

Psalm 22

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FOURTH DAY.—EVENING PRAYER.

PSALM XXII.

ARGUMENT.

This Psalm, which the church hath appointed to be used on Good Friday, as our Lord uttered the first verse of it when hanging on the cross, consisteth of two parts. The former, 1—21. treateth of the passion; the latter, 22—31. celebrateth the resurrection of Jesus, with its effects. 1—2. He complaineth of being forsaken; 3—6. acknowledgeth the holiness of the Father, and pleadeth the former deliverance of the church; 6—8. describeth his humiliation, with the taunts and reproaches of the Jews; 9—11. expresseth his faith, and prayeth for help; 12—18. particularizeth his sufferings; 19—21. repeateth his supplications; 22—25. declareth his resolution to praise the Father for his deliverance, and exhorteth his church to do the same; 26—31. prophesieth the conversion of the Gentile world to the faith and worship of the true God.

1. *My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? Why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring?*

Christ, the beloved Son of the Father, when hanging on the cross, complained in these words, that he was deprived, for a time, of the divine presence and comforting influence, while he suffered for our sins. If the Master thus underwent

the trial of a spiritual desertion, why doth the disciple think it strange, unless the light of heaven shine continually upon his tabernacle? Let us comfort ourselves, in such circumstances, with the thought, that we are thereby conformed to the image of our dying Lord, that Sun, which set in a cloud, to arise without one.

2. *O my God, I cry in the day time, but thou hearest not; and in the night season, and am not silent.*

Even our Lord himself, as man, prayed, "that if it were possible, the cup might pass from him;" but God had ordained otherwise, for his own glory, and for man's salvation. "Day and night," in prosperity and adversity, living and dying, let us not be "silent," but cry for deliverance: always remembering to add, as Christ did, "Nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done." Nor let any man be impatient for the return of his prayers, since every petition preferred even by the Son of God himself was not granted.

3. *But thou art holy, O thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel.**

Whatever befalleth the members of the church, the Head thereof here teacheth them to confess the justice and holiness of God in all his proceedings; and to acknowledge, that whether he exalteth or humbleth his people, he is to be praised and glorified by them.

4. *Our fathers trusted in thee; they trusted, and thou didst deliver them.*

"Trust" in God is the way to "deliverance;" and the former instances of the divine favour are so many arguments why we should hope for the same; but it may not always be vouchsafed, when we expect it. The patriarchs and Israelites of old were often saved from their enemies: the holy Jesus is left to languish and expire under the malice of his. God knows what is proper for him to do, and for us to suffer; we know neither. This consideration is an anchor for the afflicted soul, sure and steadfast.

5. *They cried unto thee, and were delivered; they trusted in thee, and were not confounded.*

No argument is of more force with God, than that which is founded upon an appeal to his darling attribute of mercy, and to the manifestation of it formerly made to persons in

* Or, perhaps, as Bishop Lowth renders it, "That thou inhabitest ישראל חזקתו."—See "Merrick's Annotations on the Psalms," p. 43

distress ; for which reason it is here repeated, and dwelt upon. They who would obtain grace to help, in time of need, must "cry," as well as "trust." The "prayer of faith" is mighty with God, and (if we may use the expression) overcometh the Omnipotent.

6. *But I am a worm, and no man : a reproach of men, and despised by the people.*

He who spareth all other men, spared not his own Son ; he spared not him, that he might spare them. The Redeemer of the world scrupled not to compare himself, in his state of humiliation, to the lowest reptile which his own hand formed, a "worm," humble, silent, innocent, overlooked, oppressed, and trodden under foot. Let the sight of this reptile teach us humility.

7, 8. *All they that see me, laugh me to scorn : they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, He trusted on the Lord, that he would deliver him : let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him.*

This was literally fulfilled, when Messiah hung upon the cross, and the priests and elders used the very words that had been put into their mouths, by the spirit of prophecy, so long before. Matt. xxvii. 41—43.—"The chief priests mocking him, with the scribes and elders, said, He trusted in God ; let him deliver him now if he will have him."

O the wisdom and foreknowledge of God ! The infatuation and blindness of man ! The same are too often the sentiments of those, who live in times, when the church and her righteous cause, with their advocates, are under the cloud of persecution, and seem to sink beneath the displeasure of the powers of the world. But such do not believe, or do not consider, that, in the Christian economy, death is followed by a resurrection, when it will appear, that God forsaketh not them that are his, but they are preserved for ever.

