

Ettrick, May 4. 1707.

[First Sabbath after my Admission.]

THE LORD'S HELPING HIS PEOPLE.

SERMON VI.

1 SAMUEL vii. 12.

Then Samuel took a stone, and set it between Mizpeh and Shen, and called the name of it Ebenezer, saying, Hitherto hath the Lord helped us.

IF we look back to the former chapter, we find Israel brought to a very low state. By the sword of the Philistines, chap. iv. 10, thirty thousand footmen were slain; and by the sword of the Lord, chap. vi 19, "Fifty thousand and threescore and ten men were smitten." After this the ark was brought to Kirjath-jearim, a city of the Levites in the tribe of Judah. There it remained till David brought it up, 2 Samuel. vi. Psal. cxxxii. Only it was twenty years there, ere the children of Israel lamented after the Lord, chap. vii. 2. Now Israel was in a great strait; the Philistines were strong and could not be resisted; God angry and would not be entreated; they lamented after him but found him not. In this sad case Samuel adviseth them to deep humiliation and a complete reformation, vers. 3—5. They fall in with his advice in some measure, vers. 4—6. They gather for humiliation and fasting in Mizpeh, a city on the borders of Benjamin and Judah, lying in the heart of the country, and so proper for such a meeting. The Philistines are alarmed at this, looking upon it as a rendezvous of rebellion, and so bring an army against Israel. It is well they were found at their duty, which was a good pledge of the Lord's help. While Samuel is sacrificing and praying, the Philistines draw near to battle, and God himself takes the cause in hand, thunders against the enemy, so that Israel had nothing more to do but to pursue, ver. 10, 11.

The text gives us an account of the setting up of a monument of this great victory and glorious deliverance. The monument itself is a stone set up. A stone is a most durable substance, and very proper to perpetuate the memory of this glorious victory. The person who set it up was Samuel, that is, it was set up by his order and direction. He was their Prophet and their Judge. By his

means especially was the victory procured; and he is careful to set up this monument of thankfulness. The place where it was set up was between Mizpeh and Shen, a rock over against Mizpeh. It is set up there where they got the deliverance and near to the place where they prayed for it. We have also the name which was put upon the monument, Ebenezer. We read of it before, chap. iv. 1. The place is called in the history, Ebenezer, by way of anticipation. In that very place they got a sore disaster before, but now a signal deliverance. Ebenezer, that is, the stone of help, including a respect to God, and bearing not only a remembrance of the victory, but that it was obtained not by them but by the Lord.

We have the reason of the name. Hitherto hath the Lord helped us. It is a grateful acknowledgment of the Lord's help for the time past, to raise their confidence in him for the time to come. He hath helped us, and shewn himself on our side; not only helped us to bear our burdens, but he hath taken them off our shoulders and wrought for us.

DOCTRINE—It is the duty of the Lord's people to keep the memorial of the experience which they have of the Lord's helping them. I shall discuss this point under two general heads.

I. I shall speak of the Lord's helping his people.

II. I will speak to the keeping up of the memorial of the experiences which they had of his helping them. I am then,

I. To speak of the Lord's helping his people. Here I shall answer two questions. 1. How doth the Lord help his people; and, 2. Why doth he help his people?

First, How doth the Lord help his people? Here I reply,

1. Sometimes the Lord helps his people, by working all for them, they themselves contributing nothing to their deliverance. Moses said unto the people, "Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord, which he will shew you to-day; for the Egyptians whom ye have seen to-day, ye shall see them again no more for ever. The Lord shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace." Many times the children of God may be brought to that, that they can do nothing for themselves, but commit their cause to God, and depend upon him, but even then their case is not despair. "Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass," Psal. cxlii. 4—7. Thy Lord can do all things, said Luther to a person solicitous about a future event.

2. Sometimes the Lord assists his people in working. They endeavour their own deliverance in God's way, and he fits them to act, and bleaseth their exertions crowning them with success. Like

Paul, "they labour, yet not they, but the grace of God who is with them." In this God's help is to be acknowledged, for all depends on him. "For except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it." We must be at our work, and look to God for his assistance. Pray and labour.

3. Sometimes God helps his people by appointing means. Thus in the case of Hezekiah, Isaiah said, "Let them take a lump of figs, and lay it for a plaster upon the boil, and he shall recover." When God intends to help his people and to make use of means and instruments for it, he can easily bring them about and raise them up. Sometimes no way appears for their help, but the Lord brings them about unexpectedly, so that "when the Lord turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream." If he intends to have his people brought out of Babylon, he raiseth up Cyrus for that purpose. If Elijah must be fed in his hiding place, the ravens shall be employed rather than he suffer want. And often their help comes by such unexpected means that they must say as Jacob did of his son's venison. "How is it that thou hast found it so quickly, my son? And he said, because the Lord thy God brought it unto me."

