

CHAPTER 3

The scope of this chapter is the same with that of the two foregoing chapters, but the composition is somewhat different; that was in long verse, this is in short, another kind of metre; that was in single alphabets, this is in a treble one. Here is,

I. A sad complaint of God's displeasure and the fruits of it (v. 1-20).

II. Words of comfort to God's people when they are in trouble and distress (v. 21-36).

III. Duty prescribed in this afflicted state (v. 37-41).

IV. The complaint renewed (v. 42-54).

V. Encouragement taken to hope in God, and continue waiting for his salvation, with an appeal to his justice against the persecutors of the church (v. 55-66). Some make all this to be spoken by the prophet himself when he was imprisoned and persecuted; but it seems rather to be spoken in the person of the church now in captivity and in a manner desolate, and in the desolations of which the prophet did in a particular manner interest himself. But the complaints here are somewhat more general than those in the foregoing chapter, being accommodated to the case as well of particular persons as of the public, and intended for the use of the closet rather than of the solemn assembly. Some think Jeremiah makes these complaints, not only as an intercessor for Israel, but as a type of Christ, who was thought by some to be Jeremiah the weeping prophet, because he was much in tears (~~4164~~ Matthew 16:14) and to him many of the passages here may be applied.

~~2811~~ LAMENTATIONS 3:1-20

THE PROPHET'S PERSONAL AFFLICTION

The title of the 102nd Psalm might very fitly be prefixed to this chapter — *The prayer of the afflicted, when he is overwhelmed, and pours out his complaint before the Lord*; for it is very feelingly and fluently that the

complaint is here poured out. Let us observe the particulars of it. The prophet complains,

1. That God is angry. This gives both birth and bitterness to the affliction (v. 1): *I am the man*, the remarkable man, *that has seen affliction*, and has felt it sensibly, *by the rod of his wrath*. Note, God is sometimes angry with his own people; yet it is to be complained of, not as a sword to cut off, by only as a rod to correct; it is to them *the rod of his wrath*, a chastening which, though grievous for the present, will in the issue be advantageous. By this rod we must expect to *see affliction*, and, if we be made to see more than ordinary affliction by that rod, we must not quarrel, for we are sure that the anger is just and affliction mild and mixed with mercy.

2. That he is at a loss and altogether in the dark. Darkness is put for great trouble and perplexity, the want both of comfort and of direction; this was the case of the complainant (v. 2): *“He has led me by his providence, and an unaccountable chain of events, into darkness and not into light, the darkness I feared and not into the light I hoped for.”* And (v. 6), *He has set me in dark places, dark as the grave, like those that are dead of old*, that are quite forgotten, nobody knows who or what they were. Note, The Israel of God, though children of light, sometimes *walk in darkness*.

3. That God appears against him as an enemy, as a professed enemy. God had been for him, but no *“Surely against me is he turned* (v. 3), as far as I can discern; for *his hand is turned against me all the day. I am chastened every morning,*” ^{Psalm 73:14}. And, when God's hand is continually turned against us, we are tempted to think that his heart is turned against us too. God had said once (^{Hosea 5:14}), *I will be as a lion to the house of Judah*, and now he has made his word good (v. 10): *“He was unto me as a bear lying in wait, surprising me with his judgments, and as a lion in secret places;* so that which way soever I went I was in continual fear of being set upon and could never think myself safe.” Do men shoot at those they are enemies to? *He has bent his bow*, the bow that was ordained against the church's prosecutors, that is bent against her sons, v. 12. *He has set me as a mark for his arrow*, which he aims at, and will be sure to hit, and then *the arrows of his quiver enter into my reins*, give me a mortal wound, an inward wound, v. 13. Note, God has many arrows in his quiver, and they fly swiftly and pierce deeply.

4. That he is as one sorely afflicted both in body and mind. The Jewish state may now be fitly compared to a man wrinkled with age, for which

there is no remedy (v. 4): “*My flesh and my skin has he made old; they are wasted and withered, and I look like one that is ready to drop into the grave; nay, he has broken my bones, and so disabled me to help myself, v. 15. He has filled me with bitterness, a bitter sense of his calamities.*” God has access to the spirit, and can so embitter that as thereby to embitter all the enjoyments; as, when the stomach is foul, whatever is eaten sours in it: “*He has made me drunk with wormwood, so intoxicated me with the sense of my afflictions that I know not what to say or do. He has mingled gravel with my bread, so that my teeth are broken with it (v. 16) and what I eat is neither pleasant nor nourishing. He has covered me with ashes, as mourners used to be, or (as some read it) he has fed me with ashes. I have eaten ashes like bread,*” ^{297B}Psalm 102:9.

5. That he is not able to discern any way of escape or deliverance (v. 5): “*He has built against me, as forts and batteries are built against a besieged city. Where there was a way open it is now quite made up: He has compassed me on ever side with gall and travel; I vex, and fret, and tire myself, to find a way of escape, but can find none, v. 7. He has hedged me about, that I cannot get out.*” When Jerusalem was besieged it was said to be *compassed in on every side,* ^{298B}Luke 19:43. “I am chained; and as some notorious malefactors are double-fettered, and loaded with irons, so he *has made my chain heavy. He has also (v. 9) enclosed my ways with hewn stone, not only hedged up my way with thorns* (^{299B}Hosea 2:6), but stopped it up with a stone wall, which cannot be broken through, so that *my paths are made crooked; I traverse to and fro, to the right hand, to the left, to try to get forward, but am still turned back.*” It is just with God to make those who walk in the crooked paths of sin, crossing God's laws, walk in the crooked paths of affliction, crossing their designs and breaking their measures. So (v. 11), “*He has turned aside my ways; he has blasted all my counsels, ruined my projects, so that I am necessitated to yield to my own ruin. He has pulled me in pieces; he has torn and is gone away* (^{300B}Hosea 5:14), and has *made me desolate, has deprived me of all society and all comfort in my own soul.*”

6. That God turns a deaf ear to his prayers (v. 8): “*When I cry and shout, as one in earnest, as one that would make him hear, yet he shuts out my prayer and will not suffer it to have access to him.*” God's ear is wont to be open to the prayers of his people, and his door of mercy to those that knock at it; but now both are shut, even to one that *cries and shouts.* Thus sometimes God seems to be angry even against *the prayers of his people*

(^{<1800>}Psalm 80:4), and their case is deplorable indeed when they are denied not only the benefit of an answer, but the comfort of acceptance.