9, 10. *But thou art he that took me out of the womb ; thou didst make me hope, when I was upon my mother's breasts. I was cast upon thee from the womb : thou art my God from my mother's belly.*

This was eminently the case of Christ, who was the Son of God in a sense, in which no other man ever was. But in him we are all children of God by adoption : we are all in the hands of a gracious Providence from the womb ; and into those hands must we commend ourselves, when about to de-

part hence. To whom else, then, should we have recourse, for support and consolation, in the day of calamity and sorrow? 11. *Be not far from me, for trouble is near: for there is none to help.*

From the foregoing considerations, namely, from the holiness of God, ver. 3. from the salvation vouchsafed to the people of old time, ver. 4, 5. from the low estate to which Messiah was reduced, ver. 6—8. and from the watchful care of the Father over him, since his miraculous birth, ver. 9, 10, from all these considerations, he enforced his petition for help, during his unparalleled sufferings, when “all forsook him, and fled.” Let us treasure up these things in our hearts, against the hour when “trouble shall be near, and there shall be none to help;” when all shall forsake us, but God, our consciences, and our prayers.

12, 13. *Many bulls have compassed me: strong bulls of Bashan have beset me round. They gaped upon me with their mouths, as a ravening and a roaring lion.*

From the 11th verse to the 19th, the sufferings of the holy Jesus are described, in terms partly figurative, and partly literal. A lamb, in the midst of wild “bulls and lions,” is a very lively representation of his meekness and innocence, and of the noise and fury of his implacable enemies. “Bashan” was a fertile country, Numb. xxxii. 4. and the cattle there fed were fat and “strong.”—Deut. xxxii. 14. Like them, the Jews, in that good land, “waxed fat and kicked,” grew proud and rebelled; forsook God “that made them, and lightly esteemed the rock of their salvation.” Let both communities and individuals, when blessed with peace, plenty, and prosperity in the world, take sometimes into consideration this flagrant instance of their being abused; with the final consequence of such abuse.

14, 15. *I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint, or, sundered; my heart is like wax, it is melted in the midst of my bowels. My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws; and thou hast brought me into the dust of death.*

For our sakes, Christ yielded himself like “water,” without resistance, to the violence of his enemies; suffering his “bones,” in which consisteth the strength of the frame, to be distended and dislocated upon the cross; while, by reason of the fire from above, to the burning heat of which this

riking, the nobles and princes of the world should be called in to partake of the feast, and to “worship” God. Rich, as well as poor, are invited;* and the hour is coming, when all the race of Adam, as many as sleep in the “dust” of the earth, unable to raise themselves from thence, quickened and called forth by the voice of the Son of man, must “bow” the knee to King Messiah.

30. *A seed shall serve him; it shall be accounted to the Lord for a generation.*

The apostle informeth us, Rom. ix. 8. that “the children of the promise are counted for the seed;” that is, the converts to be made, among the nations, by the preaching of the gospel, according to the promise of Abraham; these were to constitute the church and family of Christ, the “generation” of the faithful; these were to take the place, and enjoy the privileges of the Jews, cut off because of their unbelief. Lord, enable us to serve thee all our lives with a service acceptable to thee in Christ Jesus; that at the resurrection of the just, we may be numbered in the generation of thy children.

31. *They shall come, and shall declare his righteousness unto a people that shall be born, that he hath done this.*

The promised and expected race shall spring forth at the time appointed, and proclaim the “righteousness,” which is of God by faith, to ages and generations yet unborn; who hearing of that great work, which the Lord shall have wrought for the salvation of men, will thereby be led to glorify him in the church, for the same, to the end of time.

