying: (Heb 10:36) Ye have need of patience; that after ye have done the will of God, ye may receive the promise. And we often need patience most, when just upon the receiving of the promise. We should run with patience the race that is set before us (Heb 12:1). And most of patience is usually most needful in the last stage of this race. Patience should have her perfect work (James 1:4). And the perfect and perfecting work of patience, is the last act of it. We all know, that usually death comes on by such steps as are grievous to the flesh. There are pains, sickness, and languishings, that are no small trials of patience: but these are in a manner but trials of the patience of the flesh. There are other things about dying that patience is tried by; as time and place, and many circumstances, that is no small or easy thing to be quietly submitted to. Jacob, the heir of the promise, goes down to Egypt, to Joseph, for bread, after he is starved out of the land of promise; and must die in Egypt, and leave his family there, where they were to be long and heavily oppressed, as the Lord told his grandfather Abraham (Gen 15:12). Moses must die on the other side of Jordan. David must not see a stone laid in the temple. Josiah must die in battle, and that by not hearkening to the words of Necho from the mouth of God (2 Chron 35:22). But what of such sad circumstances of dying? Did not our Lord himself die under a dark cloud on his dear Father's face, and on his own blessed soul? My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? were sad words, from the sad soul of our dying blessed Lord. His disciples forsook him, the sun forsook him, death and hell bandied against him; yet all was nothing to his Father's forsaking him. How bitter was this to our Lord! And yet how sweet is it to the faith of believers! If you be called to die under a cloud, remember, The Lord, the heir, the purchaser of heaven, went to heaven in the greatest storm that ever blew from earth, and hell, and heaven, on any man's face, at death. Men are ashamed to express any quarrel against dying; but there are many things about it that makes us needy of much grace to help to quiet submitting unto it, both in substance, and all circumstances attending it.

2. Safe dying. This is very needful, and it is grace's doing. Many die patiently, as men think, that die not safely. There are no bands in the death of the wicked sometimes (Psa 73:4). Some go out of this life to hell more calmly, than some of the heirs of glory pass to their blessed home. Safe dying, is to die without any hurt to the soul; that when the cage of the body is broken by death, the soul, the bird, may take wing, and fly

straight and safe to heaven. Death is the believers' (1 Cor 3:22), as well as life. But what have we to do with death, or death with us? It is a black boat, that we must sail out of time to heaven in: and Christ steers the boat, and lands all believers safely on heaven's shore. This is all we have to do with death. And when all the passengers are brought over, Christ will burn this ugly boat: (Rev 20:14,15) And death and hell (or the grave) were cast into the lake of fire: this is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life, was cast into the lake of fire. And then in the new Jerusalem, there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away (Rev 21:4). Who would not venture to pass out of this bad world, to that blessed land, under Christ's conduct, though sailing through the gulf of death be unpleasant in itself to us? Men for gain will sail from one end of the earth to the other; through heat and cold, and stormy seas and winds, and manifold perils, in the probable hope of advantage. But believers may be assured, that they shall arrive at their port. Never did a believer in Jesus Christ die or drown in his voyage to heaven. They will be all found safe and sound with the Lamb on Mount Zion. Christ loseth none of them; yea, nothing of them (John 6:39). Not a bone of a believer is to be seen in the field of battle. They are all more than conquerors, through him that loved them (Rom 8:37).

3. It is very desirable to have an honourable dying. It is a part of the vanity of this world, that many dote upon an honourable burial. Some respect indeed should be paid to the dead bodies of believers; but honourable dying is a great deal more considerable, than that men call an honourable burial. Our Lord told Peter of his dying, (John 21:19) This spake Jesus, signifying by what death Peter should glorify God. That is honourable dying that brings glory to God. Paul is confident of this as to himself: (Phil 1:20) According to my earnest expectation, and my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also, Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life or by death. The most honourable dying, is dying for the Lord. This honour is not given to all his saints. All saints die in the Lord, and blessed are they (Rev 14:13). Our desires should be, to be enabled by his grace to bear our dying testimony to Christ and his gospel. There have been strong convictions given to the consciences of sinners, wonderful supports to the hearts of surviving saints, by the honourable dying of some believers. Their example, their words, their very looks and behaviour, in the shadow of death, have been of great use to them that have seen and heard them.