4. Sometimes without means. "Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts. God is not bound to means, as he can work without them. A word from the Lord will bring about his people's help. He can speak peace to them, and so create it. And often when he hath tried his people's patience, by frustrating of means, he will bring about their help without them.

5. Sometimes by contrary means, as our Lord cured the blind man by laying clay upon his eyes. God does not only bring light after, but out of darkness. The troubling of the waters of Bethesda made them healing waters; and the whale that swallowed up Jonah was the ship in which he came ashore. Christ's going away filled the disciples' hearts with sorrow. "Nevertheless," said he, "I tell you the truth, it is expedient for you that I go away; for if I go not away, the comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you." The promise guides the ship of providence, and will make a cross wind drive them to the harbour. "Out of the eater came forth meat, and out of the strong came forth sweetness. For all things shall work together for good to them that love God, and are the called according to his purpose."

Secondly, Let us inquire why the Lord helpeth his people.

1. Because they are in covenant with him. There is a league offensive and defensive betwixt Christ and his people. They have common friends, and common enemies. Hence all the attributes of God are engaged for them, and their help. The promise is made;

He shall call upon me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him and honour him. Thus the power of God is made the ground of Abraham's comfort by virtue of the covenant, Gen. xvii. 1, 2.

2. Because of their special relation to him. Christ is the believer's head. Hence if the foot be hurt, the head in heaven cries out, Acts ix. 4. He who is their maker, is their husband, their father, and elder brother; in a word they are one with him, one spirit. This is the ground of sympathy betwixt Christ and his people, and secures their help. "For he that toucheth them toucheth the apple of his eye."

3. Because they look to him and trust in him for their help. The 91st psalm has in it a great many blessed promises, but see to whom they belong. "The Lord is a buckler to all those that trust in him." The Lord gives this for the reason why he would help and deliver Ebedmelech the Ethiopian; "because thou hast put thy trust in me, saith the Lord."

It lies upon the honour of God to help those who trust in him. Trust on an ingenuous man will engage him to answer the trust put in him; and God will see to those that trust in him, that they shall not be ashamed.

4. Because the Lord brings his people into straits for this very end, that he may have the glory of helping them; and they may get the greater experience of his kindness. A good friend is best known in adversity: and the Lord will let his people's case grow darker till it be near past hope, and then he will arise. "For the Lord shall judge his people, and repent himself for his servants, when he seeth that their power is gone, and there is none shut up, or left." For the lower they are, the greater is the glory of God in delivering them. "For great is thy mercy toward me, saith David, and thou hast delivered my soul from the lowest hell." And none have such rich experience of the Lord's goodness as they that are most in straits, Hos. ii. 14. We now proceed,

III. To speak of the keeping up of the memorial of the experiences which they have had of the Lord's helping them. Here three things demand our attention. *First*, What it is to keep up this memorial. *Secondly*, What of these experiences of the Lord's helping should be recorded and kept in memory. And, *Thirdly*, why should we keep up such a memorial.

First, What it is to keep up the memorial of the Lord's helping us.

1. It implies an observing of the dispensations we meet with, for our help in the course of our life. If the thing itself be not ob-

served, we cannot keep up the memorial of it. "Who is wise and will observe these things, even they shall understand the loving kindness of the Lord." Many times the Lord helps, when we are sleeping and do not observe it. And this makes us like the unjust steward in recounting our mercies, setting down fifty for a hundred.

2. A discerning of the Lord's hand in the help we receive. Alas! men are ready to sacrifice to their own net, and burn incense to their drag: it requires wisdom to see the hand of the Lord in the good things we meet with. "For she did not know, saith the Lord, that I gave her corn, and wine, and oil, and multiplied her silver and gold, which they prepared for Baal."

3. Laying up these experiences and recording them, if not in a book yet in a faithful memory. "And all they that heard them, (the things said of John Baptist at his birth) laid them up in their hearts, saying, what manner of child shall this be! And the hand of the Lord was with him." Many instead of laying such things up, lay them down in the grave of forgetfulness, and instead of setting up a stone, lay a stone upon them, burying them out of sight. They forget that God remembered them in their low estate. "My people," says God, "have forgotten me, days without number." But if these experiences were carefully laid up, the former part of our life would help the latter, and the longer we live the richer we would grow. As in wars former success encourages to future exertions, so is it with the Christian warfare. "Thy servant," said David, "slew both the lion and the bear; and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be as one of them, seeing he hath defied the armies of the living God." Let us,

Secondly, Inquire what of these experiences of the Lord's helping should be recorded and kept in memory.