7. That his neighbours make a laughing matter of his troubles (v. 14): *I was a derision to all my people*, to all the wicked among them, who made themselves an one another merry with the public judgments, and particularly the prophet Jeremiah's griefs. I am their song, their *neginath*, or hand-instrument of music, their *tabret* (^{<1876>}Job 17:6), that they play upon, as Nero on his harp when Rome was on fire.

8. That he was ready to despair of relief and deliverance: "Thou hast not only taken peace from me, but hast *removed my soul far off from peace* (v. 17), so that it is not only not within reach, but no within view. *I forget prosperity*; it is so long since I had it, and so unlikely that I should ever recover it, that I have lost the idea of it. I have been so inured to sorrow and servitude that I know not what joy and liberty mean. I have even given up all for gone, concluding, *My strength and my hope have perished from the Lord* (v. 18); I can no longer stay myself upon God as my support, for I do not find that he gives me encouragement to do so; nor can I look for his appearing in my behalf, so as to put an end to my troubles, for the case seems remediless, and even my God inexorable." Without doubt it was his infirmity to say this (^{<1770>}Psalm 77:10), for with God there is *everlasting strength*, and he is his people's never-failing hope, whatever they may think.

9. That grief returned upon every remembrance of his troubles, and his reflections were as melancholy as his prospects, v. 19, 20. Did he endeavour as Job did (^{<1827>}Job 9:27), to *forget his complaint*? Alas! it was to no purpose; he remembers, upon all occasions, *the affliction and the misery, the wormwood and the gall*. Thus emphatically does he speak of his affliction, for thus did he think of it, thus heavily did it lie when he reviewed it! It was an affliction that was misery itself. *My affliction and my transgression* (so some read it), my trouble and my sin that brought it upon me; this was *the wormwood and the gall in the affliction and the misery*. It is sin that makes the cup of affliction a bitter cup. *My soul has them still in remembrance*. The captives in Babylon had all the miseries of the siege in their mind continually and the flames and ruins of Jerusalem still before their eyes, and *wept when they remembered Zion*; nay, they could *never forget Jerusalem*, (^{<1870>}Psalm 137:1, 5. *My soul, having them in remembrance, is humbled in me*, not only oppressed with a sense of the

trouble, but in bitterness for sin. Note, It becomes us to have humble hearts under humbling providences, and to renew our penitent humiliations for sin upon every remembrance of our afflictions and miseries. Thus we may get good by former corrections and prevent further.

21 LAMENTATIONS 3:21-36

WORDS OF COMFORT TO ISRAEL

Here the clouds begin to disperse and the sky to clear up; the complaint was very melancholy in the former part of the chapter, and yet here the tune is altered and the mourners in Zion begin to look a little pleasant. But for hope, the heart would break. To save the heart from being quite broken, here is something *called to mind*, which gives ground for *hope* (v. 21), which refers to what comes after, not to what goes before. *I make to return to my heart* (so the margin words it); what we have had in our hearts, and have laid to our hearts, is sometimes as if it were quite lost and forgotten, till God by his grace make it return to our hearts, that it may be ready to us when we have occasion to use it. “*I recall it to mind; therefore have I hope*, and am kept from downright despair.” Let us see what these things are which he calls to mind.

I. That, bad as things are, it is owing to the mercy of God that they are not worse. We are *afflicted by the rod of his wrath*, but *it is of the lord's mercies that we are not consumed*, v. 22. When we are in distress we should, for the encouragement of our faith and hope, observe what makes for us as well as what makes against us. Things are bad but they might have been worse, and therefore there is hope that they may be better. Observe here,

1. The streams of mercy acknowledged: *We are not consumed*. Note, The church of God is like Moses's bush, burning, yet *not consumed*; whatever hardships it has met with, or may meet with, it shall have a being in the world to the end of time. It is *persecuted* of men, but *not forsaken* of God, and therefore, though it is *cast down*, it is *not destroyed* (~~400~~ 2 Corinthians 4:9), corrected, yet *not consumed*, refined in the furnace as silver, but *not consumed* as dross.

2. These streams followed up to the fountain: *It is of the Lord's mercies.* here are mercies in the plural number, denoting the abundance and variety of those mercies. God is an inexhaustible *fountain of mercy, the Father of mercies.* Note, We all owe it to the sparing mercy of God *that we are not consumed.* Others have been consumed round about us, and we ourselves have been in the consuming, and yet *we are not consumed;* we are out of the grave; we are out of hell. Had we been dealt with *according to our sins,* we should have been consumed long ago; but we have been dealt with *according to God's mercies,* and we are bound to acknowledge it to his praise.

II. That even in the depth of their affliction they still have experience of the tenderness of the divine pity and the truth of the divine promise. They had several times complained that God had not pitied (~~2417~~ Jeremiah 2:17, 21), but here they correct themselves, and own,

1. That *God's compassions fail not;* they do not really fail, no, not even when in anger he seems to have *shut up his tender mercies.* These rivers of mercy run fully and constantly, but never run dry. No; *they are new every morning;* every morning we have fresh instances of God's compassion towards us; he visits us with them *every morning* (~~3078~~ Job 7:18); *every morning does he bring his judgment to light,* ~~3685~~ Zephaniah 3:5. When our comforts fail, yet God's compassions do not.

