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A SERMON

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SERMON XLI.

THE NATURE OF LOOKING TO CHRIST OPENED AND EXPLAINED.

ISAIAH *xlv.* 22—*Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else.*

IT is the peculiar sin and unhappiness of the Christianized world, that while they profess and speculatively believe Jesus to be the Messiah, the Saviour of sinners: and while they harbour some kind of high esteem for him as a Benefactor that appeared upon earth about 1700 years ago, who should be still remembered with gratitude, yet they are not deeply sensible of that intimate, personal concern which degenerate sinners have with him in every age. They do not make that eager, importunate, affectionate application to him, which his character requires as the Saviour of guilty men. Divine justice indeed was satisfied, the demands of the law were answered by the obedience and sufferings of our divine Redeemer long before we came into existence, and God became reconcilable to a guilty world. But all this alone does not ensure our salvation. Redemption must not only be purchased, but applied; and though it was purchased without our concurrence, yet all mankind, in all ages, are concerned in the application of it. There was no need of the gospel and its ordinances to procure it; but all these are necessary, and therefore appointed for our obtaining an actual interest in it. Hence Christ, as an almighty Saviour, is exhibited, and the blessings of his purchase are offered in the gospel; and all that hear the gracious proposal are invited to entertain this Saviour with suitable dispositions, and to consent to the terms on which these blessings are offered, upon the penalty of everlasting damnation. Our personal consent is required as

much in this age as when the gospel was first published to the world; and it is this which is solicited by all the means of grace; it is to gain your consent to this gracious proposal, that the gospel is still continued among you. It is for this we preach: for this you should hear, and perform every other duty; for this the Lord's supper in particular was instituted, and has been to-day administered among you. It is to melt your hearts, and engage your affections to a dying Saviour, that he is represented both in words and in speaking actions, in all the agonies of Gethsemane, and in all the tortures of Calvary.

But though these affecting means have been used from age to age, yet, alas! they have not had the intended effect upon multitudes. They act like a sick person infatuated with the imagination that the mere grateful remembrance of Galen or Hippocrates, or some other eminent physician of past ages, will be sufficient for his recovery, without following their prescriptions, or making a speedy application to a living physician now; whereas there is as much reason why we in this age should be pricked to the heart, and cry out, *What shall we do to be saved?* as there was for St. Peter's hearers. Acts ii. 37, 38. There is as much reason to exhort unregenerate sinners now to repent and be converted, as there was to exhort the impenitent Jews to it. There is as much cause to direct and persuade men now to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, as the heathen jailer, who had been an infidel. Acts xvi. 31. It is true indeed, when we now exhort men to believe in Christ, we cannot include all the ideas in it, which were included in this exhortation when addressed to infidel Jews and heathens in the apostolic age; for then it included, that they should renounce their former religion, and assent to this important truth, that Jesus is the Messiah, and take upon them the profession of Christianity; and this is rendered in general, I hope, needless in our land, as we have been initiated into this persuasion by our education and other means. But, my brethren, all this is far short of that consent which we must yield to the gospel, if we expect to be saved by it. This faith is not that living faith which we are called to act upon the Redeemer; and we must give him another kind of reception than multitudes do, who thus believe his divine mission, and profess his religion. We must have those affectionate dispositions and vigorous exercises of heart towards him, which become guilty, perishing sinners towards an almighty and gracious Saviour, who deserves and therefore demands our supreme affection, our humble dependence on his merits alone, and our hearty consent to be his servants for ever. We must be brought to believe in him with such a faith as will regulate our practices, and render the whole of our life a series of grateful obedience to him, who is an atoning Priest upon a throne of royal authority, enacting laws and demanding the dutiful submission of his subjects. And therefore, though it is needless to call upon you to believe in the same sense in which this exhortation was addressed to infidels by the apostles; yet there is still room enough to urge you to this duty, only leaving out one ingredient then included, viz., a speculative belief and external profession of the Christian religion, and that Christ is the Messiah. There is still reason to persuade sinners to consent to the terms of life established in the gospel, to renounce all dependence on their own righteousness, and to place their humble confidence in his alone, to acquiesce with the warmest complacency in the method of salvation through grace, and in the meantime to surrender themselves to his government, to obey his will, with the most cheerful willingness, the most ardent devotion, and the humblest ado-

ration: in short, to entertain the great Redeemer with those affections and dispositions which the nature and design of his mediatorial office demand, and which become our condition as guilty, miserable, helpless creatures; all which are included in that faith in Jesus which the gospel enjoins as the grand condition of salvation.

