



Fire and Ice Sermon Series

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A Practical Exposition Upon The Fifty-Third Chapter Of Isaiah.

by Thomas Manton

THE SECOND VERSE.

For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness: and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him.

I AM now to make entrance upon the cause and ground of the Jews' unbelief, namely, Christ's meanness and sufferings. His meanness is described:—

1. In regard of his birth.

2. In regard of his manner of life, and outward appearance in the world, which are the two things the prophet prosecutes in divers expressions. I shall take notice of them in this and the following verses.

My method shall be:—

1. To open the phrases to you as they lie in the order of the words.

2. To apply them to Jesus Christ, and to give you some helps for your meditation.

3. Because Christ's life holdeth forth much matter of observation for the guiding of our lives, I shall give some more general and practical points, that so what is said of Christ may be useful for us.

First, For the phrases, and these respect:—

First, His birth and original; and here three expressions are to be explained.

1. *He shall grow up as a tender plant.* What is meant by that?

The Septuagint (because the word for *tender plant* signifieth also a *sucker*) have translated it **wVpaidion**. We have spoken of him as a sucking child. But I conceive it is not put here to signify the infancy of Christ, so much as the low and mean manner of the original that he would take upon himself. He would be as a tender plant, not as a tall tree full of limbs and branches. For it is usual in scripture to set forth the several conditions of men by trees and plants: thus Nebuchadnezzar's greatness and strength are represented, Dan. 4:21,22, by the tree whose leaves were fair, whose fruits were much, and the branches thereof reaching to heaven and shading the earth. So the Psalmist describes the wicked's prosperity, Ps. 37:35, 'I have seen the wicked great in power, and spreading himself like a green bay-tree.' And on the contrary, misery is expressed by the heath in the desert, a low mean shrub, Jer. 17:6. So here, Christ's meanness and poverty are held forth by a tender plant, newly sprouted forth, and come up above the earth, which a man would tread upon rather than cherish. And indeed it is observable that Christ is often represented by the expression of a tender plant, or as a branch: thus Isa. 11:1, 'There shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots.' I shall touch upon it again. So it is said, Zech. 3:8, 'I will bring forth my servant the branch.' So chap. 6:12, 'The man whose name is The Branch.' Jer. 23:5, 'Behold the days shall come that I will raise unto David the righteous branch;' Jer. 33:15, 'Behold, I will cause the branch of righteousness to grow up unto David.' And I conceive this expression holdeth forth two things:—

[1] Christ's present meanness, what he was in the world's eye, which was no more than a branch or twig.

[2] His future glory. He should be a tree: Ezek. 17:22-24, Thus saith the Lord, I will also take of the highest branch of the high cedar, and I will crop off from the top of his young twigs 'a tender one, and will plant it upon an high mountain and eminent; and it shall bring forth boughs, and bear fair fruit, and become a goodly cedar; and under it shall dwell all fowl of every wing; in the shadow of the branches thereof shall they dwell.' Thus it was a tender plant, yet such a one as might become a spacious and goodly tree.

2. *A root out of a dry ground*; that is, not only a tender branch, but a branch that hath little verdure and freshness. But why a root? And why out of a dry ground? The root does not come up, but the branches. I may answer—*Root* is put figuratively, the cause for the effect, the root for the sprigs; or else to denote the dryness of the branch; it was not fresh and green: even like a root, or like heath in the wilderness, which is a branch and root too. Or more properly it may be to show that Christ is such a branch as that he is a root likewise. And I the rather take notice of this, because the scripture doth so: Rev. 5:5, 'The Lion of the

tribe of Judah, the root of David, hath prevailed to open the book;' and chap. 22:16, 'I am the root and offspring of David.' Mark, not the branch, but the root. Christ was David's son and David's Lord, Mat. 22:45, yet 'a root out of a dry ground.' Some triflers understand by this is meant the womb of the virgin; but it is rather the dead and withered stock of David's house. For though that family was obscure, and all the glorious branches cut off to the very stump, yet even then shall sprout out the last and greatest ornament of it, like a root out of a dry ground. Therefore it is observable it is said, Isa. 11:1, 'A rod shall come out of the stem of Jesse, and a branch out of his roots.' He doth not say, out of the stem of David, who was the first king and honour of that family, but Jesse, whose name was more obscure, implying that at this time this house should be reduced to its first meanness, or that it should not be the house of David so much as the house of Jesse. Out of his decayed roots should spring up this tender branch.

3. *Before him*. Whom? Some say himself, for so they say the Hebrew word is to be understood. As if the sense were, if you look to the state and presence of the person himself. But I shall pass by that, and take notice but of two persons to whom this *him* may be referred; for the scriptures have this privilege, to abound in senses.

[1.] *Him*, that is, the Lord, for so may it be referred. He was but lately spoken of, ver. 1, 'The arm of the Lord;' and then it is added, 'Before him shall grow up a tender plant.' Though he was so mean, yet God saw it, and permitted it, because he had appointed it. It was not by chance, and because it could be no better, but by God's special decree and appointment. Before the Lord he shall rise up a tender plant.

[2.] *Before him*; that is, before the party that believes not the report: ver. 1, 'Who hath believed,' &c.—because before him Christ riseth up in such a mean manner. By this *him* must be meant the unbelieving Jews of whom he spake. Reason cannot expect that the Messiah should lie hid under so mean a shape. They will be offended in Christ's meanness, as I shall touch by and by. Thus for the phrases of Christ's original.

Secondly, For the phrases now that belong to the outward state and appearance of his life. Christ hath not in him proportion and beauty, which are the objects allurable to men. We love things for the orderly disposition of parts or colours; the one is called *form* or *comeliness*, the other *beauty*. So that Christ's mean appearance is described two ways:—

1. By the removal of excellency.

2. By the restraint of affection.

1. As to the removal of excellency. And therein—

[1.] No proportion, no form nor comeliness is found in him. Then—

[2.] As to beauty, there was no fitness of colour. These things are not put here literally, to deny there was any individual or personal beauty in Christ; for I believe that he was not of a monstrous and misshapen body, but well compacted and well coloured,—though I doubt not but there have been a great many fictions about the body of Christ, particularly what Lentulus says in his letters concerning the amiableness of Christ's countenance, that he was of so fair a face, and yet of so majestic an eye, that all that beheld him were enforced to love and fear him. Nicephorus likewise said that Mary Magdalen, who was at first a common strumpet, was drawn to hear Christ upon a report of the comeliness of his person, and afterwards won by the efficacy of his doctrine. No doubt he had a comely, well-featured, healthy body. But this is not spoken of so much as his outward port and presence to the world. He did not come with such pomp and glory as they imagined was suitable to the majesty of the Messiah. They thought he should have come in a royal way, with a great deal of outward pomp and splendour, that so all the world might have admired the great Redeemer of the Jews.

But how can it be said of Christ that he had neither comeliness nor beauty, since it is said, Pa. 45:2, that 'he is fairer than the children of men,' or 'than the sons of Adam'? And in Cant. 5:10-16, he is described by the spouse to be well-coloured, 'My beloved is white and ruddy, the chiefest of ten thousand;' and likewise well-featured, as she goeth on from part to part, from head to feet; and then concludeth, 'He is altogether lovely.'

To this I answer:—

(1.) It is one thing what Christ is to the spouse, another what he is to the unbelieving Jews. Christ's beauties are inward, seen of none but those that are inwardly acquainted with him. The spouse speaketh of him in a spiritual sense. Here he is spoken of in respect of his outward habitude in the world.

(2.) We must distinguish between Christ's humiliation and exaltation, his Godhead and his manhood. In his Godhead; so he is 'the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person,' Heb. 1:3, and consequently full of beauty. In his humiliation; so he is not only a man, but a mean man: Phil. 1:9, 'He made himself of no reputation.'

(3.) In Christ's humiliation we must distinguish as to what he is in himself and as to what he is in the eye of the world. In Christ's manhood he did not appear in the form of God. It is said, Phil. 2:7, 'He took upon him the form of a servant;' yet he did not lay aside his Godhead: that appeared too sometimes in the power of his doctrine and miracles; but the world saw no form in him, none of the form of the Godhead in him. Then—

2. As to the phrase that implieth restraint of affection, 'why we should desire him.' But you will say, How then is Christ said to be the desire of all nations, as we read, Hag. 2:7, 'I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come'?

I answer—

[1.] Though he is not actually desired, yet he is nevertheless worthy of esteem and affection. Pearls do not lose their worth though swine trample upon them. It is the world only that is offended at his meanness, and saith, 'There is no beauty in him wherefore we should desire him.' But—

[2.] You judge by the eye and appearance. Now a carnal heart can see no excellency in Christ; and when you see him, if you trust to your sight merely, you will not desire him. Thus you have the meaning of the words. Now—

Secondly, To accommodate this prophecy to Christ, and show you how it agreeth to him, that so his love may be displayed and held forth to your meditations, that he should submit himself to such meanness for your sakes. Wherefore I desire that you would with me observe these few things. And first from the causal particle: '*For* he shall grow up as a tender plant.' He gives a reason why so few believed the report.