2. That *great is his faithfulness.* Though the covenant seemed to be broken, they owned that it still continued in full force; and, though Jerusalem be in ruins, *the truth of the Lord endures for ever.* Note, Whatever hard things we suffer, we must never entertain any hard thoughts of God, but must still be ready to own that he is both kind and faithful.

III. That God is, and ever will be, the all-sufficient happiness of his people, and they have chosen him and depend upon him to be such (v. 24): *The Lord is my portion, saith my soul;* that is,

1. "When I have lost all I have in the world, liberty, and livelihood, and almost life itself, yet I have not lost my interest in God." Portions on earth are perishing things, but God is *portion for ever.*

2. “While I have an interest in God, therein I have enough; I have that which is sufficient to counterbalance all my troubles and make up all my losses.” Whatever we are robbed of our portion is safe.

3. “This is that which I depend upon and rest satisfied with: *Therefore will I hope in him.* I will stay myself upon him, and encourage myself in him, when all other supports and encouragements fail me.” Note, It is our duty to make God the portion of our souls, and then to make use of him as our portion and to take the comfort of it in the midst of our lamentations.

IV. That those who deal with God will find it is not in vain to trust in him; for,

1. He is good to those who do so, v. 25. He is good to all; *his tender mercies are over all his works*; all his creatures taste of his goodness. But he is in a particular manner *good to those that wait for him, to the soul that seeks him.* Note, While trouble is prolonged, and deliverance is deferred, we must patiently wait for God and his gracious returns to us. While we *wait for him* by faith, we must *seek him* by prayer: our *souls* must *seek him*, else we do not seek so as to find. Our seeking will help to keep up our waiting. And to those who thus wait and seek God will be gracious; he will show them his *marvellous lovingkindness.*

2. Those that do so will find it good for them (v. 26): *It is good* (it is our duty, and will be our unspeakable comfort and satisfaction) *to hope and quietly to wait for the salvation of the Lord*, to hope that it will come, though the difficulties that lie in the way of it seem insupportable, to wait till it does come, though it be long delayed, and while we wait to be quiet and silent, not quarrelling with God nor making ourselves uneasy, but acquiescing in the divine disposals. *Father, thy will be done.* If we call this to mind, we may have hope that all will end well at last.

V. That afflictions are really good for us, and, if we bear them aright, will work very much for our good. it is not only good to hope and wait for the salvation, but it is good to be under the trouble in the mean time (v. 27): *It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth.* Many of the young men were carried into captivity. To make them easy in it, he tells them that it was good for them to *bear the yoke* of that captivity, and they would find it so if they would but accommodate themselves to their condition, and labour to answer God's ends in laying that heavy yoke upon them. It is very applicable to the yoke of God's commands. it is good for young

people to take that yoke upon them in their youth; we cannot begin too soon to be religious. it will make our duty the more acceptable to God, and easy to ourselves, if we engage in it when we are young. But here it seems to be meant of the yoke of affliction. Many have found it good to bear this in youth; it has made those humble and serious, and has weaned them from the world, who otherwise would have been proud and unruly, and *as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke*. But when do we *bear the yoke* so that it is really *good for us to bear it in our youth*? He answers in the following verses,

1. When we are sedate and quiet under our afflictions, when we *sit alone and keep silence*, do not run to and fro into all companies with our complaints, aggravating our calamities, and quarrelling with the disposals of Providence concerning us, but retire into privacy, that we may *in a day of adversity consider, sit alone*, that we may converse with God and *commune with our own hearts*, silencing all discontented distrustful thoughts, and laying our hand upon our mouth, as Aaron, who, under a very severe trial, held his peace. We must keep silence under the yoke as those that have borne it upon us, not wilfully pulled it upon our own necks, but patiently submitted to it when God laid it upon us. When those who are afflicted in their youth accommodate themselves to their afflictions, fit their necks to the yoke and study to answer God's end in afflicting them, then they will find it good for them to bear it, for it yields *the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who are thus exercised thereby*.

2. When we are humble and patient under our affliction. *He gets good by the yoke who puts his mouth in the dust*, not only *lays his hand upon his mouth*, in token of submission to the will of God in the affliction, but *puts it in the dust*, in token of sorrow, and shame, and self-loathing, at the remembrance of sin, and as one perfectly reduced and reclaimed, and brought as those that are vanquished to *lick the dust*, ⁽⁵⁷⁾ Psalm 72:9. And we must thus humble ourselves, *if so be there may be hope*, or (as it is in the original) *peradventure there is hope*. If there be any way to acquire and secure a good hope under our afflictions, it is this way, and yet we must be very modest in our expectations of it, must look for it with an *it may be*, as those who own ourselves utterly unworthy of it. Note, Those who are truly humbled for sin will be glad to obtain a good hope, through grace, upon any terms, though they *put their mouth in the dust* for it; and those who would have hope must do so, and ascribe it to free grace if they have any

encouragements, which may keep their hearts from sinking into the dust when they put their mouth there.