4. It is also desirable to have the mercy of comfortable dying; to have an entrance ministered to us abundantly, into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ (2 Peter 1:11). The Lord's dealings with his people in this matter, are a great depth. Some that have given most shining evidences of the truth and strength of the grace of God in them, who have spent their days eminently to the Lord's praise, and to the edifying of his body the church, have gone to heaven under a cloud: others, that were hardly known or regarded in Christ's flock, have gone off the stage triumphantly. No observer can escape the notice of such instances. Therefore we must not say, that consolation in dying is a certain sign of eminency in grace, or of tenderness in walking. It is not very unusual, to see the greatest storm overtake even a strong believer, just as he is putting into the harbour. However, this dispensation of the Lord's grace in granting a comfortable exit, is what we should beg earnestly, and pray for heartily. I believe that there are few Christians so cast down with fears, and clouds, and darkness, but if they could be assured, that all shall be dispelled at death, (and it is sometimes so); and that they should have a clear evening, and strong consolation, in their last hours, they would bear their present sorrows better. Though comfortable dying be not simply necessary to the salvation of a believer; yet it is a blessing more valuable than many others that are more in our prayers. Grace can help to it; and a precious help it is, and we should mind it much in our addresses to the throne of grace. So much of these times of need, and of the help of grace in them.

There are a few exhortations from this whole doctrine of the helpfulness of grace in a time of need, that I would conclude this text with.

The general exhortation is this, Learn not only to submit as to what is determined, and that you cannot alter; but to be heartily content with this wise dispensation of God about your need and his grace, as a contrivance becoming his wisdom, and levelled at your good: As,

1. That our necessities are so many, so great, and so unavoidable; and yet there is a sufficient supply provided for them. The new creature is the most needy creature of all God's creation. The Lord hath framed the new creature in a singular way, and for a singular use and end. All other creatures have their being from

God, and have that being continued by God in the common course of his wise and powerful providence. But the new creature is not only of and from God, but it is wrought, and hath its being in Christ Jesus, and its life is continued by a continual gracious efflux from him; for without him the new creature can do nothing (John 15:5). Let not such a thought arise in your heart, (or if it arise, give it no entertainment), Why hath God made this new creature so needy a creature as it is? Surely he might have done otherwise. He made the first Adam in another state. He was made perfect in soul and body immediately. His state was perfect; he needed little, and all at hand. But the new creature is framed weak and necessitous. The difference is as great betwixt the first Adam, and a Christian at his regeneration, as betwixt perfect Adam, and a young babe newly born, or a child conceived in the womb. Yet the Lord hath made provision of grace sufficient for all these necessities. And he loves the glory of his grace so, and takes so great delight in giving of his grace, that he not only lets the heirs of this grace fall into the common pit of sin and misery with others, and sometimes deeper than many of them that are left, that his grace may be glorified, in loving them out of the pit of corruption, as Hezekiah's word is (Isa 38:17); (for all that are converted, are plucked out of their natural damnable state, by a mighty act of the love of God, Eph 2:4); but when he hath pulled them out, he sets them down in his kingdom of grace, in so indigent and weak a condition, that they may glorify him by begging and believing, and he may glorify himself in giving of his grace to them. Who should find fault with this wise way?

2. Be satisfied, that this grace which is your supply, is all in Christ Jesus, and not in your own hand. Since Adam fell, and ruined himself and all his posterity, by having his and their stock in his own hand, and sinning it away; the Lord in mercy hath resolved never to intrust a mere man again with his own stock; but hath lodged all the grace his people are saved and supplied by, in Christ's hand. And there it is safe. Adam was created perfect, and had a sufficient stock to have enriched himself, and all his offspring; but he was left to his free will, and so came on it. This is an eternal disgrace to man's free will. What must the free will of a sinner be able to do, when the free will of perfect sinless man opened the door to sin, and death, and ruin, upon the whole world of mankind? It is therefore graciously and wisely provided, that free will shall have no hand in the salvation of sinners, (and indeed free will to good, is but a vain name, usurped by willing and willful slaves of sin); and that in its stead, the free grace of God in Jesus Christ shall be, and do all in all. But we are so proud, that we would fain have somewhat in our own hand; and are so used to sense, and unskillful in believing, that we can hardly reckon that our own, that is not in our possession, and at our disposing. But, in this order, the Lord consults the interest of his glory, and the security of our salvation, and daily supplies, by lodging our all in Christ's hand; who is able to keep it safely for us, and ready and willing to give forth of it to us, according to our real necessity.