The point therefore is this:—

Doct. 1. That Christ's meanness, and want of outward pomp and splendour, is the great prejudice against the entertainment of him and the things of his kingdom.

In handling this point I shall treat of his meanness both in his life and doctrine.

First, As to his meanness in his manner of revealing himself to the world. Because the beginnings of his kingdom were weak, the world rejected it. I will prove this by a reason or two.

1. Because we have no light to see any excellency in other things but what are outwardly glorious. Men being inured to such things, think them the only things. Corrupt desires make a corrupt mind. Where there is flesh, there

will be a knowing of things after the flesh, 2 Cor. 5:16; and we will think such things only to be glorious. Men's judgments are as their affections; for as these are, so are their conceits of happiness: 1 Cor. 2:12, 'We have not received the spirit of the world.' There is a spirit of the world which maketh men think that the greatest excellency is in the things of the world, as in outward fineness, royalty, learning, eloquence, pomp, and splendour. Christ is mean, and therefore rejected, because he cometh not with these things.

2. Because we judge altogether by likelihoods and outward appearances. Samuel thought sure that Eliab was the man, because he looked upon his countenance and the height of his stature, 1 Sam. 16:7; but it is added, 'Man seeth not as God seeth; man looketh to the outward appearance.' We judge of things according as they are to our senses. Many would have thought that some great emperor should have been the Messiah, rather than the poor child in the manger at Bethlehem. Most people will have it that truth is rather on that side that is accompanied and accommodated with outward authority, applause, and other advantages of learning and eminency, than among a few despicable men, such as the martyrs were.

3. Because we envy and despise any worth that is veiled under meanness, as if it were a disgrace to us to take anything from those beneath us. It was a great condescension in Job, chap. 31:13, that he would 'not despise the cause of his servants when they contended with him.' Certain it is otherwise in the world; they consider the person and envy the excellency; as you may read, Mat. 13:55, &c. Though they were astonished at his doctrine, yet they said, 'Is not this the carpenter's son?' and were offended at him. His mean original hindered them from giving that due honour and respect that they should.

Use 1. The use of this may be to inform us:—

1. Whence it is that Christ is differently entertained in the world, which is, because some see nothing but the outward meanness, others the inward excellency: Luke 2:34, 'This child is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel.' Because this child, therefore for the fall and rising of many. And therefore he is called a rock of offence and a stumbling-stone, Rom. 9:33. God would not satisfy every one. There was inward power in Christ, and outward meanness, and many times he did exert and put forth his inward power: 1 Peter 2:7, 'To them that believe he is precious; but to others a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence.' God will satisfy those that are desirous to learn the things of his kingdom; as for others, there is so much out-ward meanness and reproach laid upon his ways, as to harden them against them. If you will know the reason why so many are prejudiced against the ways of Christ, it is because they see

nothing in them worthy of their choice. Oh, it is a great mercy of God for any to see the beauty of religion through the clouds of meanness, affliction, self-denial, and all those troubles to which it engageth men.

2. Do not despise things for their meanness, for so thou mayest condemn the ways of God. God will have his people love him for his own sake, not for the outward accommodation and advantages we have by him. As it is said, John 6:26, ‘Jesus answered them and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, ye seek me not because ye saw the miracle, but because ye did eat of the loaves and were filled.’ Princes try the affections of their subjects most when they come to them in a disguise, and veil their majesty under the plainest garb; and so did Christ to the world, and still does to this day. He suffereth this stumbling-block, to see if we will look beyond it. As there was meanness in the outward habitude of Christ’s person, so there is now in the administration of his kingdom; as appears by considering:—

[1.] That the ordinances are weak to appearance; there is nothing but plain words, plain bread and wine, in one ordinance, and only water in another. The simple plainness of the ordinances is an obstacle to men’s believing; they would fain bring in pomp, but that will mar all. When there were wooden chalices, there were golden priests. God would have his ordinances like himself, simple and full of virtue. The tabernacle was all gold within, but covered with badgers’ skins without. This stumbleth the world at first dash; they will not look for gold where they see nothing but badgers’ skins: 2 Kings 5:12, ‘Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel?’ What! no greater thing to be done for my health? I might have done thus at home. So some are apt to say, We had better read at home, than wait upon such plain preaching; but remember, it is God’s ordinance, and that puts a value upon it.

[2] These ordinances are administered by weak men. Many times God singeth out the meanest. Our Saviour sent fishermen to conquer the world, and made use of a goose-quill to wound Antichrist. Moses, the stammering shepherd, was commissioned to deliver Israel; God makes use of Amos, who was a herdsman, to declare his will, Amos 1:1. So Elisha the great prophet was taken from the plough, 1 Kings 19:19. And many times God made use of young men, such as Paul, whose very person causeth prejudice; young Samuel, young Timothy, men of mean descent, low parentage, and of no great appearance in the world.

[3.] The manner how it is by them managed, which is not in such a politic, insinuating way as to beguile and deceive, and as if they were to serve their own ends: 2 Cor. 1:12, the apostle saith, ‘Our rejoicing is this, the testimony of

our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, we have our conversation among you.’ He calleth it carnal wisdom to use any underhand dealing to gain esteem to their way, or to go in any by-path out of Christ’s way. They did nothing deceitfully and closely, but what they openly held forth. And so now the less there is of worldly wisdom, the more God prevaieth: Luke 16:8, ‘The children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light.’

[4] The persons by whom it is entertained, the poor: James 2:5, ‘Hath not God chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith?’ Usually God’s true people are the meanest and most contemptible, not being so noted for outward excellency as others, Mat. 11. God revealeth the things of his kingdom to babes, men destitute of outward sufficiencies. This hath been always a great prejudice against Christ’s doctrine: John 7:48, ‘Have any of the rulers or the pharisees believed on him?’ Have the great men, the great scholars, closed with that way?

[5.] The general drift of it is to make men deny their pleasures, to overlook their concerns, to despise the world, to hinder unjust gain, to walk contrary to the honorary customs and fashions of the world. If men would be Christians indeed, they will find that the usual customs of the world are most contrary to Christianity; as to forgive injuries, to seek reconciliation, to put up with disgrace, and to show kindness to those that are not likely to repay us again: Luke 14:12-14, ‘When thou makest a dinner or supper, call not thy friends, nor thy brethren, nor thy rich neighbours, lest they bid thee again, and a recompense be made unto thee; but call the poor, the blind, and the lame, and the maimed, for they cannot recompense thee; for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just.’ So to make a man contented, though he and his family should be in a mean condition, though he be not so great in the world as others; yet this is a great prejudice against the ways of Christ. Therefore do not despise persons or things for their meanness; do not count zeal folly, or religion weakness; do not reckon them among fools that are conscientiously scrupulous: Heb. 13:2, it is said, that some that entertained strangers thereby entertained angels unawares; so some that refuse things because of outward appearance, they refuse Christ unawares; they may condemn and reproach the very saints and people of God. Luke 16:15: ‘That which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the eyes of God.’ There is no judging by the outward probability and face of things. Still true, strict Christianity is disesteemed in the world; men look upon it as some humorous, misshapen conceit, that looketh enviously upon their pleasures, contrary to their natures, and unbefitting their quality. That you may not thus despise the things that any way concern the kingdom of Christ for their meanness, I shall give you these four directions:—

(1.) Beg the Spirit of God that he would suggest to you his will and counsel in all things. The spirit of the world or your own spirit will make you judge amiss, and that nothing is God's but what is outwardly glorious; and so even Christ may become a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence to you, and you may despise the greatest truth. The things of Christ's kingdom are carried in a secret way. The Spirit telleth us what things are given us of God. Plain things must be set on by the demonstration of the Spirit, or else we shall see no beauty in them: 1 Cor. 2:4. A Christian sucketh marrow out of that which is dry bones to a natural man. Do not trust to your own reason. Leave a man to his reason, to the mere considerations of flesh and blood, and he can perceive no beauty in the glorious ways of Christ. This is the cause why great scholars are so much mistaken in the things of his kingdom

(2.) Walk in the ways of God, in his fear and love—keep communion with him and he will direct you: Ps. 25:13, 'The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him; he will show them his covenant.' God discovereth himself particularly to his own people. They are his friends, and you know friends reveal themselves mutually to one another in the greatest secrets; as Christ giveth the reason: John 15:15, 'I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard of my Father, I have revealed to you.' Those that keep up a continual acquaintance with God, by manifesting their love and fear of him, shall have divine mysteries manifested to them: Col. 1:26, 'The mystery that was hid from ages is made manifest to the saints.' Truths that have long lain hid through many successions and revolutions of ages, are at length made known to holy persons. Where there is purity, there is revelation: 'The pure in heart shall see God,' Mat. 5:8. They shall see more of his truth and mind in those things which if they should judge of by their own reason, they would condemn. So also it is said, Prov. 3:32, 'His secret is with the righteous.' They have not only other kinds of knowledge, but knowledge of the secret of such a way as is veiled with contempt, reproach, and unlikelihood to the world. Blind and carnal men sometimes stumble upon the despised ways of Christ; but they do but plough with the saints' heifer, and light their torch at the altar. Their self-ends and by-interests make them borrow from truth; but it is with them as it is with parrots, they speak the words of men not of reason but custom; they learn a truth when it is delivered, they have been used to such notions.