3. When we are meek and mild towards those who are the instruments of our trouble, and are of a forgiving spirit, v. 30. *He gets good by the yoke who gives his cheek to him that smites him, and rather turns the other cheek* (^{<415>}Matthew 5:39) than returns the second blow. Our Lord Jesus has left us an example of this, for he *gave his back to the smiter*, (^{<2816>}Isaiah 50:6. he who can bear contempt and reproach, and not *render railing for railing, and bitterness for bitterness, who, when he is filled full with reproach, keeps it to himself, and does not retort it and empty it again upon those who filled him with it, but pours it out before the Lord* (as those did, ^{<437>}Psalm 123:4, whose *souls were exceedingly filled with the contempt of the proud*), he shall find that *it is good to bear the yoke*, that it shall turn to his spiritual advantage. The sum is, *If tribulation work patience, that patience will work experience, and that experience a hope that makes not ashamed.*

VI. That God will graciously return to his people with seasonable comforts *according to the time that he has afflicted them*, v. 31, 32. *Therefore* the sufferer is thus penitent, thus patient, because he believes that God is gracious and merciful, which is the great inducement both to evangelical repentance and to Christian patience. We may bear ourselves up with this,

- 1.** That, when we are cast down, yet we are not cast off; the father's correcting his son is not a disinheriting of him.
- 2.** That though we may seem to be cast off for a time, while sensible comforts are suspended and desired salvations deferred, yet we are not really cast off, because not *cast off for ever*; the controversy with us shall not be perpetual.
- 3.** That, whatever sorrow we are in, it is what God has allotted us, and his hand is in it. It is he that causes grief, and therefore we may be assured it is ordered wisely and graciously; and it is but *for a season*, and when need is, that we *are in heaviness*, (^{<4016>}1 Peter 1:6.
- 4.** That God has compassions and comforts in store even for those whom he has himself grieved. We must be far from thinking that, though God cause grief, the world will relieve and help us. No; the very same that

caused the grief must bring in the favour, or we are undone. *Una eademque manus vulnus opemque tulit* — *The same hand inflicted the wound and healed it.* he has torn, and he will heal us, ^{<XIII>}Hosea 6:1.

5. That, when God returns to deal graciously with us, it will not be according to our merits, but according to his mercies, *according to the multitude*, the abundance, *of his mercies*. So unworthy we are that nothing but an abundant mercy will relieve us; and from that what may we not expect? And God's causing our grief ought to be no discouragement at all to those expectations.

VII. That, when God does cause grief, it is for wise and holy ends, and he takes not delight in our calamities, v. 33. he does indeed *afflict, and grieve the children of men*; all their grievances and afflictions are from him. But he does not do it *willingly*, not *from the heart*; so the word is.

1. He never afflicts us but when we give him cause to do it. He does not dispense his frowns as he does his favours, *ex mero motu* — *from his mere good pleasure*. If he show us kindness, it is because *so it seems good* unto him; but, if he write bitter things against us, it is because we both deserve them and need them.

2. He does not afflict with pleasure. he delights not in the death of sinners, or the disquiet of saints, but punishes with a kind of reluctance. He comes out of his place to punish, for his place is the mercy-seat. He delights not in the misery of any of his creatures, but, as it respects his own people, he is so far from it that in all their afflictions he is afflicted and his soul is grieved for the misery of Israel.

3. He retains his kindness for his people even when he afflicts them. If he does not *willingly grieve the children of men*, much less his own children. However it be, yet *God is good* to them (^{<XIII>}Psalm 73:1), and they may by faith see love in his heart even when they see frowns in his face and a rod in his hand.

VIII. That though he makes use of men as his hand, or rather instruments in his hand, for the correcting of his people, yet he is far from being pleased with the injustice of their proceedings and the wrong they do them, v. 34-36. Though God serves his own purposes by the violence of wicked and unreasonable men, yet it does not therefore follow that he countenances that violence, as his oppressed people are sometimes

tempted to think. ^{<313>}Habakkuk 1:13, *Wherefore lookest thou upon those that deal treacherously?* Two ways the people of God are injured and oppressed by their enemies, and the prophet here assures us that God does not approve of either of them: —

1. If men injure them by force of arms, God does not approve of that. he does not himself *crush under his feet the prisoners of the earth*, but he regards the cry of the prisoners; nor does he approve of men's doing it; nay, he is much displeased with it. It is barbarous to trample on those that are down, and to crush those that are bound and cannot help themselves.

2. If men injure them under colour of law, and in the pretended administration of justice, — if they *turn aside the right of a man*, so that he cannot discover what his rights are or cannot come at them, they are out of his reach, — if they *subvert a man in his cause*, and bring in a wrong verdict, or give a false judgment, let them know,

(1.) That God sees them. It is *before the face of the Most High* (v. 35); it is in his sight, under his eye, and is very displeasing to him. They cannot but know it is so, and therefore it is in defiance of him that they do it. he is *the Most High*, whose authority over them they contemn by abusing their authority over their subjects, not considering that *he that is higher than the highest regardeth*, ^{<208>}Ecclesiastes 5:8.

(2.) That God does not approve of them. More is implied than is expressed. The perverting of justice, and the subverting of the just, are a great affront to God; and, though he may make use of them for the correction of his people, yet he will sooner or later severely reckon with those that do thus. Note, However God may for a time suffer evil-doers to prosper, and serve his own purposes by them, yet he does not therefore approve of their evil doings. *Far be it from God that he should do iniquity*, or countenance those that do it.

^{<215>}LAMENTATIONS 3:37-41

THE DUTIES OF THE AFFLICTED

That we may be entitled to the comforts administered to the afflicted in the foregoing verses, and may taste the sweetness of them, we have here the

duties of an afflicted state prescribed to us, in the performance of which we may expect those comforts.

I. We must see and acknowledge the hand of God in all the calamities that befall us at any time, whether personal or public, v. 37, 38. This is here laid down as a great truth, which will help to quiet our spirits under our afflictions and to sanctify them to us.