1. We should record the timing or seasonableness of them. There is often a weight lies on this very circumstance; that the help came at such a time and not another is worthy to be remembered. Many instances of this kind occur in scripture, Gen. xxv. 45; Judges vii. 13. The church remembers the time of her deliverance, Ps. cxxvi. 1. The Lord's help comes always seasonably, though not at our time, yet at his time which is the best. This will let us see the frame of spirit in which the help did overtake us, sometimes when we were looking for it, sometimes when we were not.

2. The effects of them on our spirits. How we are affected with them when they come. "Then," says the church, "was our mouth filled with laughter and our tongue with singing." Many times the Lord helps his people in such a manner that the experience of his goodness fills them with shame, looks their doubts and fears out of

countenance, proves their unbelief to be a false prophet, and makes them resolve never to distrust God again and fills them with thankfulness. Isaiah xxxviii. 10, 12 ; Psal. lxxiii. 22, 23; and cxvi. 11, 12. O how useful would this be afterwards to the Christian.

3. Their harmony and agreement with the promise. If help come not by virtue of a promise, little use can be made of it this way, and for want of recording this, many of the Lord's people do often question their experiences. Experiences are the bread which the saints have to feed upon in their mournful hours ; but the promise is the staff and stay of this bread without which there will be no nourishment in it. Now as face answereth to face in a glass, so God's works answer his words. As we have heard, so have we seen in the city of the Lord of Hosts. Thus David records his experience, saying, "Thou hast dealt well with thy servant, O Lord, according to thy word. The promises in the Bible are all written over in the experiences of the saints. "There failed not ought, said Joshua, of any good thing which the Lord had spoken unto the house of Israel ; all came to pass."

4. Their agreement with their prayers. Gen. xxiv. 45. What are the Christian's experiences but returns of prayers. Such was that in the text. This seems to be the ground of that conclusion ; "By this I know that thou favourest me, because mine enemy doth not triumph over me." It is of great importance to notice this, for a mercy that is an answer of prayer is a double mercy ; and mercies are certainly obtained by prayer, are enjoyed with thankfulness, as in the text. Only there is need of wisdom here, for sometimes God answers prayer not with the blessing itself that was desired but with as good : as instead of removing Paul's thorn in the flesh, he said to him, "my grace is sufficient for thee:" and sometimes experiences of the Lord's helping us with our expression in prayer, though not with the pressure of our own spirits, Rom. viii. 26, 27.

Lastly, Even the very place of our experiences should be recorded. The stone was set up where the victory was obtained. There are some golden spots on earth, where the Lord has entertained his people, whereof the very remembrance hath been refreshing to them afterwards. "I will remember thee," says David, "from the land of Jordan and of the Hermonites, from the hill Mizar;" Gen. xxviii. 11—19. And the Lord loves to have his people remember these blessed places, Gen. xxxi. 13; and xxxv. 1. Let us now,

Thirdly, Inquire why we should keep up the memorial of these things.

1. We owe this to God : In point, of obedience, when we meet

with experiences of his goodness he calls us to set up our Ebenezer. "We are to remember his marvellous works that he hath done, his wonders, and the judgments of his month." It is very grieving to the Spirit of God to let these things slip; and God complains of his people for it, Jer. ii. 81, 32. We owe it to him in point of gratitude; acknowledgment, and the remembrance of the benefit, is the tribute we owe to God for his goodness. They called the stone Ebenezer; thereby to make acknowledgment that it was not they that got the victory, but God for them. O monstrous ingratitude to forget experiences.

We owe it to him also, in point of compliance with his design in giving experience of his help to his people. God intends his people more comfort by a mercy, than the mercy itself singly considered. He intends it as a ground to hope for more. He gives the valley of Achor for a door of hope. But how can they comply with this design unless they remember them. "Thou brakest, says Asaph, the head of the leviathan in pieces, and gavest him to be meat to the people inhabiting the wilderness." The heads of the leviathan are the princes of Pharaoh. God in that help which he gave to his people at the Red Sea, would have them not only feast themselves on it for the present, but carefully lay it up in their memories, that their faith might not want support in the wilderness.

2. We owe this to ourselves in point of interest: If we would consult our own advantage, we would not let them slip. For former experiences of the Lord's help are very supporting to the soul in a dark night. Sometimes a Christian's spiritual rest is broken, then it is useful to read the records of his experiences. Sometimes a little writing is found in a man's study that saves his estate and keeps him out of prison. In such times "we should remember the years of the right hand of the most high." This may revive our hopes.