(3.) Exercise faith; that is, the evidence of things not seen, Heb. 11:1; that is, not seen by natural sense or reason. It is *of* ***JalmoVthVyuchV***,—the eye, the discovering part of the soul. As reason is to a natural man, so is faith to a godly man. It carrieth a man within the veil: what cannot be made out to sense and reason is made out to faith. *Ideo credo quia est impossibile*,—therefore

I believe, because it is impossible. Though, in your own thoughts, you would fain have things otherwise, yet, if there be revelation to the contrary, believe it; as that there is happiness in sufferings,—that the reproach of Christ is better than all the treasures of the world,—that there is life in death. Faith seeth that easy and plain which is the greatest contradiction to reason and sense. See what a riddle St Paul telleth you by faith: 2 Cor. 6:9,10, ‘As unknown, yet well known; as dying, and behold we live; as chastened, and not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things.’ Faith maketh us see that in a thing which reason would tell us were the greatest absurdity and inconsistency in the world to believe; as that Abraham should see Christ before he was extant. The Jews were ready to stone Christ for saying so: ‘Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day, and he saw it and was glad.’ Faith captivates reason to scripture, and maketh a man close with the revelation against his own conceits and prejudices. Only take this caution,—though faith seeth things impossible and improbable, yet they are only such things as are revealed by God.

(4.) Deny carnal reason and sense; do not judge of divine things by outward appearance. Hear what the apostle saith: ‘Eye hath not seen, ear hath not heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive, what God hath prepared for them that love him’—that is, carnal eyes, carnal sense, and carnal thoughts; weighing that place with the context, that seemeth to be the meaning. To an ordinary reason, or eye, or ear, things would not appear so. Now, because this rule is general, I shall a little restrain it by these particulars.

1. Do not cast away anything of Christ because it is despised or discountenanced. Take heed, a saint may suffer under a reproachful name. Christ was a despised branch, a root out of a dry ground; and Christianity was contemned because of the ill name and common cry against it. Most Christians offend in blind zeal; they condemn things before they have tried them. Though the censure be right, it is ill in thee. Nicodemus suggested good advice: ‘Doth our law judge any man before it hear him, and know what he doth?’ It was a pharisaical spirit to take up a prejudice, and not to be willing to hear what might be said for it. It was the misery of the primitive Christians that they could not be heard to speak out. *Nolentes audire quid auditor damnare non possunt* — men are unwilling to hear that which they are resolved to condemn as soon as heard. It would be confutation enough if men did but know the beauty of the ways of religion. It is always this hasty zeal which rejecteth things upon public scorn without due trial: examine first and then speak. Though it be a despised and unlikely way, it is like thou, mayest find somewhat of God in it.

2. Because it is an afflicted way. Afflicted godliness is a great prejudice. But remember God never intended that truth should be known by pomp, nor condemned or disallowed for the troubles that accompany it. The drift of Christianity is to take us off from the hopes and fears of the present world; therefore he that liketh Christ and his promises is not likely to be separated from him by persecution.

3. Because poor men are of that way, those that have the meanest parts, and no outward excellencies: Mat. 11:26, 'At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes.' The jesuits have charged it upon the ministers of France, that they were poor. So in Salvian's time; *Coguntur esse mali, ne viles habeantur*—men would not be religious, because they would not be ranked among poor men. So the Albigenes were called the poor men of Lyons. Usually the priests' lips preserve knowledge, but sometimes God worketh *extra ordinem*. A simple layman nonplussed a bishop at the council of Nice, and many that were very mean in the world were martyrs.

4. Because thou mayest seem to hazard thy wisdom by closing with it. 'If any man seem to be wise, let him become a fool that he may be wise.' Thus I have despatched the first observation, namely, that Christ's meanness in his person and kingdom is the great hindrance against the entertainment of him; few or none believed. 'For he shall grow up as a tender plant.

I come now to insist upon the second point, which is this:—*Doct. 2.* That though Christ's meanness be a great hindrance against the entertainment of him, yet, it is by the special appointment of God. He shall grow up before him. God orders it that the Messiah should come in such a manner. I shall be brief in handling this point. There is nothing about Christ but fell under God's decree, and the special care of his providence. All the circumstances of his birth, the time, place, manner of every action, you have some instance of it. The counsel of God brought it to pass, and the scripture was frequently quoted, 'that that might be fulfilled which was spoken concerning him;' yea, the most malicious actions of the enemies are spoken of as appointed by God, as particularly their spite to him in his death: 'Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain.' Judas delivered him, Pilate delivered him, and God delivered him. 'For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, and the Gentiles, were gathered together, to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done,' Acts 4:27,28. 'Whom being delivered by the counsel of God.' This was God's grand contrivance; here was his *pol upoikil oVsoj ia*, 'the manifold

wisdom of God,' Eph. 3:10. So St Paul calleth the wise disposition of our salvation by Christ: 'Without controversy great is the mystery of godliness, God manifest in the flesh.' This was the great mystery. When a man is to make some rare engine, he will look to every screw and wheel, that all is set and ordered right. Here was God's great masterpiece, in which he would show himself, and the great copy of his eternal thoughts. That is the reason.

This point affordeth us many useful considerations, as this decree of God may be referred—

1. To Christ.
2. To the wicked.
3. To the godly.

1. To Christ. God decreed this, and Christ fulfilled it. It is a wonder to see how all things did conspire to make Christ conform in every thing to God's counsel concerning him. As, for instance, in Augustus his decree, which caused Joseph and Mary to go to Bethlehem, where she was delivered. It would be too long to give you the history of the gospel. Many providences did meet, that all things whatever God had decreed might come to pass. Admire therefore the manifold wisdom of God in contriving these things.

2. In respect of the wicked. God appointed this meanness of Christ before them. Before them he shall rise up. God punisheth sin by occasions of sin. God maybe said to harden sinners three ways:—(1.) By leaving them to themselves, as it is said, he left the Gentiles to their own ways, Acts 14:16; (2.) By permitting them to enter into them; (3.) By presenting to them such objects from whence their corruption taketh occasion to sin, though they were things good in themselves; as Jer. 6:21, 'I will lay stumbling-blocks before this people.' The Jews argue that Christ is not the Messiah, because he did not come in such a way as to satisfy all his countrymen. God would have Christ mean that all might not believe in him, though not to cause sin, but to promote his just judgments. So God's cause and Christ's ways have difficulty enough in them to harden them. God pursueth his secret judgments upon them. Admire, therefore, and fear God's judgments on the wicked. It was by the special appointment of God that it was so mean.

3. For the godly. God appointed all the meanness of Christ for their sakes, for whom it is a double comfort.

[1.] From the eternity of God's thoughts towards them. Christ from before all worlds was appointed to be a captain of salvation through many sufferings, and to undergo many hardships for your sakes. This length of love is a great

refreshment to the spirit; and when the soul reflects upon the meanness of Christ as the effect of God's eternal thoughts of mercy to it, it is the more encouragement to believe. 'Christ verily was fore-ordained before the foundation of the world, but manifested in these last times for you.' He would have them established in that as a sure truth.

[2.] It is a comfort to them in their meanness; it is that which is appointed. They shall be conformable to their Head in this respect. They shall undergo no condition but what God from all eternity had decreed for them: Col. 1:24; Paul and all the godly are said to fill up what is behind of the sufferings, of Christ in their flesh. The church and Christ make but one body; that which they suffer, he suffers; that which he suffereth, they suffer. The sufferings of the godly are appointed as well as Christ's meanness.

I now proceed to the third observation, namely:—

Doct. 3. That this meanness of Christ was willingly taken up by him both in his birth and life and manner of appearing among men.

1. In his birth.

[1.] For the time of it. It was when the royal stock of David was quite extinct, and even come so low that Joseph was but a carpenter by profession. 'Is not this the carpenter's son?' And therefore is the genealogy of Joseph and Mary so carefully sought out by the evangelist, because it was not commonly and publicly known that they were of that lineage. The throne of David was occupied by Herod, who was an Ascalonite; he was *Epi j oroiV tetagmenoV*, rather an observer of the tribute than a king.

[2.] The place, Bethlehem, a small place, not able to make up one division in Israel, the least of the thousands of Judah. A man would have thought he should have been born in some great city, as Rome or Jerusalem. No; but he chose to be born in Bethlehem, and suffered at Jerusalem: he had the least place to be born, but the greatest to suffer in. And then again, he was not born in any stately room at Bethlehem, but in a stable, nay, in a manger in the stable. Christ would have all mean at his birth.

[3.] Consider how in everything he was found in shape like another child, being circumcised the eighth day. He submitted to the law as soon as he was born into the world, to teach his followers obedience.

[4] Consider the oblation that was made for him, such as was made for poor people—a pair of turtle-doves and two young pigeons, the poor's offering. Those that were not able to bring a lamb were to ring two turtles and two young pigeons,

and that was accepted for an atonement. Thus much for his birth: yet we may observe there was something divine still mingled with Christ's outward meanness, as the appearing of the star, the trouble of the Jews, the wise men's report and offerings. By these things God would leave them without excuse, and under this poverty discover some glimpses of the deity.

