

CHAPTER 50

In this chapter,

I. Those to whom God sends are justly charged with bringing all the troubles they were in upon themselves, by their own wilfulness and obstinacy, it being made to appear that God was able and ready to help them if they had been fit for deliverance (v. 1-3).

II. He by whom God sends produces his commission (v. 4), alleges his own readiness to submit to all the services and sufferings he was called to in the execution of it (v. 5, 6), and assures himself that God, who sent him, would stand by him and bear him out against all opposition (v. 7-9).

III. The message that is sent is life and death, good and evil, the blessing and the curse, comfort to desponding saints and terror to presuming sinners (v. 10, 11). Now all this seems to have a double reference,

1. To the unbelieving Jews in Babylon, who quarrelled with God for his dealings with them, and to the prophet Isaiah, who, though dead long before the captivity, yet, prophesying so plainly and fully of it, saw fit to produce his credentials, to justify what he had said.

2. To the unbelieving Jews in our Saviour's time, whose own fault it was that they were rejected, Christ having preached much to them, and suffered much from them, and being herein borne up by a divine power. The "contents" of this chapter, in our Bibles, give this sense of it, very concisely, thus: — "Christ shows that the dereliction of the Jews is not to be imputed to him, by his ability to save, by his obedience in that work, and by his confidence in divine assistance." The prophet concludes with an exhortation to trust in God and not in ourselves.

~~<280>~~ ISAIAH 50:1-3

EXPOSTULATION WITH ISRAEL

Those who have professed to be the people of God, and yet seem to be dealt severely with, are apt to complain of God, and to lay the fault upon him, as if he had been hard with them. But, in answer to their murmurings, we have here,

I. A challenge given them to prove, or produce any evidence, that the quarrel began on God's side, v. 1. They could not say that he had done them any wrong or had acted arbitrarily.

1. He had been a husband to them; and husbands were then allowed a power to put away their wives upon any little disgust: if their wives found not favour in their eyes, they made nothing of giving them a bill of divorce, ~~<1341>~~ Deuteronomy 24:1; ~~<4911>~~ Matthew 19:7. But they could not say that God had dealt so with them. It is true they were now separated from him, and had abode many days without ephod, altar, or sacrifice; but whose fault was that? They could not say that God had given their mother a bill of divorce; let them produce it if they can, for a bill of divorce was given into the hand of her that was divorced.

2. He had been a father to them; and fathers had then a power to sell their children for slaves to their creditors, in satisfaction for the debts they were not otherwise able to pay. Now it is true the Jews were sold to the Babylonians then, and afterwards to the Romans; but did God sell them for payment of his debts? No, he was not indebted to any of those to whom they were sold, or, if he had sold them, he *did not increase his wealth by their price*, ~~<39412>~~ Psalm 44:12. When God chastens his children, it is neither for his pleasure (~~<38210>~~ Hebrews 12:10) nor for his profit. All that are saved are saved by a prerogative of grace, but those that perish are cut off by an act of divine holiness and justice, not of absolute sovereignty.

II. A charge exhibited against them, showing them that they were themselves the authors of their own ruin: "*Behold, for your iniquities, for the pleasure of them and the gratification of your own base lusts, you have sold yourselves, for your iniquities you are sold; not as children are sold by their parents, to pay their debts, but as malefactors are sold by the judges, to punish them for their crimes. You sold yourselves to work*

wickedness, and therefore God justly sold you into the hands of your enemies, ^{<4115>}2 Chronicles 12:5, 8. It is for your transgressions that your mother is put away, for her whoredoms and adulteries,” which were always allowed to be a just cause of divorce. The Jews were sent into Babylon for their idolatry, a sin which broke the marriage covenant, and were at last rejected for crucifying the Lord of glory; these were the iniquities for which they were sold and put away.