3. Be satisfied with this, that the special times of our need are not usually known to us before they come. There is none of the people of God, nor of the children of men, that usually know twenty-four hours before, what temptations and trials they may meet with. We know we may be tempted; but we know not when, nor how, and in what part, the adversary may assault us, or with what weapons. We know we may be afflicted: but we know not with what rod, nor when. We know we must die; but we know not how, nor when. There is a foolish and sinful curiosity in our nature, that raiseth desires to know future things concerning ourselves. It were well, if men were duly desirous to know from the word, what their eternal state shall be. But in other things that may befall us in time, it is dangerous curiosity to be inquisitive. People imagine, that it would be of great advantage to them to foreknow future events, as to themselves. But I am sure it would be a great disadvantage, and what you would quickly repent of. If the Lord should reveal to any of you, and set in a clear light before the eyes of your mind, all the particular providences, trials, and afflictions, and temptations, you are to meet with in seven years time to come; what a dread would it be you! You would soon beg that it might be forgot again. It is a great deal better for us, that future things that belong to God, are secret and kept from us; and that we are led on believing, and come to the waters in our way to heaven, one after another, and get through them, by the gracious conduct of our blessed guide, Christ. He will give no Christian a particular and exact map of all his way, and stages, and entertainment, in this wilderness-journey to heaven, though our Lord hath fixed them all in his decree. Should it not be enough for us, that he will lead us well and safely; that no water shall drown us; that he will never leave us, but be with us wherever he leads us, and will bring us safe home at last to his Father's house?

4. Be satisfied with this part of his wise order, that this supply of his grace to help in time of need, must be come for. Not only that we may come for it, which is a great privilege, but that we must come for it, if we would have it. Is there any so unreasonable, as to find fault with this order? Is it not fair and easy, Ask and have? Would any have grace to help them, unsought? If you would have it, you are asking it. Is it not fit then to come for it, and tell Christ you would have it? If you would not have it, you are praying against it. And wicked are those prayers, that are in aversion from the grace of Christ? Every believer will find his heart reconciled to this order. They know, that there is a blessing in coming, as well as a blessing to be got by coming. And most Christians, I am apt to think, continue their approaches to the throne of grace, as much, if not more, from the delight they find in coming, as from the profit they find by coming; though these two are not inconsistent. He that delights not himself in the Lord, will not always call upon God (Job 27:10). So much for this general exhortation.

Exhort. 2. In the next place, I would speak somewhat to them that are not acquainted with the grace of God, nor with the throne of grace. Graceless people is so bad a name, that few will own it, though many deserve it. Such fill up much room in most assemblies, and sometimes may step up into the pulpit, in the name of ministers of that grace of God they never knew but in a book. But God calls all by their right names, and only can make men answer to those names. Let these four things enter into such folks thoughts:

1. Unavoidably a time of need will come, that the grace of God can only help in. None but a great atheist can make any doubt of this. Dost thou believe there is a God? that thou art a mortal man, whom a few days more will turn out of this world? Dost thou believe that thou hast an immortal soul, that must be for ever? (and how much a beast is that man, and worse than a beast, that doubts of any of these?) If thou believe these plain principles, canst thou doubt but a time of need will come, wherein nothing can stand thee in any stead, but only this God's mercy and grace?

