

A Sermon preached by Richard Cameron at Avondale

"Be still and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the heathen: I will be exalted in the earth." - Psalm xlvi. 10.

Outward troubles ordinarily begin and occasion many stirrings and commotions within, either when they are beginning or in the time of their continuance, or even about the time in which the Lord is to put a period to them. Hence, the Spirit of God here, having spoken of great desolation and of making wars to cease, of breaking the bow, of cutting the spear, and burning of the chariots, addeth this, "Be still, and know that I am God."

Now, before we enter particularly on these words, we shall answer a question that may be here proposed; "Whence is it that disquiet of mind arises from outward troubles? for surely it is not from troubles themselves. It must be from somewhat within; for if matters were right within, though in fire or water, we would be calm and still."

I shall only name these five things:-

1st, Disquiet within, when troublous times are without, flows from the love of the world. It is certain that a man whose predominant evil is covetousness, or a reigning love for the world, must of necessity in outward commotions have much disorder and inquietude within - inquietude which makes him say, "These troubles may spoil me of my house, my cattle, my goods and all I have." But oh that ye could say with Paul, "I am crucified to the world, and the world unto me"! Then ye would learn that lesson, "I have learned in whatsoever state I am, to be content." A worldly man, in time of external troubles, cannot be content with his lot or condition.

2ndly, It flows from a cowardly fearful disposition. There are some of a cowardly humour or disposition, and hence even though they have much love to Christ, and somewhat of faith, and may be much denied to the world also, yet if fearfulness posses them, if the fear of men have more weight with them than the fear of God, they will be much cast down in the time of outward disorders. We may say that there never was a generation wherein there was more of the fear of men, and less of the fear of God, than in this age; wherein that word, "The fear of man bringeth a snare," &c. is made out; and many a snare has the fear of man brought all ranks of men in this land into.

3rdly, It flows from want of acquaintance with God. Hence says Eliphaz, "Acquaint now thyself with him, and be at peace: thereby good shall come unto thee." And here the text, "Be still, and know that I am God." Oh that folk were looking to God, and had the saving knowledge of Him; that they were looking up and saw His hand in all that they are exercised with! This would contribute much to make them calm and still in their minds under every difficulty.

4thly, It flows from unbelief. Ye know when the disciples were tossed in the sea their minds were as much troubled as the waves. And what was the reason of this? They were of little faith. Why are ye troubled and fearful? You are of little faith.

Lastly, It flows from over much haste, rashness, and great forwardness. I said inquietude of

mind is inwardly experienced not only in the beginning of outward trouble, but even when God is about to put an end to it. Some folk's minds will be in a strange hurry. The reason is, their inordinate and excessive desire of the speedy accomplishment of what they are in the hope and expectation of from the word of God, which He has caused us to hope in. Indeed it is very hard to tell what hour of the night it is now; but sure we may say that this is not the beginning of our troubles. We may date their beginning more than eighteen years since; nay, we may date their beginning from the year 1650. Who knows then but that the time may be drawing near when the Lord may make these wars cease for a time? but the truth is they must come to a greater height ere they cease, and ere we have peace in our borders. Who knows but the day is approaching when our Lord is to break the bows, and burn the chariot, and cut down those who have had plenty of bows and swords for years past? But whensoever the Lord is to make an end of these troubles, let us study to be still and know that He is God. There is much neglect of this doctrine now. It is but a groping in the water to speak to many folk. But what our Master gives us to speak, that we must speak, and it will not return empty. Woe's me! that it is all we can do by preaching, to make you more ripe for strokes and judgments, and as to the greater part we fear for utter destruction at last.

But for the further explanation of these words - "Be still, and know that I am God" -

- I. I shall speak of what is here forbidden, "Be still."
- II. I shall speak to what is required, "and know."
- III. Show you what are the reasons annexed thereunto.
- IV. I shall make some use or application, as the Lord shall strengthen and assist.

I. I am to speak to what is here forbidden. There are many things here forbidden, of which we shall only mention these two or three, as we take not upon us to open or unfold all that is contained in these words. Many are the mysteries that are contained and wrapped up in the shortest sentences of Scripture.