Rise, crown'd with light, imperial Salem, rise!
Exalt thy towering head, and lift thy eyes!
See a long race thy spacious courts adorn;
See future sons and daughters yet unborn,
In crowding ranks, on ev'ry side arise,
Demanding life, impatient for the skies!
See barbarous nations at thy gates attend,
Walk in thy light, and in thy temple bend.—*Messiah.*

* They are “invited,” but they do not so often accept the invitation. And it must be owned, that $\text{יָמָא} \text{עָבַר}$ are generally mentioned in an unfavourable sense. Bishop Lowth is therefore rather inclined to construe the words, as Mr Fenwick does; all who are “fattened,” that is, “fed” and “sustained by the earth.” The expression then intimates the universality of the gospel, which, the apostle says, “was preached to every creature;” a phrase of similar import. All who would partake of the benefits of Christ's passion, must worship him as a Saviour, before they are called upon to adore him as a Judge. The Bishop thinks, likewise, that the 29th verse should end with the words “bow before him;” that the next words in the original should be read, as almost all the ancient versions seem to have read them, $\text{וְיִרְאוּ לֵאלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ}$ —“But my soul shall live—My seed shall serve him,” &c.

tion" of the Gentile Christian Church. The vows of Christ cannot fail of being performed. Happy are they, whom he vouchsafeth to use, as his instruments, in the performance of them.

26. *The meek shall eat and be satisfied: they shall praise the Lord that seek him; your heart shall live for ever.*

A spiritual banquet is prepared in the church for the meek and lowly of heart; the bread of life and the wine of salvation are set forth in the word and sacraments; and they, that hunger and thirst after righteousness, shall be "satisfied" therewith: they, "who seek" the Lord Jesus in his ordinances, ever find reason to "praise him;" while, nourished by these noble and heavenly viands, they live the life, and work the works of grace; proceeding still forward to glory; when their "heart shall live for ever" in heaven.

27. *All the ends of the world shall remember, and turn unto the Lord; and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before thee.*

The great truths of man's creation and fall, with the promise of a Redeemer to come, were "forgotten" by the nations, after their apostasy from the true God, and the one true religion; but were, as we may say, recalled to their "remembrance" by the sermons of the apostles, and the writings of Moses and the prophets, translated, and spread among them. By these they were converted to the faith, and now compose the holy church universal throughout the world; being the glorious proofs and fruits of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

28. *For the kingdom is the Lord's: and he is the governor among all nations.*

There is good reason why the nations should worship Christ, and throw away their idols; since in his hands, not in theirs, is the government of the world. Upon his ascension he was crowned King of kings, and Lord of lords; he ruleth in the church by his Spirit: and blessed are the hearts, that are his willing subjects in the day of his power.

29. *All they that be fat upon the earth shall eat and worship: all they that go down to the dust shall bow before him, and none can keep alive his own soul.*

It was said above, ver. 26. the "meek," the poor, and lowly, "shall eat and be satisfied." It is here foretold, that the "fat ones of the earth," the great, the opulent, the flou-

paschal Lamb was exposed, his heart dissolved and melted away. The intensity of his passion, drying up all the fluids, brought on a thirst, tormenting beyond expression; and, at last, laid him low in the grave. Never, blessed Lord, was love like unto thy love! Never was sorrow like unto thy sorrow! Thy spouse and body mystical, the church, is often, in a degree, conformed unto thee; and as thou wert, so is she in this world.

16. *For dogs have compassed me, the assembly of the wicked have enclosed me; they pierced my hands and my feet.*

Our Lord, who compared himself above, ver. 12. to a lamb in the midst of bulls and lions, here setteth himself forth again under the image of a hart, or hind, roused early in the morning of his mortal life, hunted and chased all the day, and in the evening pulled down to the ground, by those who "compassed" and "enclosed" him, thirsting and clamouring for his blood, crying, "Away with him, away with him! Crucify him, crucify him!" And the next step was, the "piercing his hands and his feet," by nailing them to the cross. How often, O thou preserver of men, in thy church, thy ministers, and thy word, art thou thus compassed, and thus pierced?

17. *I may tell all my bones; they look and stare upon me.*

The skin and flesh were distended, by the posture of the body on the cross, that the bones, as through a thin veil, became visible, and might be counted; * and the holy Jesus, forsaken and stripped, naked and bleeding, was a spectacle to heaven and earth. Look unto him, and be ye saved, all ye ends of the world!

18. *They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture.*

"The soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took his garments, and made four parts, to every soldier a part, and also his coat; now the coat was without seam, woven from the top throughout. They said, therefore, among themselves, Let us not rend it, but cast lots for it, whose it shall be: that the scripture might be fulfilled, which saith—They parted

* "Qui macilentum sunt, sic habent ossa prominentia, ut facile omnia possint tactu secerni et numerari. David, quatenus haec et conveniunt, dicere hoc potuit de se fuga et molestiis emaciato. Sed Christus aptius ita loqui poterat, quod magis emaciatus esset, et corpore nudo atque in cruce distento, magis adparerent ossa."—Le Clerc, cited by Bishop Lowth, in Merrick's Annotations.

my raiment among them, and for my vesture they cast lots.”—John xix. 23, 24.