These experiences are pledges of further mercies. Some promises have their day of payment here, others after this life. The performing of the former, is an earnest given to faith to look for the other. "Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterwards receive me to glory." Every mercy a child of God receives, may be called Joseph, for the Lord shall add another to it. It is not so with others, and the two reasons shall be found in these words: "O continue thy loving-kindness to them that know thee, and thy righteousness to the upright in heart." The mercies bestowed on the Lord's people flow from solid love, and love knows not an enemy. The son abides in the house, the servant goes away at the term. The saint's mercies are made over to him by promise. It is

remarkable, 2 Sam. v. 12, that David gathers his establishment in the kingdom, by his prospering to that time. Saul too prospered at first, but was not established; the reason was, David's establishment was a special promise. The word of promise gives not only bread to the eater, but seed to the sower. These experiences then, are good arguments in prayer. We find the saints often pleading with God upon former experience. "Thy vows are upon me, O God: I will render praises unto thee. For thou hast delivered my soul from death." It is not the way to plead with men, but it is a notable way to plead with God, for he is unchangeable, "whom he loves, he loves to the end."

3. We owe this to others. It is a duty to communicate our experiences of the Lord's goodness to our fellow Christians. "Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what he hath done for my soul." But how can we do this, unless we record them, and keep up the memory of them. It must be very encouraging to distressed Christians, to hear that others have been plunged in the same or similar depths, and yet have been delivered. "For this shall every one that is godly pray unto thee, in a time when thou mayest be found: surely in the floods of great waters, they shall not come nigh unto him."

USE 1. To Christians, whose work it is to look to the Lord for his help, being sensible of their own weakness. We say to you,

1. Record your experiences, keep up the memory of them. It is a soul enriching trade to gather experiences. It makes a strong Christian. It makes one ready to suffer for Christ, and to venture for him.

2. Improve your experiences for strengthening your faith and hope for time to come, in the promises of God. And to help you to this, take these notes. The same God that helped thee formerly still lives: His arm and power are as strong as ever. Doubting of the Lord's willingness to help, is a sad leak, but the ship will never sink, till faith let go its hold of the power of God.

Though awful distempers break out in the people of God in time of affliction, yet he will still perform his word to them. He will save his people notwithstanding, Psal. cxvi. 11, 12. If it were not so, we could not have been out of hell till this time. The Psalmist makes this a ground of hope to others. Psal. xxxi. 22—24. If thou be a Christian, God hath delivered thee from greater straits than any in which thou now art. "He hath delivered your soul from death." OBJECTION, But though God deliver in one, yet he lets a man fall in another strait. ANSWER, Even affliction itself, a valley of Achor, may be a door of hope, a door by which a great mercy

may enter; so was Joseph's prison, and Daniel's den. A debt may be paid either with money, or something equal in value. If God do not take away the trouble, but give strength to bear it; if he remove not sickness, but remove the sick saint to heaven, he is no loser.

USE 2. A word to all. Go to God for your help in all cases. Let God be your helper. Consider,

1. You have many and strong enemies. You are not able to grapple with Satan, the world, and the flesh. These will ruin thee, if God help thee not.

2. He is a present help. He is not far off. He is within hearing of your cry. Men may perish when help is far away.

3. He is willing.

4. He is able to help thee in all cases, and at all times. When friends can do nothing but close the eyes, and prepare the funeral rites, Christ can take thy soul to his Father's glory, and present it there with exceeding joy. Amen.

Swinton, July 28, 1706, Sermon after the Action.

MOURNING THE ABSENCE OF CHRIST.

SERMON VII.

LAMENTATIONS iii. 49, 50.

Mine eye trickleth down, and ceaseth not, without any intermission, till the Lord look down and behold from heaven.

WONDER not, that upon this occasion, we have read a mournful text to you; for I suppose if every one of us were taking liberty to express the affections and present frame of our hearts, it would be as Ezra iii. 12, 13, "when some wept with a loud voice, and many shouted aloud for joy: so that the people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy, from the noise of the weeping of the people." So among us, some would weep, and some rejoice; and in the meantime, others would stand as unconcerned spectators, who have not found Christ, and therefore cannot rejoice; and do not feel the want of him, and therefore cannot lament after him. Yea, perhaps, some would be found, who with one eye would look joyfully, because they have got so much; and with the other weep, because they have not got more. But alas! it is the misery of many that they are too soon