1. That, whatever men's actions are, it is God that overrules them: *Who is he that saith, and it cometh to pass* (that designs a thing and bring his designs to effect), if *the Lord commandeth it not*? Men can do nothing but according to the counsel of God, nor have any power or success but what is given them from above. *A man's heart devises his way*; he projects and purposes; he says that he will do so and so (²⁰¹³James 4:13); *but the Lord directs his steps* far otherwise than he designed them, and what he contrived and expected does not *come to pass*, unless it be what God's hand and his counsel had determined before to be done, ²¹⁰⁹Proverbs 16:9; ²¹⁰³Jeremiah 10:23. The Chaldeans said that they would destroy Jerusalem, and it came to pass, not because they said it, but because God commanded it and commissioned them to do it. Note, Men are but tools which the great God makes use of, and manages as he pleases, in the government of this lower world; and they cannot accomplish any of their designs without him.

2. That, whatever men's lot is, it is God that orders it: *Out of the mouth of the Most High do not evil and good proceed*? Yes, certainly they do; and it is more emphatically expressed in the original: *Do not this evil, and this good, proceed out of the mouth of the Most High*? Is it not what he has ordained and appointed for us? Yes, certainly it is; and for the reconciling of us to our own afflictions, whatever they be, this general truth must thus be particularly applied. This comfort I receive *from the hand of God, and shall I not receive that evil* also? so Job argues, ²¹⁰¹Job 2:10. Are we healthful or sickly, rich or poor? Do we succeed in our designs, or are we crossed in them? It is all what God orders; *every man's judgment proceeds from him. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away*; he forms the light and creates the darkness, as he did at first. Note, All the events of divine Providence are the products of a divine counsel; whatever is done God has the directing of it, and the works of his hands agree with the words of his mouth; *he speaks, and it is done*, so easily, so effectually are all his purposes fulfilled.

II. We must not quarrel with God for any affliction that he lays upon us at any time (v. 39): *Wherefore does a living man complain?* The prophet here seems to check himself for the complaint he had made in the former part of the chapter, wherein he seemed to reflect upon God as unkind and severe. “Do I well to be angry? Why do I fret thus?” Those who in their haste have chidden with God must, in the reflection, chide themselves for it. From the doctrine of God's sovereign and universal providence, which he had asserted in the verses before, he draws this inference, *Wherefore does a living man complain?* What God does we must not open our mouths against, ~~289~~ Psalm 39:9. Those that blame their lot reproach him that allotted it to them. The sufferers in the captivity must submit to the will of God in all their sufferings. Note, Though we may pour out our complaints before God, we must never exhibit any complaints against God. What! Shall *a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins?* The reasons here urged are very cogent.

1. We are men; let us herein show ourselves men. Shall *a man complain?* And again, *a man!* We are men, and not brutes, reasonable creatures, who should act with reason, who should look upward and look forward, and both ways may fetch considerations enough to silence our complaints. We are men, and not children that cry for every thing that hurts them. We are men, and not gods, subjects, not lords; we are not our own masters, not our own carvers; we are bound and must obey, must submit. We are men, and not angels, and therefore cannot expect to be free from troubles as they are; we are not inhabitants of that world where there is no sorrow, but this where there is nothing but sorrow. We are men, and not devils, are not in that deplorable, helpless, hopeless, state that they are in, but have something to comfort ourselves with which they have not.

2. We are living men. Through the good hand of our God upon us we are alive yet, though dying daily; and shall *a living man complain?* No; he has more reason to be thankful for life than to complain of any of the burdens and calamities of life. Our lives are frail and forfeited, and yet we are alive; now *the living, the living, they should praise*, and not complain (~~289~~ Isaiah 38:19); while there is life there is hope, and therefore, instead of complaining that things are bad, we should encourage ourselves with the hope that they will be better.

3. We are sinful men, and that which we complain of is the just *punishment of our sins*; nay, it is far less than our iniquities have deserved.

WE have little reason to complain of our trouble, for it is our own doing; we may thank ourselves. Our own wickedness corrects us, ^{<30B>}Proverbs 19:3. We have no reason to quarrel with God, for he is righteous in it; he is the governor of the world, and it is necessary that he should maintain the honour of his government by chastising the disobedient. Are we suffering for our sins? Then let us not complain; for we have other work to do; instead of repining, we must be repenting; and, as an evidence that God is reconciled to us, we must be endeavouring to reconcile ourselves to his holy will. Are we *punished for our sins*? It is our wisdom then to submit, and to kiss the rod; for, if we still walk contrary to God, he will punish us yet seven times more; for *when he judges he will overcome*. But, if we accommodate ourselves to him, though we be *chastened of the Lord* we shall not be *condemned with the world*.

III. We must set ourselves to answer God's intention in afflicting us, which is to bring sin to our remembrance, and to bring us home to himself, v. 40. These are the two things which our afflictions should put us upon.

1. A serious consideration of ourselves and a reflection upon our past lives. *Let us search and try our ways*, search what they have been, and then try whether they have been right and good or no; search as for a malefactor in disguise, that flees and hides himself, and then try whether guilty or not guilty. Let conscience be employed both to search and to try, and let it have leave to deal faithfully, to accomplish a diligent search and to make an impartial trial. *Let us try our ways*, that by them we may try ourselves, for we are to judge of our state not by our faint wishes, but by our steps, not by one particular step, but by our ways, the ends we aim at, the rules we go by, and the agreeableness of the temper of our minds and the tenour of our lives to those ends and those rules. When we are in affliction it is seasonable to *consider our ways* (^{<30B>}Haggai 1:5), that what is amiss may be repented of and amended for the future, and so we may answer the intention of the affliction. We are apt, in times of public calamity, to reflect upon other people's ways, and lay blame upon them; whereas our business is to *search and try our own ways*. We have work enough to do at home; we must each of us say, "What have I done? What have I contributed to the public flames?" that we may each of us mend one, and then we should all be mended.