2. Now for his life and manner of appearance in the world. He was altogether found in fashion as a man, as the apostle saith; that is, to outward appearance just as other men, for his growth was as other men's, by degrees: 'And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.' Though he had a most perfect divine soul given him at first, yet as he grew in stature he exercised and discovered the vigour of his faculties, which is there called increasing in knowledge, showing forth in his several ages more degrees of knowledge, that in all things he might conform to us. It would be too large for me to insist upon everything, therefore briefly take it thus:—His life was spent in much toil and labour, going to and fro; nay, and probably too, in mean labour, in his father's trade Mark 6:3, 'Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary?' Not only the carpenter's son, but the carpenter. In his younger time he exercised that trade, as Justin Martyr, a most ancient historian, writes he made yokes and ploughs. And when he put himself upon the way and duty of his ministry, he was in much want and penury; he was an hungry, Mat. 4:2; thirsty, John 4:6; without house and home Mat. 8:20, 'Foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head.' Yea, so poor was he, that he had not wherewith to pay his poll-money for his head to the Romans, Mat. 17:27; therefore Peter is fain to go to the sea and catch a fish. I will not touch upon those that especially take in his suffering, that will fall in the next verse; only take notice how he was hunted up and down by the pharisees, how he was scorned and derided by them. so far as it reflects upon his weakness, as Luke 16:14, *exemukthrizon*. —they blew their nose at him in great scorn, as the word may be rendered. Nay, when he would show any royalty, and come as a king to Sion, he came riding upon the foal of an ass, Mat. 21:5.

Use 1. Oh, then be exhorted—

1. To admire the love of God, that he should stoop to such a low condition for your sakes. Here is a large field for meditation; expatiate your thoughts, then, and trace Christ in all the history of his life, from the cradle to the grave, from the stable to Golgotha, and see what a mean and contemptible life he led.

2. Faithfully apply it, and say, All this was done for my good. The scriptures do not only take notice of Christ's humiliation, but of the very end of

it. Most read the history of Christ as a man would do a romance, to be a little affected with it for a time; they take notice

I what is done, but not why; there is not that faithful appropriation Gal. 4:4, 5, 'When the fulness of time was come, God sent his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem us that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.' Mark the end, and say, This was done for *me*; for *us* is too general. Why was Christ so mean? It was that I might be rich: 2 Cor. 8:9, 'For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich;' rich in grace, and rich in comfort. *PtwcoV*, the word signifieth he became a beggar, not that he did beg, but he lived in continual need of a supply, and would sometimes put forth some glimpses of his divinity to command his welcome: Luke 19:5, 'Zaccheus, make haste and come down, for to-day I must abide at thy house.' Yet I say, Christ put himself upon this meanness for our sakes. *Speciosus prae filiis hominum, obscuratur pro filiis hominum*, saith Bernard. It is for our sakes that he who is altogether lovely in himself had no form, that we might be made lovely and beautiful; he was without comeliness, that his church might be comely, without spot or wrinkle, as the apostle speaketh, Eph. 5:27. He was besmeared with blood, that the church might be without spot. It is good to observe that Christ's meanness was not only in judgment, for a stumbling-block to the wicked, but in mercy to the godly. If he had discovered his deity at first, he had never suffered, and then the work of our redemption

I had stood still. It is a good observation of St Austin, quoted by Aquinas, *Dum omnia mirabiliter fecit, auferret quod misericorditer fecit*—if he had done all things wonderfully, he had done nothing mercifully. Christ's meanness, as it is a great mercy to mankind, see that it be so to you.

Use 2. Is information. It informeth us, then:—

1. That poverty and meanness is not disgraceful. Christ himself was a carpenter, Paul a tent-maker, and the apostles fishermen. Christ, you see, scorned that glory, pomp, and greatness which the world doteth upon. Men look upon the outside as if the horse were the better for the trappings, or anything without a man could ennoble him: Prov. 19:1, 'Better is the poor that walketh in his integrity, than he that is perverse in his lips.' A man is rightly esteemed by his internal qualifications. One holy saint is to be preferred above all the rich men that abound in the greatest affluence of estate and pomp. It should be so with all, much more with the godly. It is a reproach to Christ to condemn any man for his poverty, because he is meaner in the world than we: Prov. 14:31, 'He that despiseth the poor reproacheth his Maker: Can I believe that ever you would

honour Christ, who despise the poor? Would you not him too? He that despiseth the poor reproacheth his Saviour. It is the most contrary affection to the Christian religion.

2. It informs us that poverty should not be irksome to us. Christ underwent it before you; his apostles were base in the world's eye 1 Cor. 4:13, 'We are made as the filth of the world, and are the offscouring of all things' counted the scurf of the earth. Christ chose this kind of life, a holy meanness, and therefore be not troubled. Poverty is a great burden, I confess, and layeth a man open to many a disadvantage, scorn, contempt, and refusal. But consider, Christ hath honoured it in his own person, and he honoureth it to this very day. If there be any respect of persons with God, he respecteth the poor, and reveals most of himself to them: 'The poor receive the gospel,' Mat. 11:5; 'I will also leave in the midst of thee an afflicted and poor people, and they shall trust in the name of the Lord,' Zeph. 3:12. God hath provided for the esteem of all his servants. What is wanting one way is more plentifully supplied in another; so that those that have the least outward esteem, are justly accounted the most excellent. Every condition, I confess, hath its snares, but poverty hath least. This disposeth the soul to hearken to divine things, that their outward defects may be made up in some inward excellency. Everything naturally seeketh after a supply of its wants; and therefore, as it is in outward things, persons that are themselves deformed are most deeply stricken with the love of beauty in others, that they may cover their own wants by linking themselves with that abundance of perfection that they spy in them; so the godly poor are more disposed to hearken to religion, because more sensible of their defects, that the meanness of their outward estate may be covered and satisfied for by the riches of those graces that are in their souls. And indeed, as these are fitter to receive a manifestation, so God doth most manifest himself to them: the first report that was made of Christ was made to shepherds and poor swains. Therefore on these accounts poverty is not so irksome.

Use 3. Is instruction. It teacheth us divers lessons:—Was Christ both in birth and manner of appearance in the world mean? Then—

1. It teacheth us humility, that he should empty himself of all his glory, and live in a mean estate. The apostle sets out this pattern excellently: Phil. 2:6-8, 'Who, being in the form of God, thought it no robbery to be equal with God, but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.' He divested himself of all his royalty, that he might teach us this pattern of humility. Most men love to live to the utmost,—in a proud, pompous way, and disdaining of others. You see Christ, when he might have discovered

majesty, held forth nought but poverty. And, indeed, it was principally to teach us this lesson: Mat. 11:29, ‘Learn of me, for I am meek, and lowly of heart.’ He doth not say, Learn of me, *quia potens*; but, Learn of me, *quia humilis sum*—not, Learn of me, for I am powerful; but, Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly. Christ is not to be imitated in his power, but he is to be imitated in his graces. Not, Learn of me to do miracles, to create the world; but, to be lowly and humble-minded. This is the great pattern and copy that God hath set us, to wit, humility.

2. To be mean and low for Christ, as he was for you. Christ was poor that you might be rich—rich in peace, joy, comfort, salvation. Can you find such a rare instance as would be poor for Christ that he may be rich in his glory, in his ordinances, in the safety of his servants? We have read of many that have been poor for their lusts, they have prodigally lavished away their estates upon their pleasures; but very few have been poor for Christ: Phil. 2:5; ‘Let the same mind be in you that was in Jesus.’ The apostle applieth it to humility, and we may also to the same purpose. Do you have as bountiful a disposition to God as Christ had for you? Can anything be too much for him? If a man truly serveth God, he would come as near him as possibly he could. Well, Christ cast away his glory for you; do you cast away your riches for Christ, not by a vowed poverty, but by a voluntary laying out yourselves for his word, his cause, and gospel? It is not waste where all is due; and indeed nothing is lost that is laid out upon God: Mat. 10:39, ‘He that findeth his life shall lose it; and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it.’ Therefore, if you do, as Ahaz’s dial, go back ten degrees in your estate or outward pomp, the nearer will you come to the pattern. There is one who has quitted more for you than you can possibly quit for him. But I shall proceed to the next doctrine.

Doct. 4. That Christ is so outwardly mean, that the men of the world do not any way desire him, or that carnal men do see nothing in Christ wherefore they should desire him. To his spouse he is all beauty, ‘altogether lovely;’ but to them there was no beauty why they should desire him.