2. This present time you have, is the only time given you for preparing for the time of need that must come. How little is that precious golden talent, time, laid out for that the Lord gives it for? Can men think that God gives them time, to spend it in the ways they spend it? That must be ill-spent time, that is spent so, as men know they must either repent of, or perish by. We are bid redeem the time (Eph 5:16). But most men throw it away, or sell it to sin and Satan, as if they had no use for it. The best use of time, is to spend it in preparing for eternity: All the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come (Job 14:14). These are well-spent days. But how few of the hours of your days are thus spent?

3. There can be no greater folly, than to neglect this present only season of preparing for an unavoidable time of extremity. Our Lord, in the parable, calls the five negligent virgins, foolish (Matt 25:2). If a man throw away his estate in folly and vanity, the world will brand him with the name of a fool, and justly. If a man throws away his health and life, there is folly in that too. But for a man to throw away his soul, and all his hopes of well-being for eternity, is the rankest of all folly: yet is the world so full of such fools, that very few give it its true name. He must be greatly plagued with blindness and stupidity, that is not convinced, that that is the greatest folly that shuts a man eternally out of heaven, and locks him up in hell.

4. There can be no reflection and remorse more sad and bitter than that that ariseth on the review and sense of this folly, when it is remediless. We read of the worm that dieth not (Mark 9:44,46,48). This is commonly understood of conscience. Conscience stings two ways; and one way more dreadfully than the other. Conscience stings for sin, as it is an offence against God, a breach of his holy law, and as it exposeth the sinner to God's dreadful anger. But conscience stings more dreadfully, for neglecting the remedy for sin provided in Christ, and revealed to men in the gospel. Therefore our Lord lays the condemnation of the world that perisheth under the gospel, on this (John 3:9). It is not laid on the evil of their deeds: but on this, that their love to their deeds made them hate the light that discovered them, and the grace that only can pardon and heal them. Men perish not under the gospel, because they are sinners against God's law, (though the least sin deserves hell; and they that have not the light of the gospel, are justly judged by the law); but because they believe not in Jesus Christ (John 3:18). And believers in Christ are not saved because they are holy, (though all that believe are holy); but because they are in Christ by faith; that the glory of salvation may be Christ's entirely, and the blame of men's perdition under the gospel may be their own entirely.

Let men therefore prevent this dreadful ruin, by giving an ear to him that calleth them. Christ offers you salvation from a throne of grace: come and take it. Come and put forth your hand, and take and eat of the

tree of life, and live for ever. You must all shortly stand before Christ's throne, when it will be no more a throne of grace: (2 Cor 5:10) We must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ. That will be a time of great need; and none can stand with peace before that throne, but they that have been acquainted with this throne of grace in my text. Christ on the throne of grace, and Christ on the judgment-seat, is the same Christ. Christ in the gospel, and Christ in the clouds, is the same Christ. Yet we must distinguish. Christ on the throne of grace is no judge; and Christ on the judgment-seat hath no grace to dispense. Now is his time of dispensing grace; then will be the day of his punishing the despisers of grace, and of giving the crown of glory to the receivers of his grace.

In the last place, I would give a few directions unto real Christians, in order to your providing of grace to help in time of need. 1. Lay the foundation sure. A time of need will try it, (1 Cor 3:11) Other foundation can no man lay, than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. The Father hath laid Christ for a foundation: (Isa 28:16) Therefore thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation, a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner-stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth, shall not make haste. Applied to Christ (1 Peter 2:6). The faithful ministers of the gospel lay Christ for a foundation; (1 Cor 3:10) According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise master-builder I have laid the foundation. But how can a poor sinner lay Christ for a foundation to himself? Turn but the words, and the question is answered: Thy laying of Christ for a foundation, is thy laying thyself upon Christ for a foundation; and it is neither more nor less, nor any thing else. Cast yourselves, and all your concerns about salvation, on Christ alone. Let him bear all. He only can, and calls for this from you. One of the first questions that ariseth in the mind of a Christian in a time of need, is this: Is the foundation right laid? am I founded on Christ? The storm will try the foundation. It were great wisdom to secure that before the storm come. 2. Clear up your evidences against a time of need. The evidences of a Christian are not his charters for heaven, (the covenant of grace contains them); but they are as light, by which a Christian reads his charters. Evidences are of great use in a time of need. They stand in God's work in us. Our faith stands on God's word of promise to us, and on Christ's work for us; the evidences of believers stand in God's gracious working in, and on, and by them.