The first thing here forbidden is, inward disquiet, despondency or anxiety about worldly things. After David had reckoned up his troubles, he corrects himself and says, "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? Why art thou disquieted in me?" He allows not himself to be thus disquieted. O Sirs, know ye what it is to speak to souls? Some have a fashion of muttering to themselves they cannot tell what. Some folk at this time say they have dispensations at this time to be cast down and dejected for. I am afraid many are in the one extreme of too much liberty and lightness of spirit; and others are in the other extreme, of being too anxious about many things; neither of which God allows, "Be ye careful for nothing." What can you profit yourselves, or the Church of Christ either, by your sinful carefulness or by your unbelieving anxiety.

Secondly, this text of Scripture forbids quarrelling with and murmuring against God. Now let me apply as I go along. There are very few, and these very well circumstanced, that find themselves in no hazard of quarrelling with God. I think almost that if angels were on earth, they would be in hazard of it. I will assure you, there are none that have corruption, but they have need to be afraid of this. But many give way to this quarrelling, and consider not the hazard thereof. Beware of it, for it is a dreadful thing to quarrel with God. Who may say unto Him, "What doest thou?" It is a good account of Aaron, that when God made fire to destroy his sons, he held his peace. Let us then, while we bear the yoke, sit alone and keep

silence, and put our mouths in the dust, if so be there may be hope. Ye know, the murmuring of the children of Israel cost them very dear. "Be still," that is, "Beware of murmuring against Me," saith the Lord. God gives not an account of His matters to any, because there may be many things ye cannot see through; and therefore ye may think it better to have wanted them, and much more for the credit of God and the Church. I say, God gives not an account of His matters to any. Beware, then, of drawing such conclusions.

Thirdly, This forbids fretting because of evil doers. "Cease from anger, and forsake wrath. Fret not thyself in any ways to do evil." Oh, but it is dangerous to lose ground or footing! It is very dreadful to hear a godly man say what David says, "Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency." What is that? "Why, my religion has been all in vain. My mortification is to no effect and my prayers to no purpose. God chastens me, and He smiles upon the wicked." Then beware of envying the wicked, though all things appear to prosper. "Be still," says God, "for I sit in heaven and am laughing at them all the while."

II. I come now to speak of what is here required. And

1st, It requires fixedness of mind and stayedness of heart. "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee, because he trusteth in thee." "He shall not be afraid of evil tidings, his heart is fixed trusting in the Lord." Ye would do well to be much in putting up that request in prayer to the Lord at this time, "Lord, fix our hearts; fix our spirits, and compose our minds to rely on Thee in troublous times."

2ndly, It requires composure of spirit. For some are of such a temper naturally, that they will carry calmly under strange vicissitudes or changes, neither being much cast down with cross trials nor much lifted up with favourable dispensations. But I say, this too requires submission to God. A holy submission to God is now become a stranger and a rare thing in the country amongst us. I cannot now stay to speak upon the nature of this kind of submission, but I will tell you in a word what it is; it is taking well with the providential dispensations of God, because He alone has done it, and if ye cannot see through them ye hope against hope that God will bring good out of these. And if submission be so entertained it will make the soul triumph and rejoice in persecution, famines, and in every trial and tribulation whatsoever.

3rdly, It requires not only submission as to what is past, and what we are presently under, but also a quiet and patient waiting on the word for an outgate and relief as to what He may try us with in time to come. Oh, but he that has submission has need of much patience; as when we are enabled to look backward, and see that He has done all things well, so likewise we should resolve not to take anything amiss that He does for the time to come. We should not limit or set bonds to Him, but let Him take His own way in granting that which is most upon our spirits, and fulfilling the desires of our hearts.

III. As for the reasons annexed to these, we shall only give you these two that are contained in the text, "Be still, and wait on God."

1. Because He is God still. Think not that He is, in any respect, less God than He was many years ago. It is true He appeared more visibly to men twenty or thirty years since, in this land, than He does now, but He is the same God now that he was then when His work

flourished in Britain and Ireland. He is the same God yesterday, to-day, and for ever. Although he be far out of our view, yet He is the same God. Oh, for high and honourable thoughts of Him. For though He be unchangeable, yet oh, how often do our thoughts change of Him! Our good thoughts of Him ebb and flow as His dispensations towards us are. Sometimes folk have good thoughts of God, and at other times they begin to think He hath forgotten the earth. How dangerous is such a thought, for He hath as much power for managing and governing his affairs now as ever. He is always sitting in the assembly of the gods, and rules in the midst of His enemies.