This faith is one of the principal subjects of sacred Scripture, and is expressed in various forms: sometimes in plain terms, but more frequently in metaphors borrowed from earthly things, and particularly from the actions of the body. This method of expressing spiritual objects and intellectual ideas, in terms that originally and properly are applied to the body, is not only common in Scripture, but intermingled in conversation, and authorized by the best authors in all ages and languages. We speak of the eye of the understanding as well as of our bodily eye: and to see an argument, or a meaning, is almost as common a phrase as to see a man or any other material object. The evidence by which the soul forms its determinations is called light, as well as the medium of proper vision. And as the metaphor is here borrowed from the eye, so it is frequently borrowed from the other organs of the body and their actions. This is owing to the penury of the language of mortals, who, as they are most conversant with material objects, and have the earliest and most frequent occasions of receiving or conveying their ideas of them in sound, are habituated to a dialect proper to these things; and, when they would express their ideas of immaterial things, they are obliged to transfer these terms, originally applied to material objects, to express those immaterial things; and there is not only necessity but reason for this, as there is a resemblance between those actions of the body from which these metaphors are borrowed, and those actions of the mind to which they are transferred; yea, it is not only reasonable, but a beautiful and moving method of representing divine things: in this principally consists the beauty of poetry, that it clothes intellectual ideas in lively material images, which make deep impressions on our imaginations.

In such metaphorical terms, as I observed, faith is often represented in sacred Scripture. Sometimes the metaphor is borrowed from the feet; and then to believe is to come to Christ; to come to him as one oppressed with a heavy burden to a person that can relieve, Matt. xi. 28; to come to him as one perishing with thirst, to a fountain of living water, Isaiah lv. 1; Rev. xxii. 17; or as the man-slayer, closely pursued by the avenger of blood, to the city of refuge: hence it is expressed by the most emphatical phrase of *fleeing for refuge*. Heb. vi. 18. Sometimes the metaphor is taken from the conduct of a dutiful and loyal people towards their rightful Sovereign upon his entering among them in his own territories. John i. 11, 12. Sometimes the metaphor is taken from the ears; and faith is expressed by hearing his voice, as an impoverished, dying wretch would hear the offer of plenty and life. Isaiah lv. 3; John v. 25. And sometimes, as in the text, the metaphor is taken from the eyes; and faith is represented as looking to Christ. My present design is,

- I. To explain the duty here expressed by the metaphor of looking.
- II. To urge it upon you by sundry important considerations.

I.

To explain the duty expressed by the metaphor of looking, we are to ob-

serve in general, that a man's looks often discover his condition and the frame of his mind. By virtue of the strange union between the soul and the body, the dispositions of the one are often indicated by the emotions and appearances of the other. The eye, in particular, is a mirror in which we may see the various passions of the mind; and it has a kind of silent, and yet significant language, which conveys to others those inward exercises which the tongue does not, and perhaps cannot express. Hence we can understand a look of surprise and consternation, a look of sorrow and compassion, a look of joy, the look of a perishing supplicant, or of a needy, expecting dependant. If an agonizing patient casts an eager look upon his physician, we understand it to be a silent petition for relief. When a dying husband fixes a wishful, tender look upon his surviving half, or those little other selves, his children, they know the melting language, and feel its resistless energy. And when we see a drowning man casting a wild and eager look towards a boat coming to his relief, we understand it to be the language of earnest importunity for speedy help. Hence it follows, that looking to Christ implies those suitable dispositions and exercises of heart towards him, which are expressed by the earnest and significant looks of persons in a distressed condition towards their deliverer. And in such a case it is natural to conceive a person as expressing by his looks a particular notice and distinct knowledge of his deliverer, an importunate cry for his assistance—a wishful expectation for it—a dependence upon him for it—a universal submission to him—a hearty love and approbation of him—and joy and gratitude for his deliverance. And these dispositions and exercises of mind towards Christ are intended in the text by looking to him.

II.