The reasons of the point are these:—

1. Because carnal men neglect the study of Christ; their hearts are so taken with the things of sense, and the beauty of the creatures, that they do not look any further. We are not much affected with an unknown beauty; things that we know only by a general hearsay do not work upon us. Christ must be in our thoughts before he can be in our desires. The Jews looked upon Christ’s outside, and therefore minded him no further. So men hear of Christ in a slight way; so far as they know him by the common noise and report, so far they close with him. But

they do not see why they should desire him, and slight apprehensions stir up but weak affections. The spouse displayeth every part of Christ, to work upon her bowels: Cant. 5:10-16, 'My beloved is white and ruddy, the chiefest among ten thousand. His head is as the most fine gold; his locks are bushy, and as black as a raven. His eyes are as the eyes of doves by the rivers of waters, washed with milk, and finely set. His cheeks are as a bed of spices, as sweet flowers; his lips like lilies, dropping sweet-smelling myrrh. His hands are as gold rings, set with the beryl; his belly is as bright ivory, overlaid with sapphires; his legs are as pillars of marble set upon sockets of fine gold. His countenance is as Lebanon, excellent as the cedars. His mouth is most sweet; yea, he is altogether lovely. This is my beloved, and this is my friend, O daughter of Jerusalem.' The apostle wondereth that the Galatians should not obey the truth, when Jesus Christ was evidently set forth and crucified among them before their eyes, Gal. 3:1. It was so in the word, but not in their thoughts. Men's hearts are wedded to the creatures, and so the breasts of their own roe satisfy them, and therefore they do not gaze upon other beauties.

2. Because they reject Christ; he is not for their turn; nay, he is quite contrary to their ends. Carnal men have not all the same ends, but they all agree in this, their ends are carnal. Those that would not come to the wedding-supper, some had their farm, some their merchandise to mind, another had married a wife, and therefore could not come; all said, they could not come: Mat. 22:5, 'They all made light of it, and went their ways.' So they all despised Jesus Christ. Some wicked men make riches their end. Now see what Christ saith Mat. 19:24, 'It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.' It is by the great power of God that a rich man is saved, as it followeth, 'All things are possible with God.' Now Christ is not for a rich man's turn. Christianity furnisheth men with precepts, not only against unjust gain, but mere desires of gain, or delight in gain. It contains precepts, that the kingdom of God is to be sought first, and his righteousness. And we are to look to these things from God for an additional supply: Mat. 6:32, 'After these things do the Gentiles seek.' It is not a Christian but a paganish spirit that maketh men so inordinate in the pursuit of gain. Then for honour, preferment, or applause, the scripture is peremptory against it: John 5:44, 'How can ye believe, who seek honour one of another, and not the honour that cometh from God only?' This pursuing of glory, honour, and renown is incompatible with a Christian affection. The force of the argument lieth thus: How can those that seek honour believe in him that contemneth honour? Only he is fit to believe in God that maketh eternal life the end of his desires and endeavours, which is called the glory that cometh from God. The like argument is used by the apostle:

Gal. 1:10, 'For if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ.' He did not labour to frame his doctrine and life so as might be pleasing and suitable to the affections of men. Pride and ambition are the most unsuitable affections to religion that can be. There is such an antipathy between what God liketh and men like, that it is impossible they should be in the same soul. Then for pleasures; there are men that have quit human nature, and are so far from desiring Christ, that they do not desire a free use of their reason. Reason is not for their turn, and therefore certainly religion is not. This is the very affection that is in the brute beasts. They have some general object, a sensual good, only they differ in the particular modification of the object. Beasts are for grass and water, these for meats and drinks. All the use they make of their reason is to be more curious than the beasts in their choice; and therefore Christ is not for their ends: 'Strait is the gate and narrow is the way that leadeth unto life,' Mat. 7:13. It is spoken specially in opposition to the voluptuous. The ways of God are fenced up with thorns to them: Prov. 15:19, 'The way of a slothful man is an hedge of thorns.' Everything is grievous and troublesome that requireth care and diligence. Thus they reject Christ because he is not suitable to them. To apply it now.

Use 1. It serveth for information, to teach us the difference between God's people and carnal men. To God's people he is all their desire; to carnal persons there is nothing desirable in him. It is good to observe their several verdicts of him: 1 Peter 2:7, 'To you that believe he is precious, but to them that be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner, and a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence.' To the world he is base and ignominious: Ps. 22:6, 'A worm, and no man, a reproach of men, and despised of the people.' To the spouse, glorious and full of allurements: Ps. 45:2, 'Thou art fairer than the children of men: grace is poured into thy lips.' To the world he appeared deformed and contemptible: Isa. 52:14, 'Many were astonished at thee; his visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men;' but quite contrary to the spouse: Cant. 5:10, 'My beloved is the fairest of ten thousand.' The Hebrew word signifieth an ensign-bearer. In the world's view there is no form nor comeliness in him; he is without beauty. To the spouse he is 'altogether lovely,' Cant. 5:16. Well, then, you see here is the true differencing note between us and the men of the world, whether we see anything in Christ why we should desire him. And it is both an inclusive and an exclusive mark. Some marks are inclusive; that is, if a man find them in him, he may be sure he is in Christ; but if not, he is not to determine he is out of Christ. As the eminent and vigorous workings of holy graces, they do not take in every state of Christianity, they do not take in the infancy of grace. Other marks are exclusive; that is thus, they knock off the

fingers of pretenders, and serve to show a man out of grace, but not in. As frequenting of the ordinances, a care of duty; if a man doth not these things, he may be sure he is none of God's, though he cannot be sure he is of God because he doth them. But now this is a mark that is inclusive and exclusive too. It is inclusive, for if your desires be to Christ, no doubt he is yours. It is a true mark, and a mark that is compatible to the weakness of grace. It is a true mark, for God looketh to the heart more than to the duty: Prov. 23:26, 'My son, give me thy heart.' And desires are the chiefest part of that. Desires are most genuine and suitable to the judgment and determination of the soul. They are a mark in which God's weakest servants may comfort themselves. Those that fail in other things are not wanting in desires. However they may have many defects in their carriage and in their duties, yet they are sure their desires are towards him. If they cannot be much in duty, they will be much in their desires and valuations of him. Peter, that durst not appeal to his own conscience for other things, dareth appeal to God's omniscieny for this: John 21:17, 'Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee.' And the people of God often vouch this: Isa. 26:8, 'The desire of our soul is to thy name;' Neh. 1:11, 'Thy servants who desire to fear thy name.' Therefore it is comfortable; and it is convincing too, and exclusive. Wicked men feel no desires; they have some slight wishes, carnal and weak velleities, but they have no serious desires, nor true volitions. Balaam may wish to die the death of the righteous, Num. 23:10. So they may desire Christ out of some general conceit of happiness; but they do not desire Christ for holiness. So there is no beauty in him why we should desire him. They do not desire him as seeing any beauty in his ways John 6:34, 'Lord, evermore give us this bread.' When Christ said he was the bread of life, those that would not come to Christ would fain have the bread of life. Nay, heaven itself is not really desired by wicked men; it is true, they may desire it in a carnal way, as a Turkish paradise, and such a place of ease and delight as the Koran sets forth; but not as it is in itself, to enjoy God, and Christ, and more grace, and to be more free and undisturbed in respect of the prevailing of sin and corruptions. Those that desire Christ truly, desire him not for ease (the spirit of the world may do that), but from the beauty and excellency they find in him, and in his ways. His service is of a high and honourable nature, and 'therefore they desire it. So that you see here is the note of trial, and the main difference, viz., a desiring of Christ for the rare beauty and perfections that are found in him. Do you, then, try yourselves by this note. But that you may not deceive yourselves in this matter, I will give you a few notes. I will not speak anything of the cause of desires. A high value and price set upon Christ, and a seeing rich beauties in him, of that I shall speak in the next verse. I shall only treat now of the effects of this desire. If it be earnest and strong after him, it will be manifested by these things.

1. A holy impatency in the want of Christ. When we strongly desire a thing, the heart fainteth under the want of it. Amnon was sick for Tamar, 2 Sam. 13:1-4. And the spouse was sick of love for Christ, Cant. 5:8. The soul languishes with a holy desire of the sense of his mercy, with a longing after pardon, and grace, and quickening, and life, and what is to be found in Christ. They can find no rest in themselves till they do enjoy it: Ps. 13:1, 'As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so doth my soul pant after thee, O God.' Thirst is the most implacable impression that can be upon the body; the creature cannot be quiet till it be quenched. Now, of all creatures the hart is most thirsty by nature, and the thirst is mightily increased when it is hunted. And mark, it is the she-hart, for so the Seventy read it, *ἡ ἐλαφος*, 'The she-hart panteth after the water brooks.' Passions in females are stronger than in the males. As the she-hart panteth when chased, such a rage of thirst was there in his soul till it were satisfied with God, and refreshed with the comforts of Jesus Christ. Search then for such a restless and strong desire; try if there be such an ardency and earnestness upon your affections, that nothing can satisfy but Christ, that you cannot be quiet till you have him. Was your heart never chased into a panting for the water brooks? Some are haunted so by the ghastly apprehensions of God's wrath, that they have no ease, no rest. But certainly all that love Christ are chased into a panting; they have such

a sense of their sins and miseries, that their souls are put into an earnest expectation of the mercies of Christ.

2. A holy indignation. Passions usually serve and accompany one another. If there be a holy desire, there will be a holy anger. And this is at two things:—

[1.] At anything that would rival the affection.

[2.] At what would hinder the enjoyment of the object.