2. A sincere conversion to God: "Let us *turn again to the Lord*, to him who is turned against us and whom we have turned from; to him let us

turn by repentance and reformation, as to our owner and ruler. We have been with him, and it has never been well with us since we forsook him; let us therefore now turn again to him.” This must accompany the former and be the fruit of it; *therefore* we must *search and try our ways*, that we may turn from the evil of them to God. This was the method David took.

^{<BB>}Psalm 119:59, *I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies.*

IV. We must offer up ourselves to God, and our best affections and services, in the flames of devotion, v. 41. When we are in affliction,

- 1.** We must look up to God as a *God in the heavens*, infinitely above us, and who has an incontestable dominion over us; for *the heavens do rule*, and are therefore not to be quarrelled with, but submitted to.
- 2.** We must pray to him, with a believing expectation to receive mercy from him; for that is implied in our *lifting up our hands* to him (a gesture commonly used in prayer and sometimes put for it, as ^{<BB>}Psalm 141:2, *Let the lifting up of my hands be as the evening sacrifice*); it signifies our requesting mercy from him and our readiness to receive that mercy.
- (3.)** Our hearts must go along with our prayers. We must *lift up our hearts with our hands*, as we must pour out our souls with our words. it is the heart that God looks at in that and every other service; for what will a sacrifice without a heart avail? If inward impressions be not in some measure answerable to outward expressions, we do but mock God and deceive ourselves. Praying is lifting up the soul to God (^{<BB>}Psalm 25:1) as to *our Father in heaven*; and the soul that hopes to be with God in heaven for ever will thus, by frequent acts of devotion, be still learning the way thither and pressing forward in that way.

^{<BB>}LAMENTATIONS 3:42-54

COMPLAINING TO GOD

It is easier to chide ourselves for complaining than to chide ourselves out of it. The prophet had owned that a living man should not complain, as if he checked himself for his complaints in the former part of the chapter;

and yet here the clouds return after the rain and the wound bleeds afresh; for great pains must be taken with a troubled spirit to bring it into temper.

I. They confess the righteousness of God in afflicting them (v. 42): *We have transgressed and have rebelled*. Note, It becomes us, when we are in trouble, to justify God, by owning our sins, and laying the load upon ourselves for them. Call sin a transgression, call it a rebellion, and you do not miscall it. This is the result of their searching and trying their ways; the more they enquired into them the worse they found them. Yet,

II. They complain of the afflictions they are under, not without some reflections upon God, which we are not to imitate, but, under the sharpest trials, must always think and speak highly and kindly of him.

1. They complain of his frowns and the tokens of his displeasure against them. Their sins were repented of, and yet (v. 42), *Thou hast not pardoned*. They had not the assurance and comfort of the pardon; the judgments brought upon them for their sins were not removed, and therefore they thought they could not say the sin was pardoned, which was a mistake, but a common mistake with the people of God when their souls are cast down and disquieted within them. Their case was really pitiable, yet they complain, *Thou hast not pitied*, v. 43. Their enemies persecuted and slew them, but that was not the worst of it; they were but the instruments in God's hand: *"Thou hast persecuted us, and thou hast slain us, though we expected thou wouldst protect and deliver us."* They complain that there was a wall of partition between them and God, and,

(1.) This hindered God's favours from coming down upon them. The reflected beams of God's kindness to them used to be the beauty of Israel; but now *"thou hast covered us with anger, so that our glory is concealed and gone; now God is angry with us, and we do not appear that illustrious people that we have formerly been thought to be."* Or, *"Thou hast covered us up as men that are buried are covered up and forgotten."*

(2.) It hindered their prayers from coming up unto God (v. 44): *"Thou hast covered thyself with a cloud,"* not like that bright cloud in which he took possession of the temple, which enabled the worshippers to draw near to him, but like that in which he came down upon Mount Sinai, which obliged the people to stand at a distance. *"This cloud is so thick that our prayers seem as if they were lost in it; they cannot pass through; we cannot obtain an audience."* Note, The prolonging of troubles is sometimes

a temptation, even to praying people, to question whether God be what they have always believed him to be, a prayer-hearing God.

2. They complain of the contempt of their neighbours and the reproach and ignominy they were under (v. 45): *“Thou hast made us as the off-scouring, or scrapings, of the first floor, which are thrown to the dunghill.”* This St. Paul refers to in his account of the sufferings of the apostles. ^{<401>}1 Corinthians 4:13, *We are made as the filth of the world and are the off-scouring of all things.* “We are the refuse, or dross, in the midst of the people, trodden upon by every body, and looked upon as the vilest of the nations, and good for nothing but to be cast out as salt which has lost its savour. Our enemies have opened their mouths against us (v. 46), have gaped upon us as roaring lions, to swallow us up, or made mouths at us, or have taken liberty to say what they please of us.” These complaints we had before, ^{<212>}Jeremiah 2:15, 16. Note, It is common for base and ill-natured men to run upon, and run down, those that have fallen into the depths of distress from the height of honour. But this they brought upon themselves by sin. If they had not made themselves vile, their enemies could not have made them so: but *therefore men call them reprobate silver, because the Lord has rejected them* for rejecting him.