19. *But be thou not far from me, O Lord; O my strength, haste thee to help me.*

The circumstances of the passion being thus related, Christ resumes the prayer, with which the Psalm begins, and which is repeated, ver. 10, 11. The adversary had emptied his quiver, and spent all the venom of his malice; Messiah, therefore, prayeth for a manifestation of the power and favour of heaven on his side, in a joyful and glorious resurrection. And to a resurrection from the dead every man will find it necessary to look forward for comfort.

20, 21. *Deliver my soul from the sword: my darling* from the power of the dog. Save me from the lion's mouth: for thou hast heard me, or, and hear thou me, from the horns of the unicorns.*

The wrath of God was the “sword,” which took vengeance on all men, in their representative; it was the “flaming sword,” which kept men out of paradise; the sword, to which it was said, at the time of the passion—“Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, saith the Lord of hosts: smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered.”—Zech. xiii. 7. Matt. xxvi. 31. The ravening fury of the “dog,” the “lion,” and the “unicorn,” or “oryx,” a fierce and untameable creature of the stag kind, is made use of to describe the rage of the devil and his instruments, whether spiritual or corporeal. From all these Christ supplicates the Father for deliverance. How great need have we to supplicate for the same through him!

22. *I will declare thy name unto my brethren: in the midst of the congregation will I praise thee.*

The former part of the Psalm we have seen to be prophetic of the passion. The strain now changes to an epimicion, or hymn of triumph, in the mouth of the Redeemer, celebrating his victory, and its happy consequences. This verse is cited by the apostle, Heb. ii. 11.—“Both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one: for which cause He is not ashamed to call them brethren, say-

* Heb. *יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ* my united one. “May it relate to any thing more than *אֱלֹהֵינוּ*? The human nature united with the divinity in the person of Christ? Quære.” Bishop Lowth, in Merrick's Annotations.

ing, I will declare thy name unto my brethren,” &c. And accordingly, when the deliverance, so long wished, and so earnestly prayed for, was accomplished by the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, he “declared the name of God,” by his apostles, to all his “brethren;” and caused the church to resound with incessant praises and hallelujahs; all which are here represented as proceeding from the body, by and through him who is the head of that body.

23.* *Ye that fear the Lord, praise him; all ye the seed of Jacob glorify him; and fear him all ye seed of Israel.*

If Christ arose from the dead, to declare salvation to his brethren, and to glorify God for the same, how diligent ought we to be in doing the former; how delighted in the performance of the latter! Messiah first addresseth himself to his ancient people, “the seed of Jacob,” to whom the gospel was first preached. How long, O Lord, holy and true, shall thy once highly favoured nation continue deaf to this gracious call of thine;—“All ye seed of Jacob glorify him; and fear him all ye seed of Israel.”

24. *For he hath not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted: neither hath he hid his face from him; but when he cried unto him, he heard.*

The great subjects of praise and thanksgiving, in the church, are the sufferings of the lowly and afflicted Jesus, and the acceptance of those sufferings by the Father, as a propitiation for the sins of the world; which acceptance was testified by raising him from the dead; inasmuch as the discharge of the surety proved the payment of the debt. The poor and afflicted brethren of Christ, may take comfort from this verse; for if they suffer in his spirit, they will be raised in his glory.

25. *My praise shall be of thee in the great congregation: I will pay my vows before them that fear him.*

The vow of Christ was, to build and consecrate to Jehovah a spiritual temple, in which the spiritual sacrifices of prayer and praise should be continually offered. This vow he performed, after his resurrection, by the hands of his apostles, and still continueth to perform, by those of his ministers, carrying on the work of edification in “the great congrega-

* Bishop Lowth is of opinion, that this verse and the following are the “song of praise, which, in the verse preceding, the speaker, says, he will utter “in the congregation.” The introduction of it, as his Lordship justly observes, gives a variety to the whole, and is highly poetical.—Merrick's Annotations.