These four words I would give about your evidences:

(1.) When you cannot perceive them, search for them: (2 Cor 13:5) Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves: know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates, or disapproved? The exhortation is so delivered, as to persuade us, that very narrow and exact searching is called for in this work. May not that Christian's heart condemn him, who is daily complaining of his ignorance of his state, when he knows that serious self-examination is neglected by him?

(2.) If upon searching you cannot yet find, beg the help of the Spirit of God to discover his own work in you: (1 Cor 2:12) Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God; that we may know the things that are freely given to us of God. The illumination of the Holy Ghost is not only simply needful, to give us a saving knowledge of the mystery of the gospel; but is so also to give us a right knowledge of the mystery of his grace in us (Eph 1:17-19), where the apostle prays for the Spirit, for both these ends. David prays for the Lord's help in his examining of himself (Psa 139:23,24). A heart laid open to God's search, a heart willing to have all in it viewed and discovered by the Lord, is an upright sincere heart. Whoever is willing to know his worst, is not stark naught: yet he that seeth but the least half of his badness, will judge himself to be very bad.

(3.) If you cannot yet find your evidences, make them presently. Many Christians need this advice. They formerly had evidences of their interest in Christ; they had a clear sight of the truth and fruits of their faith, and love, and repentance: this refreshing sight is gone, and they mourn as without the sun, as Job speaks (30:28). Let such take this course. Act afresh that grace, when you are doubtful whether you ever acted it before. See you at present no clear evidences of your former believing? Act faith presently. There are few things more evident, than strong believing is in the very acting of it. And if the acting of faith on Jesus Christ, as speaking in righteousness, and mighty to save (Isa 63:1) be evident to thee, thou hast the best evidence for eternal life that is in all the Bible. Most of the promises run this way. Whosoever believeth on the Son of God, hath everlasting life (John 3:15-17). It is the gracious and wise constitution of the Lord, that no grace can be ordinarily evident to a man in whom it is, so, as in and by the exercise and acting of it.

(4.) When you find evidences of God's work in you, bless the worker and discoverer of them, and believe more and more. Say with David, (Psa 71:14) I will hope continually, and will yet praise thee more and more. It is just with God, and merciful too, that darkness should come upon that man's evidences, who sits down upon them, and blesseth himself in them, more than he doth God for them; and pleaseth himself in a life of sense, with neglecting the life of faith.

3. Make good use of your former experiences of the mercy and grace of God, helping you in former times of need. The Lord's kindness is not shown to us for the present time only, but for the time to come. It is not given to us, to play or please ourselves with at present, but for good and needful uses; for strengthening of our faith, exciting of praise, and directing and encouraging us to come to the same door we were formerly relieved at. It is a part of the work of faith, to look back on formerly-bestowed mercy and grace, as well as to look forward to the greater and better things to come. It is a great sin, but very common, that a believer who hath many years experience of the mercy of God, if there be a stop put to the stream of mercy, he is often as much shaken in his faith, as if he had never tasted that the Lord is gracious.