We now intend, if the Lord will, to speak to other part, "Know that I am God" (but it may be at another opportunity). And oh, who can tell this? All the angels that are beholding Him in the greatness of His glory and the brightness of His countenance cannot tell the hundredth, nay the thousandth part of Him. But we may know much more of Him than we do, both by His works of creation, "For the heavens declare the glory of God," and likewise by what may be known of Him by the works of His providence. At this time, I assure you, the present providences may supply the want of preaching. The dispensations of this time have much in them. By these dispensations we may know many things that our fathers knew not. They had not the means of knowing many of the mysterious secrets of God's nature that we may see by the dispensations of the time. A

2. Reason is, "I will be exalted among the heathen." What need you trouble yourselves. You that are the people of God hear what He is saying. If every one of you were concerned in this, you would hear what God is saying, but unto many the reproach of Christ is a burden. You that are in hazard for the truth, be not troubled: our Lord will be exalted among the heathen. But many will say, "We know He will be exalted at the last and great day when he shall have all the wicked on His left hand." Yes; but says He, "I will be exalted in the earth." He has been exalted on the earth; but the most wonderfully exalting of His works we have not yet seen. The people of God have been right high already. Oh, but the Church of the Jews was sometimes very high, and sometimes the Christian Church! In the time of Constantine she was high. Yea, the Church of Scotland has been very high, "Fair as the moon, clear as the sun; and terrible as an army with banners." The day has been when Zion was stately in Scotland. The terror of the Church of Scotland once took hold of all the kings and great men that passed by. Yea; the terror of it took hold on Popish princes; nay, on the Pope himself. But this exalting that we have yet seen is nothing to what is to come. The Church was high, but it shall be yet much higher. "There is none like the God of Jeshurun." The Church of Christ is to be so exalted that its members shall be made ride upon the high places of the earth. Let us not be judged to be of the opinion of some men in England called the Fifth-Monarchy men, who say that, before the great day, Christ shall come in person from heaven with all the saints and martyrs and reign a thousand years on earth. But we are of the opinion that the Church shall yet be more high and glorious, as appears from the book of Revelation, and the Church shall have more power than ever she had before; and therefore we declare avowedly in opposition to all tyrannical magistrates over Protestants, and over Presbyterians - magistrates that are open enemies to God - we declare we will have none such acknowledged as lawful magistrates over us. We will have none but such as are for the advancement of piety and the suppression of impiety and wickedness. Let all the world say as they will, we have the word of God for it. The work begun shall be carried on in spite of all opposition. Our Lord shall be exalted on earth; and we do not question much but that He shall be yet exalted in Scotland. But I assure you that we in Scotland have need to take heed to ourselves.

I am very much afraid that we may even have done with good days in Scotland for all this. But let us stir up ourselves, and take hold of Him by faith. For I assure you, if ye be not delivered and made a free and purified people, we shall no more be a free corporation, nation, or embodied people, that the Jews are at this day. I say not this to disquiet you, but to stir you up to take hold of Christ and His standard, on which it shall be written, "LET CHRIST REIGN." Let us study to have it set up amongst us. It is hard to tell where it shall be first erected, but our Lord is to set up a standard; and oh, that it may be carried to Scotland? When it is set up it shall be carried through the nations, and it shall go to Rome, and the gates of Rome shall be burned with fire. It is a standard that shall overthrow the throne of Britain, and all the thrones in Europe, that will not "kiss the Son lest he be angry; and in his anger they perish from the way." "Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the heathen; I will be exalted in the earth."

Now, of what has been said, there is a threefold use to be made.

USE 1. - Of information. From what has been spoken, your judgments may be informed, both as to what is to be understood by these words, "Be still," and also with regard to what is the duty of the present day. We refer you in some measure to the particulars formerly mentioned. For the truth is, if ye would have any good or edification by a preaching, first inform your judgments; and then cry unto the Lord for strength and willingness of mind to do what ye are informed of to be duty, for as long as the duty is dark the will and affections are not rightly exercised with regard to what is spoken, nor can practise what is taught.