3. They complain of the lamentable destruction that their enemies made of them (v. 47): *Fear and a snare have come upon us*; the enemies have not only terrified us with those alarms, but prevailed against us by their stratagems, and surprised us with the ambushes they laid for us; and then follows nothing but *desolation and destruction, the destruction of the daughter of my people* (v. 48), *of all the daughters of my city*, v. 51. The enemies, having taken some of them *like a bird* in a snare, *chased* others as a harmless bird is chased by a bird of prey (v. 52): *My enemies chased me sorely like a bird* which is beaten from bush to bush, as Saul hunted David *like a partridge*. Thus restless was the enmity of their persecutors, and yet causeless. They have done it *without cause*, without any provocation given them. Though God was righteous, they were unrighteous. David often complains of those that *hated him without cause*; and such are the enemies of Christ and his church, ^{<415>}John 15:25. Their enemies chased them till they had quite prevailed over them (v. 53): *They have cut off my life in the dungeon*. They have shut up their captives in close and dark prisons, where they are as it were cut off *from the land of the living* (as v. 6), or the state and kingdom are sunk and ruined, the life and being of them are gone, and they are as it were thrown into the

dungeon or grave and a *stone cast upon them*, such as used to be *rolled to the door of the sepulchres*. They look upon the Jewish nation as dead and buried, and imagine that there is not possibility of its resurrection. Thus Ezekiel saw it, in vision, *a valley full of dead and dry bones*. Their destruction is compared not only to the burying of a dead man, but to the sinking of a living man into the water, who cannot long be a living man there, v. 54. *Waters of affliction flowed over my head*. The deluge prevailed and quite overwhelmed them. The Chaldean forces broke in upon them *as the breaking forth of waters*, which rose so high as to *flow over their heads*; they could not wade, they could not swim, and therefore must unavoidably sink. Note, The distresses of God's people sometimes prevail to such a degree that they cannot find any footing for their faith, nor keep their head above water, with any comfortable expectation.

4. They complain of their own excessive grief and fear upon this account.

(1.) The afflicted church is drowned in tears, and the prophet for her (v. 48, 49): *My eye runs down with rivers of water*, so abundant was their weeping; *it trickles down and ceases not*, so constant was their weeping, *without any intermission*, there being no relaxation of their miseries. The distemper was in continual extremity, and they had no better day. It is added (v. 51), "*My eye affects my heart. My seeing eye affects my heart. The more I look upon the desolation of the city and country the more I am grieved. Which way soever I cast my eye, I see that which renews my sorrow, even because of all the daughters of my city,*" all the neighbouring towns, which were as daughters to Jerusalem the mother-city. Or, *My weeping eye affects my heart*; the venting of the grief, instead of easing it, did but increase and exasperate it. Or, *My eye melts my soul*; I have quite wept away my spirits; not only *my eye is consumed with grief, but my soul and my life are spent with it*, ^{LEB}Psalm 31:9, 10. Great and long grief exhausts the spirits, and brings not only many a *gray head*, but many a green head too, *to the grave*. I weep, ways the prophet, *more than all the daughters of my city* (so the margin reads it); he outdid even those of the tender sex in the expressions of grief. And it is no diminution to any to be much in tears for the sins of sinners and the sufferings of saints; our Lord Jesus was so; for, *when he came near, he beheld this same city and wept over it*, which the daughters of Jerusalem did not.

(2.) She is overwhelmed with fears, not only grieves for what is, but fears worse, and gives up all for gone (v. 54): "*Then I said, I am cut off, ruined,*

and see no hope of recovery; I am as one dead.” Note, Those that are cast down are commonly tempted to think themselves cast off, ^{<4812>}Psalm 31:22; ^{<3114>}Jonah 2:4.

5. In the midst of these sad complaints here is one word of comfort, by which it appears that their case was not altogether so bad as they made it, v. 50. We continue thus weeping *till the Lord look down and behold from heaven*. This intimates,

(1.) That they were satisfied that God's gracious regard to them in their miseries would be an effectual redress of all their grievances. “If God, who now *covers himself with a cloud*, as if he took no notice of our troubles (^{<4213>}Job 22:13), would but shine forth, all would be well; if he look upon us, *we shall be saved*,” ^{<4819>}Psalm 80:19; ^{<2917>}Daniel 9:17. Bad as the case is, one favourable look from heaven will set all to rights.

(2.) That they had hopes that he would at length look graciously upon them and relieve them; nay, they take it for granted that he will: “Though he contend long, he will not contend for ever, thou we deserve that he should.”

(3.) That while they continued weeping they continued waiting, and neither did nor would expect relief and succour from any hand but his; nothing shall comfort them but his gracious returns, nor shall any thing wipe tears from their eyes *till he look down*. Their eyes, which now *run down with water*, shall still *wait upon the Lord their God until he have mercy upon them*, ^{<4312>}Psalm 123:2.

^{<2115>}LAMENTATIONS 3:55-66

AN APPEAL TO GOD

We may observe throughout this chapter a struggle in the prophet's breast between sense and faith, fear and hope; he complains and then comforts himself, yet drops his comforts and returns again to his complaints, as Psalm 42. But, as there, so here, faith gets the last word and comes off a conqueror; for in these verses he concludes with some comfort. And here are two things with which he comforts himself: —

I. His experience of God's goodness even in his affliction. This may refer to the prophet's personal experience, with which he encourages himself in reference to the public troubles. He that has seasonably succoured particular saints will not fail the church in general. Or it may include the remnant of good people that were among the Jews, who had found that it was not in vain to wait upon God. In three things the prophet and his pious friends had found God good to them: —

1. He had *heard their prayers*; though they had been ready to fear that the cloud of wrath was such as their *prayers could not pass through* (v. 44), yet upon second thoughts, or at least upon further trial, they find it otherwise, and that God had not said unto them, *Seek you me in vain*. When they were *in the low dungeon, as free among the dead, they called upon God's name* (v. 55); their weeping did not hinder praying. Note, Though we are cast into ever so low a dungeon, we may thence find a way of access to God in the highest heavens. *Out of the depths have I cried unto thee* (^{Psalm} Psalm 130:1), as Jonah out of the whale's belly. And could God hear them out of the low dungeon, and would he? Yes, he did: *Thou hast heard my voice*; and some read the following words as carrying on the same thankful acknowledgment: *Thou didst not hide thy ear at my breathing, at my cry*; and the original will bear that reading. We read it as a petition for further audience: *Hide not thy ear*. God's having heard our voice when we *cried to him, even out of the low dungeon*, is an encouragement for us to hope that he will not at any time *hide his ear*. Observe how he calls prayer *his breathing*; for in prayer we breathe towards God, we breathe after him. Though we be but weak in prayer, cannot cry aloud, but only *breathe in groanings that cannot be uttered*, yet we shall not be neglected if we be sincere. Prayer is the breath of the new man, sucking in the air of mercy in petitions and returning it in praises; it is both the evidence and the maintenance of the spiritual life. Some read it, *at my gasping*. “When I lay gasping for life, and ready to expire, and thought I was breathing my last, then thou tookest cognizance of my distressed case.”