III. The confirmation of this challenge and this charge.

1. It is plain that it was owing to themselves that they were cast off; for God came and offered them his favour, offered them his helping hand, either to prevent their trouble or to deliver them out of it, but they slighted him and all the tenders of his grace. “Do you lay it upon me?” (says God); “tell me, then, wherefore, *when I came, was there no man to meet me, when I called, was there none to answer me?*” v. 2. God came to them by his servants the prophets, demanding the fruits of his vineyard (^{<4134>}Matthew 21:34); he sent them his messengers, *rising up betimes and sending them* (^{<2855>}Jeremiah 35:15); he called to them to leave their sins, and so prevent their own ruin: but *was there* no man, or next to none, that had any regard to the warnings which the prophets gave them, none that answered the calls of God, or complied with the messages he sent them; and this was it for which they were sold and put away. Because they *mocked the messengers of the Lord*, therefore, *God brought upon them the king of the Chaldeans*, ^{<4466>}2 Chronicles 36:16, 17. Last of all *he sent unto them his Son*. He *came to his own*, but *his own received him not*; he called them to himself, but there were none that answered; he would have gathered Jerusalem's children together, but they would not; they knew not, because they would not know, the things that belonged to their peace, nor the day of their visitation, and for that transgression it was that they were put away and their house was left desolate, ^{<4141>}Matthew 21:41; 23:37, 38; ^{<4241>}Luke 19:41, 42. When God calls men to happiness, and they will not answer, they are justly left to be miserable.

2. It is plain that it was not owing to a want of power in God, for he is almighty, and could have recovered them from so great a death; nor was it owing to a want of power in Christ, for he is *able to save to the uttermost*. The unbelieving Jews in Babylon thought they were not delivered because their God was not able to deliver them; and those in Christ's time were ready to ask, in scorn, *Can this man save us? For himself he cannot save*.

“But” (says God) “*is my hand shortened at all, or is it weakened?*” Can any limits be set to Omnipotence? Cannot he redeem who is the great Redeemer? Has he no *power to deliver* whose all power is? To put to silence, and for ever to put to shame, their doubts concerning his power, he here gives unquestionable proofs of it.

(1.) He can, when he pleases, *dry up the seas*, and make the rivers a wilderness. He did so for Israel when he redeemed them out of Egypt, and he can do so again for their redemption out of Babylon. It is done at his *rebuke*, as easily as with a word's speaking. He can so dry up the rivers as to leave the fish to die for want of water, and to putrefy. When God *turned the waters of Egypt into blood he slew the fish*, ~~1859~~ Psalm 105:29. The expression our Saviour sometimes used concerning the power of faith, that it will *remove mountains and plant sycamores in the sea*, is not unlike this; if their faith could do that, no doubt their faith would save them, and therefore they were inexcusable if they perished in unbelief.

(2.) He can, when he pleases, eclipse the lights of heaven, *clothe them with blackness, and make sackcloth their covering* (v. 3) by thick and dark clouds interposing, which he balances, ~~1852~~ Job 36:32; 37:16.

~~2804~~ ISAIAH 50:4-9

WORK AND SUFFERINGS OF THE MESSIAH

Our Lord Jesus, having proved himself able to save, here shows himself as willing as he is able to save, here shows himself as willing as he is able. We suppose the prophet Isaiah to say something of himself in these verses, engaging and encouraging himself to go on in his work as a prophet, notwithstanding the many hardships he met with, not doubting but that God would stand by him and strengthen him; but, like David, he speaks of himself as a type of Christ, who is here prophesied of and promised to be the Saviour.

I. As an acceptable preacher. Isaiah, a prophet, was qualified for the work to which he was called, so were the rest of God's prophets, and others whom he employed as his messengers; but Christ was anointed with the Spirit above his fellows. To make the man of God perfect, he has,

1. *The tongue of the learned*, to know how to give instruction, *how to speak a word in season to him that is weary*, v. 4. God, who made man's mouth, gave Moses the tongue of the learned, to speak for the terror and conviction of Pharaoh, ^{<0011>}Exodus 4:11, 12. He gave to Christ the tongue of the learned, to speak a word in season for the comfort of those that are weary and heavily laden under the burden of sin, ^{<0128>}Matthew 11:28. *Grace was poured into his lips*, and they are said to *drop sweet-smelling myrrh*. See what is the best learning of a minister, to know how to comfort troubled consciences, and to speak pertinently, properly, and plainly, to the various cases of poor souls. An ability to do this is God's gift, and it is one of the best gifts, which we should covet earnestly. Let us repose ourselves in the many comfortable words which Christ has spoken to the weary.