USE 2. - Of reproof. Many folk may be reproved by what is here spoken. I wish we would all take with our reproofs, and mind that word, "He that being often reproved, hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy." And this doctrine reproves these :-

1. It reproves those who are stupidly and unconcernedly lying by from their duty at this time, for when it is said, "Be still," the meaning is not that ye should lie by and be idle; no, but that ye should make use of the means. Many folk say, "At such a time we may lie by from duty;" by we lie by most from duty when we are most called forth to help. We see that when Judas was approaching, Christ calls the disciples to watch and pray with Him, but instead of that they fell asleep. But He did the work without them. And if the work were not laid upon One who could do it without the help of ministers and professors, we might lay it by altogether. I will be free with you. Many of you have given over the work that ye had on your hands about a twelve-month ago. I know none that have done this more than you, O Avondale. Ye of this parish were among the first last year, and now ye are among the last. I trow it is because of the love of the world. Many before this were much concerned in the work, and now have laid it by. Why! ye are feuars and have heritages, and are afraid to offend the great man and his substitutes. You will not only lose their favour, but your heritage also. Oh, but the love of the world is a great enemy to this calmness and quietness of mind! "Be still." I am sure ye cannot have much peace of conscience till ye be at work again, and as much so as ever. But says the house or bit of land, as it were, "Will ye quit me thus?"

But again, there may be some that have grown remiss in duty, not from love to the world, but from timidity and fearfulness. A strange fearfulness seized on folk after the break. It did so to such a degree that they have not yet cast it off. Some are naturally of such a fearful and

timorous disposition. But I say, beware of lying by, you in Avondale or any other parish, for God is as able to do His work this year as the last when He had an army at His back. he then turned His back upon them, because they took in the interest of His stated and avowed enemies, for He saw this was inconsistent. But say some, "You know my lord is my lord, and the chamberlain, and the laird." But ye know not that God is God, otherwise ye would not do as ye do. But say some, "You know my lord is more my lord than before." But I say, Not at all. The enemies have no more power than the last year before the rise at Bothwell. It was then thought that they had not much power. The meeting then almost defied them: but our Lord has no less power than He had; and oh, that these things were believed by us!

2. It reproves those who take over great a lift. I need not speak much against it. Folk that are of an anxious spirit about events would have a deliverance soon. Say they, "If it should fall out in a week, a month, a year, or two years either," they would be content to venture all for it. You should lay a year or two out of your own expense, and then you would have all you wanted and something to come in. But you might be content to lay out what you have, if it were for seven years; nay, if it were for all your days, and your son's days. It is probable and likely that it will not be so long, but we shall say nothing as to that.

USE 3. - Of exhortation. But I cannot tell whether I shall speak much on it at this time; but only, Are ye not in love with this, "Be still"? Would ye not be content to be at this with it? I shall only name some things whereby we may attain to calmness of spirit in all times and seasons. And

1. Labour to have much of the awe, fear, and dread of God upon your spirits. "Stand in awe, and sin not, commune with your own hearts." Little do we mind Isaiah viii. 13: "Sanctify the Lord of hosts himself, and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread," and then follows the promise, "And he shall be for a sanctuary." Oh, that ye would set the Lord always before you! Consider this, who says it, and it comes to pass. "And the Lord has not commanded it." It is neither lord, laird, general, nor forces that can stand in Thy sight, O Lord, if once Thou be angry. If this were on our spirit, looking to and fearing of men would much disappear. If this consideration were on our spirits, man's greatness would not be once named by us. If we looked to the greatness, sovereignty and power of God, and could say, "The Lord of hosts is with us, the God of Jacob is our refuge," we would have composure of spirit. Then let the impression of this be likewise upon you that if ye be against God He will be against you also. And