1. Looking to Christ implies a particular notice and distinct knowledge of him. When we fix an earnest look upon an object, we take particular notice and a distinct survey of it, and so obtain a clear knowledge of it. Thus we are called to fix our intellectual eyes upon Christ, to make him the object of our contemplation, and by these means to obtain the knowledge of him. Mankind are too commonly regardless and ignorant of him. And are not many of you chargeable with this criminal neglect! The blessed Jesus has exhibited himself to your observation in the gospel, but your attention is so engaged by other objects, that you will not allow him an earnest look. He has been set forth evidently crucified before your eyes, but you have, as it were, passed and re-passed careless and unconcerned by his cross. You have had a variety of opportunities and means to be instructed in the glorious mysteries of the gospel; to know the person of the Redeemer as Immanuel, God and man; to know the absolute necessity, the gracious design, and the high degree of his sufferings; to know his sufficiency and willingness to pardon and save believing penitents; and, in a word, to obtain a competent acquaintance with the method of salvation. But you have taken but little or no notice of these things; and consequently remained contentedly ignorant of them. It is equally lamentable and astonishing, that in a land like this, abounding in Bibles and other means of instruction, Christianity should be so little known even by those that profess it. How ridiculous a figure would an artist make that knew nothing of his trade! a school-master that could not spell! or a doctor that knew nothing of physic! And yet men have the impious impudence to call themselves Christians, and

resent it when their profession is pronounced a hypocritical pretence, though they are ignorant of the rudiments of Christianity. You are therefore called in the text to pursue the knowledge of God and Jesus Christ whom he has sent, John xvii. 3, to make this the object of your study; for without it you cannot be saved. It is by the knowledge of him you are justified, Isa. liii. 11 and if you are a people of no understanding, he that formed you will not have mercy on you, Isa. xxvii. 11, but you shall be destroyed through lack of knowledge. Hosea iv. 6. Not that a mere speculative knowledge of Christ will suffice; no, it must not be a look of curiosity and speculation, but you must be affected with the object; your eye must affect your heart; and by beholding the glory of the Lord in the glass of the gospel, you must be changed into the same image, or conformed to him in holiness. 2 Cor. iii. 18. A perishing man is not a mere curious spectator of his deliverer; but he views him with the tenderest passions. So you must look upon Christ. Thus the knowledge of him was attended with supreme affection to him in St. Paul. Phil. iii. 7, 8. But this will be further illustrated under the following particulars.

2. Looking to Christ implies an importunate eagerness for relief from him. See Psalm xxv. 15. If your child were fallen into the hand of a murderer just ready to dispatch him, and should cast a wishful look upon you, while you was running to his deliverance, you would understand it as a silent cry for help. So we are enjoined to look to Christ with the most eager importunity for deliverance from him as our Saviour. And this supposes a deep sense of our need of him. When a guilty creature, that had been involved in the general presumptuous security, is effectually alarmed with just apprehensions of his danger; when he sees his numberless transgressions in all their horrid aggravations, and the dreadful threatenings of the law in full force, and ready to be executed against him: in short, when he sees himself ripe for ruin, and ready every moment to sink into it, with what importunate cries will he betake himself to him for relief! Behold he prayeth! now he is often on his knees before God in secret, as well as in social prayer; and in the intervals between his prayers, he is often looking to the hills from whence cometh his aid, Psa. cxxi. 1, and waftin up many an importunate cry to heaven. Sometimes he sinks into an abyss of sorrow, and is overwhelmed with boisterous waves of fears, so that, with Jonah, he is ready to cry out, *I am cast out of thy sight, O LORD*; yet with him he says, *I will look again towards thy holy temple*. Jonah ii. 4. Happy the souls that are thus looking to Jesus, who is lifted up for the recovery of a dying world, as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness! John iii. 14. And happy we, should this spirit of pious importunity prevail among us, and banish that spirit of deep sleep which seems poured out upon us! Then would prayer be our employ, not only when we observed the returns of stated prayer in secret, in our families, and in our public assemblies, but our souls would be always in a supplicating posture; every wish, every groan would be a cry for mercy: and then might we expect to obtain the blessings we need; and the aspect of our religious affairs would be happily altered among us. To this duty the text invites us; and oh that we may consult our own interest, as well as regard the authority of God, so far, as to seek the Lord while he may be found, and call upon him while he is near! Isaiah lv. 6.