2. The ear of the learned, to receive instruction. Prophets have as much need of this as of the tongue of the learned; for they must deliver what they are taught and no other, must hear the word from God's mouth diligently and attentively, that they may speak it exactly, ^{<0017>}Ezekiel 3:17. Christ himself received that he might give. None must undertake to be teachers who have not first been learners. Christ's apostles were first disciples, *scribes instructed unto the kingdom of heaven*, ^{<0152>}Matthew 13:52. Nor is it enough to hear, but we must *hear as the learned*, hear and understand, hear and remember, hear as those that would learn by what we hear. Those that would hear as the learned must be awake, and wakeful; for we are naturally drowsy and sleepy, and unapt to hear at all, or we hear by the halves, hear and do not heed. Our ears need to be wakened; we need to have something said to rouse us, to awaken us out of our spiritual slumbers, that we may hear as for our lives. We need to be awakened *morning by morning*, as duly as the day returns, to be awakened to do the work of the day in its day. Our case calls for continual fresh supplies of divine grace, to free us from the dulness we contract daily. The morning, when our spirits are most lively, is a proper time for communion with God; then we are in the best frame both to speak to him (*my voice shalt thou hear in the morning*) and to hear from him. The people came *early in the morning* to hear Christ in the temple (^{<0138>}Luke 21:38), for, it seems, his were morning lectures. And it is God that wakens us morning by morning. If we do any thing to purpose in his service, it is he who, as our Master, calls us up; and we should doze perpetually if he did not waken us morning by morning.

II. As a patient sufferer, v. 5, 6. One would think that he who was commissioned and qualified to speak comfort to the weary should meet with no difficulty in his work, but universal acceptance. It is however quite otherwise; he has both hard work to do and hard usage to undergo; and here he tells us with what undaunted constancy he went through with it. We have no reason to question but that the prophet Isaiah went on resolutely in the work to which God had called him, though we read not of his undergoing any such hardships as are here supposed; but we are sure that the prediction was abundantly verified in Jesus Christ: and here we have,

1. His patient obedience in his doing work. “The Lord God has not only wakened my ear to hear what he says, but has opened my ear to receive it, and comply with it” (⁹⁰⁶Psalm 40:6, 7, *My ear hast thou opened; then said I, Lo, I come*); for when he adds, *I was not rebellious, neither turned away back*, more is implied than expressed — that he was willing, that though he foresaw a great deal of difficulty and discouragement, though he was to take pains and give constant attendance as a servant, though he was to empty himself of that which was very great and humble himself to that which was very mean, yet he did not fly off, did not fail, nor was discouraged. He continued very free and forward to his work even when he came to the hardest part of it. Note, As a good understanding in the truths of God, so a good will to the work and service of God, is from the grace of God.

2. His obedient patience in his suffering work. I call it obedient patience because he was patient with an eye to his Father's will, thus pleading with himself, *This commandment have I received of my Father*, and thus submitting to God, *Not as I will, but as thou wilt*. In this submission he resigned himself,

(1.) To be scourged: *I gave my back to the smiters*; and that not only by submitting to the indignity when he was smitten, but by permitting it (or admitting it rather) among the other instances of pain and shame which he would voluntarily undergo for us.

(2.) To be buffeted: *I gave my cheeks to those that not only smote them, but plucked off the hair of the beard*, which was a greater degree both of pain and of ignominy.

(3.) To be spit upon: *I hid not my face from shame and spitting*. He could have hidden his face from it, could have avoided it, but he would not, because he was made a reproach of men, and thus he would answer to the type of Job, that man of sorrows, of whom it is said that they *smote him on the cheek reproachfully* (^{<1860>}Job 16:10), which was an expression not only of contempt, but of abhorrence and indignation. All this Christ underwent for us, and voluntarily, to convince us of his willingness to save us.