[1.] At anything that would rival Christ in the affection. There is a scorn that anything should come in competition with him, that we should have so much as a thought that anything were worthy but Christ: Phil. 3:8, 'I count all things but loss and dung, that I may win Christ.' Any outward excellency in comparison of him is but *skubala*, dog's meat. It thinketh the worst name good enough for anything that shall come in competition with him. And in such a case gold is not gold, but dog's meat—honour is not honour—pleasure is not pleasure—but all is dung and dog's meat. You know in a natural way things have their due respect from us, till they be compared with what we dearly love and prize; then no term is bad enough for them. So here, the soul doth even abhor the thought that Christ and other things should be spoken of the same day,

which otherwise might have fairer respects and valuations from the soul. It is worth your observation to see how the saints do abominate the thought that anything should be supposed to satisfy them without or besides Christ: Ps. 4:6, 'There be many that say, Who will show us any good? Lord, lift up the light of thy countenance upon us.' O Lord, do not think we are of that strain. It is the many, the men of the multitude, that think so; they speak as if they would not own such an unworthy thought, nor entertain any resolution to prostitute their desires to any sensual good. God shall not turn them away so. If they should have all things else, it is irksome to them to think they should be contented. *Te ipsum, Domine, da, quod peto, Domine, da te ipsum*; as Austin crieth out: 'Thyself, Lord—thyself, Lord.' They are angry with themselves if any pleasing thought should arise any other way, any vain conceit, that they should be happy apart from God and Christ. It is an excellent saying of one, *Taedet gaudere sine te, delectat contristari pro te*—They had rather mourn for God than delight without him. All their comforts are irksome to them if they have not Christ with them. Try, then, is there such a zealous indignation against false thoughts in your comforts? In what case do you think yourselves? 'Happy is the people that is in such a case.' If that be a thought that is pleasing to your minds, it is a good sign.

[2] Indignation against what hindereth the enjoyment of the object. A man is angry with what cometh between him and his desires. If your desires be to Christ, you will be angry with your perverse hearts, that keep you from him. When a man desireth to sin, he is angry with God because he cometh in with his law, and steppeth between us and our desires: Rom. 8:7, 'The carnal mind is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law, neither indeed can be.' So when the desires are set and bent upon Christ, a man is angry with himself that he is so clogged and weighed down with the flesh that he cannot enjoy such full communion with him as he desires: 2 Cor. 5:4, 'For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened.' And David crieth out, Ps. 120:5, 'Woe is me that I sojourn in Mesech, that I dwell in the tents of Kedar!' ***h paroikia***, my pilgrimage, is prolonged. They are angry with their own base hearts, that still there is such a strangeness between them and Christ.

3. It will cause a holy waiting. Those that desired the coming of the Messiah, waited for him; as Simeon: Luke 2:25, 'Waiting for the consolation of Israel: Earnest expectation is the formal and most proper effect of the desire of anything. Look, as it is said of Sisera's mother, Judges 5:28, 'She looked out at a window and cried through the lattice, Why is his chariot so long in coming?' She would fain meet with it as far as she could with her eyes. And so it is said, Rom. 8:19, 'The earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the

manifestation of the sons of God.’ *Apekdecetai*, the creature lifts up the head—would fain see the general restoration of all things in the world; so the soul lifteth up the heart, it would fain see Christ coming to it in this or that ordinance,—with a great deal of longing they expect when he will draw their hearts to himself: Ps. 130:6, ‘My soul waiteth for thee more than they that watch for the morning; yea, more than they that watch for the morning.’

4. Another effect is a powerful command over the whole man. Desires are the most vigorous faculties, they carry the whole soul along with them. They will take up your thoughts, time, care, endeavours, speeches. Look and you shall observe that a man is so affected in earthly things, and, therefore, why not so in heavenly? It is a bad sign when there cannot be found the same proportion and care for heavenly things as men have for the things of the world. Let us see these things a little severally.

[1] It will take up your thoughts. Our thoughts will be conversant about what we desire. We love to feed upon the sweet of those things that we long for,—to enjoy them in our meditations before we really and actually enjoy them. Thoughts are the pulses of the heart, you may know by them how it beats. When desires are at a high pitch, we shall not be able to put off those pleasing imaginations that concern the object of these desires. Nay, they will haunt the mind in the time of our usual repose and ‘rest: Isa. 26:9, ‘With my soul have I desired thee in the night; yea, with my spirit within me will I seek thee early.’ Night and morning, all their mind was upon this, how they should get God.

[2] It will challenge more of your time and care. When men will make bold with God rather than their own occasions, it is a sign they are but coldly affected to him. If your desires be to Christ, your care and time will be more laid out upon him; you will rather borrow from yourselves, your own pleasures and business, than borrow from God. I confess a man that is in a particular calling, and is to provide for a wife and family, must necessarily spend more time in the world than he can in religion; but when he begrudgeth all time to God, or thinketh all lost that is spent in duty, it is a sign there is little desire after Christ. When we are where we would be, time goeth too fast for us; therefore, try how it is with thee in point of religion Is all too much that is spent in duty? If the heart goeth out that way, all will be too little. As men’s desires are so their time goeth away. Job 21:13, It is said of the wicked, ‘They spend their days in wealth.’ Voluptuous men do so,—so worldly men, they spend their time in business and worldly cares, and are cumbered about much serving. You may try your bent by that, how you spend your days.

[3.] It will put you upon endeavours. Those are true desires that evil in action. Slight wishes after Christ never put us upon a pursuit of him. If a man be earnest in a thing, he will try all ways he can to compass it; it shall be his earnest business. Men that are slight would fain have Christ, but they will not seek him—*Vellent, sed nolunt*: Prov. 21:25, ‘The desire of the slothful killeth him, for his hands refuse to labour.’ The slothful are most full of desires; they would fain have things, but they do not labour after them. Now, it is otherwise with the children of God. The spouse, that was sick for want of Christ, sought him through the streets, though it cost her many a wandering, Cant. 5:7. God hath fenced up every excellent thing with *difficulty*, to see if we think it worth our endeavours.

Use 2. In the next place it serveth for exhortation, to press you to do otherwise than the men of the world do, and to beware of their spirit. Men see nothing in Christ why they should desire him, because they judge with a carnal spirit. Let not any such black note be found upon you: Do you make him the desire of your souls who is deservedly styled ‘the desire of all nations.’ This exhortation hinteth at three duties:—

1. Long to get him into your hearts. As all things are to him, let your desires be to him: Rom. 11:36, ‘Of him, and through him, and to him are all things;’ therefore, all creatures,—for it is the law of their creation to move towards God, especially for reasonable creatures so to do. But particularly by your desires look upon, him as *summum necessarium*, as the only chief thing for your souls.

2. Be careful to keep communion with him. If you have got him, take heed you do not lose him again. Remember the fate of the spouse for parting with her beloved, and how dearly she paid for it, Cant. 5:6,7. Whatever carnal men judge of it, the favour of Christ is worth the keeping.

3. Labour to get more interest in him. Worldly blessings have all this lot and fate, that they cloy in the enjoyment. Christ is a mercy of a nobler nature; the more you see of his excellency, the more you will thirst after him. When a man hath a taste of Christ, he will labour for more of him. The great prejudice against him is, that men have never had experience of him, Austin saith of himself, in the ninth book of his Confessions, chap. 1: ‘That the reason why he was loth to close with Christ was, because he was to forego all pleasures, and to deny himself in whatever was delightful, and that was very irksome to him. But since,’ saith he, ‘when once I had tasted Christ, *quam suave mihi subito factum est carere suavitatibus nugarum*! It was the greatest delight in the world to abstain from worldly delights.’ Christ made abundant recompense for them. Oh, how sweet is

Christ to those that have tried him, and made experience of him! They will not want their old delights again. I shall prescribe a few means how you shall bring your hearts to desire Christ, to keep him, and to get further interest in him:—

[1.] Consider nothing is a fit object for your desires without Jesus Christ. The creatures are beneath you. The desire of the soul is like a member of the body out of joint when it is fixed upon a wrong object. All things without Christ are either sin or the creatures. To desire sin was the cause of the first misery; that is, forbidden fruits. We know what that is by sad experience. As to the creatures, to desire them for themselves is beneath us: it is, as it were, to sit upon the threshold and the door of the gate when we might sit upon the throne,—to make that our crown which should be our footstool Ps. 8:6, it is said, ‘Thou hast put all things under his feet.’ God made these things to be under our feet; and, therefore, the church is described, Rev. 12:1, to have the moon under her feet. All sublunary things are beneath the people of God. I should a little digress from the matter in hand, at least vary from my purpose, if I should at large discourse of the uncertainty and frailty of the creatures, and show how the desires may be lost and wasted upon them, which they cannot be upon God; or should I descant upon the unsuitableness of the creatures, which cannot give true satisfaction to the soul; but I will only conclude this first rule with this: That sin is not to be desired at all, and the creatures only in reference to God and Christ, otherwise, we sin in the desire or enjoyment of them.

[2.] Look upon Jesus Christ alone as the only object upon which thy affections should be exercised. He hath all the properties in him that a lawful desire looketh to, though the world cannot see it. He is an excellent good, a necessary good, and one that deserveth the best of our desires.