3. Looking to Christ implies a wishful expectation of deliverance from him. See Psalm lxix. 3. It may be illustrated by the history of the lame beggar, in Acts iii. 4, 5. He begged an alms of the apostles Peter and John; they do not

immediately relieve him, but give him some ground of encouraging expectation by taking particular notice of him and telling him to fix his eyes upon them. Thereupon the anxious cripple gives heed to them, and wishfully looks upon them, expecting to receive something of them. So a poor sinner, amidst all his anxious fears and despondencies, approaches the throne of grace, and begs for mercy. The Lord Jesus, though his bowels are yearning over him, does not give him immediate relief; he puts him off for a while, as he did the Syrophenician, that he may give occasion for him to plead with the more importunity, and more suitably prize the blessings when obtained. Yet, in this melancholy interval, he does not leave him quite hopeless. The invitations of the gospel cry, "Look on me;" and the poor sinner lifts up the eyes of wishful expectation to receive something. "Who knows, but that sovereign and unbounded grace, which has relieved thousands, may also listen to my cries? Blessed Jesus! may I not indulge some trembling hope that thou wilt at length grant me deliverance? Thy free, thine indefinite invitations and absolute promises give me some ground of pleasing expectation; and oh! shall it be frustrated? No, let me trust in thee for the gracious accomplishment." Such are the soliloquies of such an anxious soul. And though we might be all left in remediless despair, yet, blessed be God, we have encouragement to look to Jesus with humble, joyful hope; and it is to this the text exhorts us.

4. Looking to Jesus implies a humble dependence upon him for salvation. This supposes that we are deeply sensible of our own utter inability to relieve ourselves; and when we are convinced of this, we shall immediately look to another; when we see no ground at all for self-confidence, we shall place our trust in Jesus alone. It was such a look as this that good Jehoshaphat raised to heaven: *We have no might against this great company, neither know we what to do; but our eyes are upon thee.* 2 Chron. xx. 12. So Micah, finding no room for human confidence, resolves, *Therefore I will look unto the Lord.* Micah vii. 7. Thus a humble sinner, sensible of his utter inability, resolves to venture upon Christ, *to trust in him, though he should slay him.* Job xiii. 15. And in those happy moments when the sinner has some glimmering hopes of acceptance, with what pleasure and satisfaction does he rest upon this eternal rock! and how happy we, should we be engaged this day to place our humble dependence there! It is to this the text calls us.

5. Looking to Christ means a universal, cheerful submission to his authority. We must consent to be his servants for ever, and wait all the intimations of his will to obey them. We must look and observe the motion of his hand pointing out to us the way of duty. We must look as a servant upon his master, eager to receive his orders. So the phrase seems used in Psalm cxxiii. 1, 2. *Unto thee I left up mine eyes, oh thou that dwellest in the heavens. Behold, as the eyes of servants look unto the hand of their masters, and as the eyes of a maiden unto the hand of her mistress, so our eyes wait upon the Lord.*" Thus, whoever trusts in Jesus with a saving faith, surrenders himself to an unlimited obedience to all his commandments; and to this the text invites us.

6. Looking to Christ implies a hearty approbation of him as a Saviour, and supreme affection to him. Love is often expressed by looks; and when we look affectionately upon an object, it evidences that we are pleased with the survey. So a perishing world is commanded to acquiesce in the method of salvation, through Christ, to love him above all, and to take the fullest and noblest com-

placence to him; and upon their so doing, they are assured of salvation. We have indeed been influenced by education and the like means to entertain a general good esteem of Christ; but, alas! this is very far short of that endearing affection and hearty complacence which he claims and deserves. Our hearts must be engaged to him; he must be the chief among ten thousand in our eyes. Our thoughts and passions must often ascend to him, and we must rest in him with complacence, as containing all our salvation and all our desire. 2 Sam. xxiii. 5.

7. And lastly, Looking to Christ implies joy and gratitude for his delivering goodness. The passions of joy and gratitude are easily discovered by the looks; and therefore are intended by this phrase, *look unto me*. And this is not only the duty, but the delightful inclination of one that has been relieved by him from the horrors of a guilty conscience, and the dreadful displeasure of God. Joy is in itself a pleasing passion, and we delight to indulge it: and to a heart that has just felt the mercy of deliverance from everlasting destruction, thanksgiving is a most grateful and pleasing employ; and, in this, much of the happiness of heaven consists.

From this view of the duty intended by looking to Jesus, take occasion, my brethren, to examine, whether ever you have complied with it; for it is a matter of infinite importance, as your eternal state depends upon it. *He that hath the Son, hath life, and he that hath not the Son of God, hath not life*, 1 John v. 12.