III. As a courageous champion, v. 7-9. The Redeemer is as famous for his boldness as for his humility and patience, and, though he yields, yet he is more than a conqueror. Observe,

1. The dependence he has upon God. What was the prophet Isaiah's support was the support of Christ himself (v. 7): *The Lord God will help me*; and again, v. 9. Those whom God employs he will assist, and will take care they want not any help that they or their work call for. God, having laid help upon his Son for us, gave help to him, and his hand was all along *with the man of his right hand*. Nor will he only assist him in his work, but accept of him (v. 8): *He is near that justifieth*. Isaiah, no doubt, was falsely accused and loaded with reproach and calumny, as other prophets were; but he despised the reproach, knowing that God would roll it away and bring forth his righteousness as the light, perhaps in this world (^{<1806>}Psalms 37:6), at furthest in the great day, when there will be a resurrection of names as well as bodies, and the righteous shall shine forth as the morning sun. And so it was verified in Christ; by his resurrection he was proved to be not the man that he was represented, not a blasphemer, not a deceiver, not an enemy to Caesar. The judge that condemned him owned he found no fault in him; the centurion, or sheriff, that had charge of his execution, declared him a righteous man: so near was he that justified him. But it was true of him in a further and more peculiar sense: the Father justified him when he accepted the satisfaction he made for the sin of man, and constituted him *the Lord our righteousness*, who was made sin for us. He was *justified in the Spirit*, ^{<1816>}1 Timothy 3:16. He was near who did it; for his resurrection, by which he was justified, soon followed his condemnation and crucifixion. He was straightway glorified, ^{<1832>}John 13:32.

2. The confidence he thereupon has of success in his undertaking: "If God will help me, if he will justify me, will stand by me and bear me out, *I shall not be confounded*, as those are that come short of the end they

aimed at and the satisfaction they promised themselves: *I know that I shall not be ashamed.*” Though his enemies did all they could to put him to shame, yet he kept his ground, he kept his countenance, and was not ashamed of the work he had undertaken. Note, Work for God is work that we should not be ashamed of; and hope in God is hope that we shall not be ashamed of. Those that trust in God for help shall not be disappointed; they know whom they have trusted, and therefore know they shall not be ashamed.

3. The defiance which in this confidence he bids to all opposers and opposition: “God will help me, and *therefore have I set my face like a flint.*” The prophet did so; he was bold in reproving sin, in warning sinners (⁴¹⁸⁸Ezekiel 3:8, 9), and in asserting the truth of his predictions. Christ did so; he went on in his work, as Mediator, with unshaken constancy and undaunted resolution; he did not fail nor was discouraged; and here he challenges all his opposers,

(1.) To enter the lists with him: *Who will contend with me*, either in law or by the sword? *Let us stand together* as combatants, or as the plaintiff and defendant. *Who is my adversary? Who is the master of my cause?* so the word is, “Who will pretend to enter an action against me? Let him appear, and *come near to me*, for I will not abscond.” Many offered to dispute with Christ, but he put them to silence. The prophet speaks this in the name of all faithful ministers; those who keep close to the pure word of God, in delivering their message, need not fear contradiction; the scriptures will bear them out, whoever contends with them. *Great is the truth and will prevail.* Christ speaks this in the name of all believers, speaks it as their champion. Who dares be an enemy to those whom he is a friend to, or contend with those for whom he is an advocate? Thus St. Paul applies it (⁴¹⁸⁸Romans 8:33): *Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect?*

(2.) He challenges them to prove any crime upon him (v. 9): *Who is he that shall condemn me?* The prophet perhaps was condemned to die; Christ we are sure was; and yet both could say, *Who is he that shall condemn?* For there is no condemnation to those whom God justifies. There were those that did condemn them, but what became of them? *They all shall wax old as a garment.* The righteous cause of Christ and his prophets shall outlive all opposition. *The moth shall eat them up* silently and insensibly; a little thing will serve to destroy them. But the roaring

lion himself shall not prevail against God's witnesses. All believers are enabled to make this challenge, *Who is he that shall condemn? It is Christ that died.*

ISAIAH 50:10-11

THE DISCONSOLATE ENCOURAGED

The prophet, having the tongue of the learned given him, that he might give to every one his portion, here makes use of it, rightly dividing the word of truth. It is the summary of the gospel. *He that believes shall be saved* (he that trusts in the name of the Lord shall be comforted, though for a while he walk in darkness and have no light), but *he that believes not shall be damned*; though for a while he walk in the light of his own fire, yet he shall lie down in sorrow.