2. Ye should be brought to calmness and submission. Beware of sinning or corresponding with what is sinful. "Stand in awe, and sin not, and be still." Now, whether they have most peace this day that have complied with the defections of the time, or those that have kept their hands most clean of them? Whether or not are those that have complied as afraid of the enemy's coming amongst them as others? I trow they are as afraid as those who have a good conscience before God and man. The man that has a good conscience has a good bed to sleep on, were it in a moss, muir, or mountain in the open field exposed to wind and weather. But for a guilty conscience, there is no getting free from it. A man that hath a good conscience before he sees them may be afraid, but when come his fear vanishes. But an evil conscience is never without fears; and, O man, if thy heart condemn thee, God can lay much more to thy charge. Many folk venture on sin to get outward peace and quiet, but by getting that they forfeit inward peace and tranquility of mind. But as for the man that is on good terms with

God, "Though the earth be removed, and the mountains cast into the sea, or turned upside down," he will not be afraid. For cast a man over a height or precipice, he still, as it were, falls on his feet if he have a good conscience. It is true when in providence he is cast here and there, he thinks that this will ruin him, but when the confusion is past, and he is come to himself, he finds himself better or at least as well as he was before.

3. A word to you that would be still. Commune with your own hearts. Confusions and commotions arise in Christians or believers, either from the subtle devices of Satan, or the troubles of the world, of the rising up of their own corruptions, and the law of the members not only rebelling against God, but prevailing over the law of the mind. A man that is not talking or communing with himself, either concerning his state or frame, cannot be right. For it is one thing we should talk much with ourselves about whether our state be good or bad? But if there be no doubt of the goodness of your state, then commune with your hearts about the frame of your hearts. We must begin and commune with our heart concerning ourselves, and then about the providences of God, and say, "Whence are these? Does this dispensation come from God?" Then, says the soul, Will God hurt me or do me wrong? No. If a providential dispensation comes upon us before we commune with our hearts, it will be ready to cast us on our backs. But let us trace it back to its first appearance, and examine our hearts about it, and hold our grips, that we may get to the end; and though it seem terrible, yet it may be very advantageous to our soul, and so there may be a great calm in the mind all the time.

4. Would ye be still? Then strive to have faith in exercise all the time. "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee, because he trusteth in thee." I shall not bid you do as the disciples did, or say, "Lord, increase our faith;" for, says Christ to them, "If ye had but a grain's weight of true and real faith, ye might say unto this mountain, Be thou removed and cast into the sea." Many folk would be at something that bears much bulk, and it is no wonder that some would be at that, for I have no skill of that faith that has no bulk at all. The least faith in exercise has more strength than thousands of men and armies! Oh, but faith hath a strange power with God. Armies and prayer without faith have no power with God. It is faith that makes prayer and armies successful. Try if you have faith, and if you have it, cry, "Lord, I believe, help mine unbelief." Deny it not, though never so small. If you have any, use the little you have, and you may get more, and this will tend much to establish and compose your heart in an evil time.

We might speak of many advantages that folk might have by being still or fixed, which we cannot stay now to mention. I shall only notice these two, which are very desirable:-

1st, The man whose heart is fixed trusting in the Lord shall not be afraid of evil tidings. "His heart is fixed, still trusting in the Lord." When evil tidings come to a believer, if he has not been at pains to compose himself, his heart will jump to his mouth; but if his heart be right and fixed, it will never move him. It is true he will look to God for assistance and direction how to set about the duties which that dispensation calls for at His hand. We might have a pleasant life with such dispensations, if we had much of this fixedness of heart.

Lastly, If we had this fixedness we would be fit to go about duties. "My heart is fixed, my heart is fixed," says the psalmist, What follows? "I will sing to thee." And elsewhere, "His heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord" - which says that without being still there is no right going about duty. Without it we cannot wrestle, pray, or praise. How can ministers preach or

people hear? how can there be reading or praying aright without being still? The man that is disquieted and fearful is unfit for any piece of duty. I say the man that is disquieted, not submitting to the will of God, is unfit for any duty He calls for at his hand. He is a prey to every temptation. We say it is good fishing in troubled waters. The devil first labours to confuse men and then he easily catches them. Then he will busk his hook, and take by one temptation or another, so that the thing to be understood here is, to be patiently waiting on God, and to beware of grudging, murmuring, despondency, fearfulness and disquiet of mind.