4. In preparing for a time of need, be careful to keep your consciences clean. There is no worse company in an evil day, than an evil conscience. It is worse company than the devil's. His company is that of a tempter and accuser; but an evil conscience is a judge condemning, and an executioner tormenting a man. Therefore herein excise yourselves, to have a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men (Acts 24:16). It is usually seen, that times of great trials do dart in some light into men's consciences, and do make men look into their hearts and ways more narrowly, and spy small faults that they could not see at other times; for they are days of darkness in one sense, and days of light in another. Study therefore to keep thy conscience clean and pure, by holy and tender walking, and by daily believing; for it is the blood of Christ that only can purge the conscience from dead works to serve the living God (Heb 9:14). And let me assure you of this, (and if you will not believe it, I dare say you will feel it, and feel it the more then, if you believe it not now), that such as make all their care about their consciences to stand in watchfulness about their hearts and ways, and are utterly estranged from believing applications to the blood of Jesus, when an evil day and an evil conscience meet together, (and meet they will), that they will be in a sad and dreadful confusion. And no better will their condition be, who, upon a false pretence (and in this case it is always false) of trusting in Christ, have no care either of their conscience or conversation. The mystery of the faith is to be held (and kept) in a pure conscience (1 Tim 1:19). We should hold faith and a good conscience (1 Tim 3:9). They cannot be got, nor kept, but together. Whoever suffers shipwreck of the one, loseth the other. Christ is the Saviour of sinners; but he is no minister of sin (Gal 2:17). He came into the world to save sinners (1 Tim 1:15): not to save saints; for there are none in it, but of his making: and his making sinners to be saints, is a notable part of his saving (2 Tim 1:9). The inheritance is for them that obtain forgiveness of sins, and who are sanctified by faith in him (Acts 26:18). None are saved but the sanctified; and none are sanctified but by faith in Christ Jesus. There may be in an unbeliever a picture and shadow of holiness: but it is an abomination in the sight of God; whatever the man that hath it, or they that see it, may think of it. A holy unbeliever, or an unholy believer, never was since the world began, nor will be while it lasts.

5. Multiply your addresses to the throne of grace, before the time of need come. Happy were that Christian that could cry as earnestly for that grace that can help him, before the time of need come, as he will see it needful to have it, when that time doth come. But it is the weakness of our minds as men, and of our grace as Christians, that we cannot take up so clear a prospect of things to come; and that they are not so big in our eyes at a distance, as when present. Yet by faith we may foresee times of need; and should pray much for grace to help us when that time comes. Suppose you should, for twenty years together, beg that grace and mercy that you should not have occasion for till those years were expired; would there be any hurt in it?

6. In any special prospect of an approaching time of need, make special addresses to the throne of grace, for grace to help in that time.

Summary

There are two things in these addresses I recommend to you:

(1.) Let them be personal, particular, and secret; our Lord's direction (Matt 6:6). Many Christians find it an easier thing to keep a day of prayer with others, than to spend an hour in prayer in secret by themselves. It were far easier to know a man's frame and state, by his secret dealings with God, (if we were acquainted with them), than by all his professions and duties besides.

(2.) Let these addresses be sometimes solemn and long. There are some mercies not to be got (as some sort of devils are not to be cast out) but by fasting and prayer (Matt 17:21). Secret, personal fasts, I am afraid, are very rare amongst Christians in our days. Christ commands and directs us about them (Matt 6:16-18), as well as about secret prayer (6:6,7). Ministers should not load Christians with work above the strength of their bodies, or minds, or grace. But surely it is but reasonable service required of you, that you should make addresses to the throne of grace, in some suitableness to your need of that grace that is dispensed from it.

There are four things, which if they were the fruit of my speaking and of your hearing so often from this text, we should both have cause to bless the Lord, who teacheth his people to profit (Isa 48:17).

1. If you learn to pray better, and to ply prayer more. David gave himself to prayer (Psa 109:4). The apostles, these extraordinary officers of the primitive church, gave themselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word (Acts 6:4). There are times in which private Christians should give themselves to fasting and prayer (1 Cor 7:5). If you belong to God, he will make you pray: and teach you with briers and thorns, if you will not yield to more gentle methods. How sad is the reflection that riseth in the heart, under some heavy trial, "This is brought on me for my indulged distance and estrangement from God!"

2. If you learn to mind Christ more, and make more use of him in your praying. He is the King on this throne of grace. As much as Christ is out of your minds in praying, so much are you out in praying, and your praying out of that it ought to be. That which we beg, is out of Christ's store. In whose name do we beg it, but in his? for whose sake, but for his? Out of whose hand do we receive what we ask and get, but out of his? It is marvellous, that people should pretend to prayer, and think they pray, who yet forget Jesus Christ, who is all in all, in all right prayer.