I. Comfort is here spoken to disconsolate saints, and they are encouraged to trust in God's grace, v. 10. Here observe,

1. What is always the character of a child of God. He is one that fears the Lord with a filial fear, that stands in awe of his majesty and is afraid of incurring his displeasure. This is a grace that usually appears most in good people when they walk in darkness, when other graces appear not. They then *tremble at his word* (~~2nd~~ Isaiah 66:2) and are *afraid of his judgments*, ~~4th~~ Psalm 119:120. He is one that obeys the voice of God's servant, is willing to be ruled by the Lord Jesus, as God's servant in the great work of man's redemption, one that yields a sincere obedience to the law of Christ and cheerfully comes up to the terms of his covenant. Those that truly fear God will obey the voice of Christ.

2. What is sometimes the case of a child of God. It is supposed that though he has in his heart the fear of God, and faith in Christ, yet for a time he walks in darkness and has no light, is disquieted and has little or no comfort. Who is there that does so? This intimates that it is a case which sometimes happens among the professors of religion, yet not very often; but, whenever it happens, God takes notice of it. It is no new thing for the children and heirs of light sometimes to walk in darkness, and for a time not to have any glimpse or gleam of light. This is not meant so much of the comforts of this life (those that fear God, when they have ever so great

an abundance of them, do not walk in them as their light) as of their spiritual comforts, which relate to their souls. They walk in darkness when their evidences for heaven are clouded, their joy in God is interrupted, the testimony of the Spirit is suspended, and the light of God's countenance is eclipsed. Pensive Christians are apt to be melancholy, and those who fear always are apt to fear too much.

3. What is likely to be an effectual cure in this sad case. He that is thus in the dark,

(1.) Let him trust in the name of the Lord, in the goodness of his nature, and that which he has made known of himself, his wisdom, power, and goodness. *The name of the Lord is a strong tower*, let him run into that. Let him depend upon it that if he walk before God, which a man may do though he walk in the dark, he shall find God all-sufficient to him.

(2.) Let him stay himself upon his God, his in covenant; let him keep hold of his covenant-relation to God, and call God *his God*, as Christ on the cross, *My God, My God*. Let him stay himself upon the promises of the covenant, and build his hopes on them. When a child of God is ready to sink he will find enough in God to stay himself upon. Let him trust in Christ, for God's name is in him (⁽¹²³⁾Exodus 23:21), trust in that name of his, *The Lord our righteousness*, and stay himself upon God as his God, in and through a Mediator.

II. Conviction is here spoken to presuming sinners, and they are warned not to trust in themselves, v. 11. Observe,

1. The description given of them. They *kindle a fire*, and *walk in the light of that fire*. They depend upon their own righteousness, offer all their sacrifices, and burn all their incense, with that fire (as Nadab and Abihu) and not with the fire from heaven. In their hope of acceptance with God they have no regard to the righteousness of Christ. They refresh and please themselves with a conceit of their own merit and sufficiency, and warm themselves with that. It is both light and heat to them. They *compass themselves about with sparks of their own kindling*. As they trust in their own righteousness, and not in the righteousness of Christ, so they place their happiness in their worldly possessions and enjoyments, and not in the favour of God. Creature-comforts are as sparks, short-lived and soon gone; yet the children of this world, while they last, warm themselves by them, and walk with pride and pleasure in the light of them.

2. The doom passed upon them. They are ironically told to *walk in the light of their own fire*. “Make your best of it, while it lasts. But what will be in the end thereof, what will it come to at last? This shall you have of my hand (says Christ, for to him the judgment is committed), *you shall lie down in sorrow, shall go to bed in the dark.*” See ~~xxxv~~ Job 18:5, 6. *His candle shall be put out with him.* Those that make the world their comfort, and their own righteousness their confidence, will certainly meet with a fatal disappointment, which will be bitterness in the end. A godly man's way may be melancholy, but his end shall be peace and everlasting light. A wicked man's way may be pleasant, but his end and endless abode will be utter darkness.