(1.) Consider he is an excellent good. Whatsoever is an attractive of love is to be found in Christ. Oh, display his glorious beauties before the soul! There is in him greatness, goodness, glory, mercy, peace, comfort, satisfaction: these are the beauties of Christ. Look over all the world and see if there be any that can do you so much good as he is able or willing to do. Cant. 5:10-16, The spouse describeth her beloved as a comely young man, as one of the greatest perfections. It would be too large to go over every particular of that description; only, in the general, observe that the Spirit of God useth such expressions as serve to discover outward beauty, to show us that whatever we admire in the creatures is, in a far more eminent degree, to be found in God and Christ. I know not how to be particular in this large field; only I shall a little single out the name of God to you, as it is said, ‘Thy name is as an ointment poured forth; therefore do the virgins love thee,’ Cant. 1:3. And the desires of God’s people are always expressed to be towards his name in the scriptures. I shall mention two attributes,

and pour out the savour of them, and display the beauty of them, which shine most gloriously in Jesus Christ; namely, his power and his mercy,

(1st.) His power and might. Christ is spoken of to be the desire of the nations, when he gave forth the greatest experiences of his power Hag. 1:7, 'I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come.' Who would not desire him that is able to secure him against all, fears, to keep him in the midst of all dangers, and to comfort him in all conditions? If a man would long after any person, he would after him that is able to shake the nations and to secure him against the common visible fears of mankind. Men run after things for a little satisfaction and security, but still this troubleth them; they must die, and then all their shifts will not serve the turn: Prov. 11:7, 'When a wicked man dieth, his expectation shall perish.' Then all his desires—wife, children, friends—will not serve the turn, when his cold corpse must be laid in the grave. But now Christ is so powerful, that he is able to secure us against this fear, to comfort us in death, and to raise us when dead.

(2dly.) His mercy is very great. A man's desire is restrained to things many times, which though otherwise allurable, yet he hath no hopes to obtain. Now here you may desire and be welcome, for your suit will be entertained: Ps. 111:8, 'He satisfieth the longing soul, and filleth the hungry soul with, goodness.' When the soul openeth itself to God, he filleth it; the longing soul is satisfied: Rev. 21:6, 'I will give to him that is athirst of the water of life freely.' You need not stand off upon terms or punctilios; Christ will satisfy your longing freely; he hath passed his word: John 6:37, 'He that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out.' They may have their comfort hindered and interrupted in their own thoughts, but he will in no wise cast them out.

(2.) Christ is a necessary good. Things may be excellent, yet if they be not needful to us, the affections move but faintly after them. Now Christ is *unum necessarium*, the one thing needful. It is not enough to choose that which is good, but that which is needful: Luke 10:42, 'But one thing is needful, and Mary hath chosen the better part.' Many follow after riches, pleasures, and honours, and outward comforts; these may be good in their kind, but they are not needful. What good will those things do us to all eternity? There the love of God will only stand us in stead. The things of this world, according to that usual saying among divines, are temporal in their use, but the punishment for the abuse of them is eternal. The most necessary and serviceable good to us is Jesus Christ; therefore get the judge to be your friend against the assizes. (3.) Consider, he hath deserved that our strongest desires should be after him, not only as he is the being of beings, and the fountain of our lives and mercies, but as he laid down his life for us: John 12:32, 'And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will

draw all men to me;’ that is, I will do that which shall draw all men’s desires to me; he will leave such a debt of thankfulness upon them. Though we could expect nothing from Christ, yet, by the law of thankfulness, our desires are due to him.

Thirdly, I come now to the third thing propounded, which was to give you some practical points and observations that concern man in the ordering of his life and conversation. I shall handle but three, and so quit this verse.

1. That God prosecuteth and accomplisheth his greatest designs by the most unlikely and despised means. Jesus Christ, the great Saviour of the world, was but a tender plant, which a man would be more apt to tread upon and crush, than to cherish.

2. God cometh in for the deliverance of his people in times of greatest despair and unlikelihood. For when the branches of Jesse were dried up, and had no verdure, even then sprung up the greatest ornament of that stock, although a root out of a dry ground.

3. Mean beginnings may grow up to great matters and glorious successes. Christ, the tender plant, was to be a tall tree, under the shadow of whose boughs all the fowls of heaven should lodge.

I begin with the first:—

Doct. 1. That God accomplisheth his greatest designs by the most unlikely and despised means. I might trace the way of God’s prosecution throughout all succession of ages, and show you how this truth is verified. He made us out of the dust, and that is contemptible matter. And as hath been our creation, so hath been our preservation, even by dust, that which we would trample upon rather than admire. But I shall rather come to the reasons of it, which are as follow:—

1. That his glory may more appear. The weakness of the instrument directs our thoughts to the power of the supreme worker. Should things work according to the constant tenor of nature, and the order of second causes, God might have no glory. We should look upon successes and deliverances as coming to us by chance, and not mind the great sway and poise by which all things in the world are moved, and carried to their proper ends. Therefore God doth sometimes more eminently put forth his hand this way. The weakness of the instrument holdeth forth the glory of the first mover and agent. The spirit of providence is discovered by it: Zech. 4:6, ‘Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord.’ My Spirit; that is, the invisible sway that directeth and ordereth all things to their proper uses and effects. God worketh sometimes the

most eminent glorious things by these weak means, that you may not rest on second causes.

2. That we may not see to the end of his counsels. A man doth not know what God will do with despised branches; God worketh in such a way as doth not suit with our usual expectations: Isa. 48:7, 'They are created now, and not from the beginning, even before the day when thou heardest them not; lest thou shouldest say, Behold, I knew them.' The things of God's providence are said to be new things, not created of old, lest we should say we understood them; deliverance cometh that way that we least looked for it. Certainly this is a new thing, it is not according to the course of this world. God hath created some things of higher value and greater efficacy than others, but they are the old things. Notwithstanding, weak things are often made use of by God. Should we see a man of a stately presence and comely lineaments and proportion, we should straightway cry, This is the anointed of the Lord, he is now before him, as Samuel did I Sam. 16:7, 'Here is now the person that God will work by;' but it is added there, 'God seeth not as man seeth;' that is, God will not work according to the usual way of your expectation. David, the least and the youngest, God chooseth him. So again, man thinketh that the eldest son shall advance the family, as being the flower of the parents' strength; and by the constant course and tenor of nature, the elder proveth the most successful; yet many times God appointeth otherwise: Gen. 25:23, 'The elder shall serve the younger.' God will not have us look to the end of his counsels, and therefore the younger is the most eminent.

3. That he may declare his displeasure against the pomp of the world. God maketh least use of that which we so much adore, outward glory and splendour. Most of his glorious instruments have been taken from the plough and sheepfold. Christ himself, as I told you, honoured meanness in his own person. You may see by Isa. 2:11-22, that God's great design in the latter days is to destroy the pomp of the world, the oaks and the cedars, and whatever is lifted up: 'The day of the Lord of hosts shall be upon every one that is proud and lofty, and every one that is lifted up, and he shall be brought low.' God's choice is of the meanest and most unlikely things, hereby showing certainly that there is not so much as the world thinketh in outward glory, which hath always proved unhappy to the church, who, when she enjoyed golden cups, had but wooden priests. Though Constantine was a worthy instrument, yet *Seminatum est venenum in ecclesia*—in his time poison was sowed in the church.

4. That he may shame his enemies in their security. When they have to deal with those that are unlikely to prevail, they think they shall carry all before them, 1 Sam. 17:42. The ruddy youth was despised by Goliath, and threatened terribly too, that his flesh should be given to the fowls of the air and to the

beasts of the field; but yet he overcame the giant. The more shame doth God pour upon his enemies by far, when they meet with their destruction where they least think of it. Abimelech, after he had overcome Shechem, the hold of, the god Berith, and divers other strongholds, and there was but one fort stood out, had his skull broke by a woman with a piece of a millstone, Judges 9:53. God ruineth them most ignominiously. Thus the Almighty goeth to war against Pharaoh with flies, and frogs, and lice, Exod. 8, the most putrid of all living creatures. The Moabites were put to flight before the Israelites by a fancy, to wit, the sun shining upon the water, which they thought to be blood. Pope Adrian was choked with a gnat. So Judges 5:20, it is said, 'The stars in their courses (or paths) fought against Sisera.' And what was that? Nothing but a little rain and hail, as Josephus witnesseth; for as they drew to battle there fell suddenly a storm of rain and hail just in their faces, that they could not see; and it being on the backs of the Israelites, it drove them on with the more fierceness against their enemies. Now by this way God poureth a great deal of contempt upon his adversaries.

5. That he may take off all cause of boasting from the creature, that the flesh may not glory in itself. Thus this very reason is urged by the apostle, 1 Cor. 1:27-29, 'God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things in the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are, that no flesh should glory in his presence.' The things that are nothing in our respect and valuation, God honoureth, and uses them as instruments, that we may have no cause to boast of our strength or merit. The creatures are apt to vaunt when they see there is anything of theirs concurring towards a work, though they do in part see God's hand in it: Judges 7:2, 'And the Lord said unto Gideon, The people that are with thee are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel vaunt themselves against me, saying, Mine own hand hath saved me.' It is observable that David called twice upon the mighty: Ps. 29:1, 'Give unto the Lord, O ye mighty, give unto the Lord glory and strength.' When a people are mighty they are very loth to give the glory and strength to God. Therefore God worketh by those that cannot any way ascribe it to themselves.