3. If you learn to mind and plead more God's free grace in Jesus Christ, in your praying. Free grace is the sensible humble man's plea. He is a proud ignorant person, that seeks or uses any other plea at God's throne of grace. Free grace is the only thing that faith can first lay hold on. It is a plea that any man may use; it is the constant and powerful plea of a wise believer. It answers every case, and suits every prayer; and the lowest case, and the highest prayer, best.

4. If you learn never to leave off improving of Christ, and pleading for grace at this throne of grace, till ye have no more need of grace. And that will never be as long as you live. If any man fall into such a dream, that he has got beyond the need of grace, and so of praying, he is one that never rightly knew himself, nor grace, nor Christ, nor praying. The believer knows he stands in need of Christ and grace; and therefore prays as long as he liveth, as David resolved (Psa 116:2). And when he comes to die, and hath prayed his last prayer, with Stephen, (Acts 7:59) Lord Jesus, receive my spirit, and gets it answered; praying, believing, and the throne of grace itself, as to him, is at an end; and everlasting praises before the throne of glory, of God, and of the Lamb, begin, never to have an end.

"Even so come, Lord Jesus, come quickly. Finish thy work; fulfil all thy promises; answer fully all the prayers of all thy people. Put an end to sin, and time, and trouble, and temptation: and hasten the marriage day, that thy people may be glad and rejoice, and give honour to thee (Rev 19:7). Let the bride be made ready, and let the Bridegroom appear in his wedding-garments of glory. O how blessed will the meeting and the marriage be! He married his bride when on earth, in garments dyed in his own precious blood; and the bride receives him as glorious, even in his bloody raiment. This most precious blood was shed in love to his bride, and for her salvation; and therefore he is amiable to her in that dress. Believers in Christ are contracted to a slain husband; but shall be married to him in a far other manifestation of himself. How great

is the difference betwixt our dearest Lord Jesus, under his cross, and under his crown? And yet, under his cross, he is infinitely amiable to a believer's heart and eye. If it were not that the light of that glorious day of his appearance will prevent all mistakes, the nations of them which are saved (as they are called, for their multitude out of all nations, Rev 21:24) might doubt, (but doubt they cannot; but wonder they will, both at him and at themselves, 2 Thess 1:10), and say, Is this that blessed Saviour I believed on so feebly? whom I trusted with my soul and its salvation, with so much fainting, and with so many fears? Is this he whom I loved so little, and so coldly? Is this he whom (all the time I lived on earth, after he had revealed himself to me), I depended and lived on by faith, and that with so many staggerings through unbelief, because I knew not so well, as now I do, whom I then believed?

“And until this blessed day come, (and come it will; for it is promised and sworn by him who cannot lie. It is not far off; for it is above sixteen hundred years since he testified, Surely I come quickly, Rev 22:20. It is his last promise to his bride), let his most excellent name be poured out as ointment; and let the savour of his knowledge be made manifest in every place. Let his saving blessed death be remembered, gloried in, and fed upon, by all believers: (the greatest token of his love to us, the only price of our redemption, 1 Peter 1:19, and the only fold of our souls). Let his justifying righteousness be only mentioned before God on earth by believing sinners, as it will be only mentioned by glorified praising saints in heaven. Let the throne of grace, reared up by the Father in his Son, and consecrated by the blood of his Son, God manifest in the flesh, be revealed to the darkened world, and set up amongst the blinded nations: and let grace from thence be dispensed to many thousands of perishing sinners. Let the glory of God's free, most free, every way free grace in Jesus Christ, shine so in the nations, as it may (and when that glory shines, it will) darken, confound, and put to shame, all the Antichristian darkness, (and dreams of false Christs of man's making, and of works, hire, and merit, under all their names and pretences), and make it all hateful in sinners eyes, as it is hurtful to their souls, and as it is hateful in God's sight. Let the praises of my Lord and my God, as recovered Thomas calls him (John 20:28), fill heaven and earth; and fill the hearts, and fill the mouths, and shine in the lives of all believers on his name; and let his praise fill all the gospel-worship in all the churches, till the day of the glorious appearing of the great God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ (Titus 2:13). And unto these wisest let every believer on, and sincere lover of Jesus Christ, say (and every one that is such, will say) Amen. So let it be, so will it be.”