6. Another reason may be, that God may provide for the esteem of the meanest. God hath so tempered his providence, that he will leave no cause of contempt and disrespect among us. He casteth honour upon the meanest, and those that are not so high in the valuations of men. This is the reason of God's various distribution, why he hath made some mean, and some glorious, that he might upon times single out some of those mean ones to show his power by. Look, as Christ saith

of the blind man, that he was made blind to fit him for a miracle—John 9:3, ‘That the works of God should be manifest in him’—so some are poor, some are unlikely, that the work of God might be made manifest, that he might show his power and might and wisdom in working by them. He will leave none to scorn and contempt. Despised persons; shall be honoured by him, when other more glorious persons are laid aside as useless.

To apply it now. It affordeth divers inferences of duty, suitable to our divers cases and conditions.

1. To keep up the heart in case the means be weak. Take heed, do not sink to any base despondency of mind or spirit. Usually when means are weak men fly to wicked means, to a base desertion of the cause of God that they have undertaken, and yield to every unworthy fear: Isa. 8:6, ‘Forasmuch as this people refuseth the waters of Shiloah that go softly, and rejoice in Rezin and Remaliah’s son.’ Shiloah was a little stream in Jerusalem. Now rivers are often put for the refreshments and accommodations of a place. So that the sense is, they had rather basely yield up to Rezin and Remaliah’s son than wait upon God, to see what he will do with the small forces in Jerusalem. Do not despise the waters of Shiloah. It is the greatest honour that can be done to God, if we keep up endeavours for him, ‘though we have but weak means and encouragements; but then faith is tried, how you can cast yourselves upon a bare promise.

2. In case you have great means, fear them; God usually worketh by the most unlikely. The prophet David in the Psalms often expresseth himself as full of fears when his armies had been successful and victorious, not doubting of God, but himself; doubting lest he provoke him by being lifted up with his mercies, as you know in that place, 2 Chron. 32:25, ‘His heart was lifted up, therefore there was wrath upon him.’ David, when he had great strength, must needs fall to numbering of the people, 2 Sam. 24:11. It is a sad sign of speedy ruin when a people reckon and rely upon their strength. The more it is, the less it should be in your value and estimation. Asa had an army of six hundred thousand, and yet, 2 Chron. 14:11, he saith, ‘We have no power.’ Get it out of your hearts; it is no strength to you unless God go with it.

3. In case weak means have been successful, give God the glory, and do not boast. This is visibly one of God’s ends in such providences, that we may take notice of his strength. In other instances it is from God, but in this most remarkably: as Pharaoh’s magicians said, Exod. 8:19, ‘This is the finger of God.’ There God remarkably discovereth himself in such deliverances. We ascribe it to his power, but not to his mercy. Therefore our care, as I told you, should be especially that we do not ascribe the merit of it to ourselves, as we do

ascribe the working of it to God: Deut. 9:4, 'Speak not thou in thine heart, after that the Lord thy God hath cast them out from before thee, saying, For my righteousness the Lord hath brought me in to possess this land.' Give the Lord the praise. This is our case; our praise should live beyond the day of its public solemnisation.

I proceed to the second point, viz.:—

Doct. 2. That God cometh in for the deliverance of his people in times of greatest despair and unlikelihood. I will give you a few places. Zech. 14:7, 'At evening time it shall be light;' that is, *sepulcrum lucis*. It shall break forth when a man would think that all things should be enveloped and wrapped up in darkness. So Mat. 25:6, 'At midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh,' when all slumbered and slept; all expectation was given over. So Luke 23:8, 'When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?' 'All things will be at such a desperate pass, that nobody will believe that ever he will come. Faith there is taken for a confident expectation of good success, not in its whole latitude, as it is falsely misexpounded.

The reasons are:—

1. That he may seize upon his enemies suddenly, even steal upon them, as Christ did upon the world, when the sixth vial was poured out. Christ saith, Rev. 16:15, 'Behold, I come as a thief;' that is, as one not expected. So 1 Thes. 5:2, 'For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night;' that is, with respect to the suddenness of it. To wicked men it is unexpected.

2. That he may sufficiently try and exercise the patience and other suffering graces of his people: James 1:4, 'Let patience have its perfect work.' It is but a partial patience in a partial calamity. Then it is perfect patience when it is thoroughly exercised. So also that he may try their faith, whether they will believe in him or no, whether they can fetch one contrary out of another: Hosea 2:15, He hath given 'the valley of Achor for a door of hope.' And so for prayer, and to stir up delight in him.

Use. Do not then give over your dependence upon God in the worst of times: Gen. 18:14, 'Is anything too hard for the Lord?' Unbelief stumbleth most at God's power; when we cannot see which way we shall be helped, then we are apt to doubt. But at such times consider:—

1. You have no cause to distrust God; though he doth not find means, he can create them. The root of Jesse, though there be no branches, it can bear a sprig. God, that could make the world out of nothing, can preserve the church by

nothing; you do not know his invisible way of working. Believe beyond what you can see. Luther was wont to comfort himself, when all supplies failed, with this, that God was alive: Dan. 2:34, 'A stone cut out without hands, smote the image upon his feet, that were of iron and clay, and brake them to pieces. 'In the mount of the Lord it shall be seen.' It is a spiritual proverb, Gen. 22:14: in the greatest extremities the Lord will appear, and provide for those that commit themselves to him.

2. You have much ground of confidence: Ps. 102:13,14, 'Thou shalt arise and have mercy upon Zion; for the time to favour her, yea, the set time, is come: for thy servants take pleasure in her stones, and favour the dust thereof.' Now you are in a condition fit for deliverance: Deut. 32:36, '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.' God puts his people into such a condition in which deliverance will be most welcome, and then he bestoweth it upon them. Wait upon him now you are in a condition for God to help. When Caligula was angry with Philo, saith he, 'Now God will help, for the emperor is angry:

I come now to the last point.

Doct. 3. That mean beginnings may grow up to great matters and glorious successes. This is admirably set forth by the prophet Ezekiel, chap. 17:22-24, 'Thus saith the Lord God, I will also take of the highest branch of the high cedar, and will set it; I will crop off from the top of his young twigs a tender one, and will plant it upon an high mountain, and eminent: in the mountain of the height of Israel will I plant it; and it shall bring forth boughs, and bear fruit, and be a goodly cedar; and under it shall dwell all fowls of every wing; in the shadow of the branches thereof shall they dwell. And all the trees of the field shall know that I the Lord have brought down the high tree, have exalted the low tree, have dried up the green tree, and have made the dry tree to flourish: I the Lord have spoken, and have done it.' As it was with Christ, so it is many times with his followers; as in many instances. Jacob from himself and his staff was multiplied into two bands, Gen. 32:10, meaning his company of children and cattle, so divided to meet Esau. David was taken from feeding of sheep to feed Israel: Ps. 78:70,71, 'He chose David also his servant, and took him from the sheepfolds; from following the ewes great with young, he brought him to feed Jacob his people, and Israel his inheritance.' Saul, when seeking his father's asses, found a kingdom. Christ's kingdom sprang from a small beginning. This might also be shown from the great spreading of Satan's kingdom, many times from little matters: it is well known that 'a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump.' Arius, a private priest in Alexandria, drew the whole world after him; as Montanus and other heretics might be said to do. We should not therefore lay too

much on success. So Rev. 12:3, 'The dragon drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and cast them to the earth.'

The reasons of this in short are these:—

1. God's sovereignty over us, as we are his creatures; he that hath made us, can do what he will with his own.

2. Because he will keep the world in a continual vicissitude and change, some up, some down.

Use 1. To teach us to look to beginnings: Ps. 129:1, 2, 'Many a time have they afflicted me from my youth, may Israel now say: 'many a time have they afflicted me from my youth; yet they have not prevailed against me;' Cant. 2:15, 'Take us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vines.' This is added for abundant caution, to teach the church to prevent errors and heresies in the beginnings of them, before they spread, and grow strong and incurable; to crush things in the beginnings.

2. To support the hearts of Christians when they first put forth into the world: Eccles. 4:14, 'For out of prison he cometh to reign.' One seed multiplieth into many. Broad rivers come from a small fountain: Job 8:7, 'Though thy beginning was but small, yet thy latter end shall greatly increase.' Men rise like hop-stalks out of the dunghill, by the pole of Providence.

3. To keep men from despairing of public mercies. When the child of deliverance hath put forth the hand, it will come to the birth Zech. 4:10, 'Who hath despised the day of small things?' Christ was but a branch at first.

4. To encourage those that are weak in grace, Mat. 12:20. God will not despise smoking flax, though it cannot flame: Phil. 1:6, 'Being confident of this very thing, that he who hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.' Be humble and thankful in admiring God's goodness towards you, saying, as David, 'Who am I, O Lord, and what is my father's house, that thou hast brought me hitherto?'

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