2. He had silenced their fears and quieted their spirits (v. 57): “*Thou drewest near in the day that I called upon thee*; thou didst graciously assure me of thy presence with me, and give me to see thee nigh unto me, whereas I had thought thee to be at a distance from me.” Note, When we draw nigh to God in a way of duty we may by faith see him drawing nigh to us in a way of mercy. But this was not all: *Thou saidst, Fear not*. This

was the language of God's prophets preaching to them not to fear (241D) Isaiah 41:10, 13, 14), of his providence preventing those things which they were afraid of, and of his grace quieting their minds, and making them easy, by the witness of his Spirit with their spirits that they were his people still, though in distress, and therefore ought not to fear.

3. He had already begun to appear for them (v. 58): "*O Lord! thou hast pleaded the causes of my soul*" (that is, as it follows), "*thou hast redeemed my life*, hast rescued that out of the hands of those who would have taken it away, hast saved that when it was ready to be swallowed up, hast given me that for a prey." And this is an encouragement to them to hope that he would yet further appear for them: "*Thou hast delivered my soul from death*, and therefore wilt deliver *my feet from falling*; thou hast *pleaded the causes of my life*, and therefore wilt plead my other causes."

II. He comforts himself with an appeal to God's justice, and (in order to the sentence of that) to his omniscience.

1. He appeals to God's knowledge of the matter of fact, how very spiteful and malicious his enemies were (v. 59): "*O Lord! thou hast seen my wrong*, that I have done no wrong at all, but suffer a great deal." He that knows all things knew,

(1.) The malice they had against him: "*Thou hast seen all their vengeance*, how they desire to do me a mischief, as if it were by way of reprisal for some great injury I had done them." Note, We should consider, to our terror and caution, that God knows all the revengeful thoughts we have in our minds against others, and therefore we should not allow of those thoughts nor harbour them, and that he knows all the revengeful thoughts others have causelessly in their minds against us, and therefore we should not be afraid of them, but leave it to him to protect us from them.

(2.) The designs and projects they had laid to do him a mischief: *Thou hast seen all their imaginations against me* (v. 60), and again, "*Thou hast heard all their imaginations against me* (v. 61), both the desire and the device they have to ruin me; whether it show itself in word or deed, it is known to thee; nay, though the products of it are not to be seen nor heard, yet their device against me all the day is perceived and understood by him to whom all things are naked and open." Note, The most secret contrivances of the church's enemies are perfectly known to the church's God, from whom they can hide nothing.

(3.) The contempt and calumny wherewith they loaded him, all that they spoke slightly of him, and all that they spoke reproachfully: “*Thou hast heard their reproach* (v. 61), all the bad characters they give me, laying to my charge things that I know not, all the methods they use to make me odious and contemptible, even the *lips of those that rose up against me* (v. 62), the contumelious language they use whenever they speak of me, and that at their sitting down and rising up, when they lie down at night and get up in the morning, when they sit down to their meat and with their company, and when they rise from both, still I am their music; they make themselves and one another merry with my miseries, as the Philistines made sport with Samson.” Jerusalem was the tabret they played upon. Perhaps they had some tune or play, some opera or interlude, that was called *the destruction of Jerusalem*, which, though in the nature of a tragedy, was very entertaining to those who wished ill to the holy city. Note, God will one day call sinners to account for all the hard speeches which they have spoken against him and his people, ⁶¹¹⁵Jude 1:15.

2. He appeals to God's judgment upon this fact: “*Lord, thou hast seen my wrong*; there is no need of any evidence to prove it, nor any prosecutor to enforce and aggravate it; thou seest it in its true colours; and now I leave it with thee. *Judge thou my cause*, v. 59. Let them be dealt with,”

(1.) “As they deserve (v. 64): *Render to them a recompence according to the work of their hands*. Let them be dealt with as they have dealt with us; let thy hand be against them as their hand has been against us. They have created us a great deal of vexation; now, Lord, *give them sorrow of heart* (v. 65), *perplexity of heart*” (so some read it); “let them be surrounded with threatening mischiefs on all sides, and not be able to see their way out. Give them *despondence of heart*” (so others read it); “let them be driven to despair, and give themselves up for gone.” God can entangle the head that thinks itself clearest, and sink the heart that thinks itself stoutest.

(2.) “Let them be dealt with according to the threatenings: *Thy curse unto them*; that is, let thy curse come upon them, all the evils that are pronounced in thy word against the enemies of thy people, v. 65. They have loaded us with curses; as they loved cursing, so let it come unto them, thy curse which will make them truly miserable. Theirs is causeless, and therefore fruitless, it shall not come; but thine is just, and shall take effect. Those whom thou cursest are cursed indeed. Let the curse be executed, v. 66. *Persecute and destroy them in anger*, as they persecute

and destroy us in their anger. *Destroy them from under the heavens of the Lord*; let them have no benefit of the light and influence of the heavens. Destroy them in such a manner that all who see it may say, It is a destruction from the Almighty, who *sits in the heavens and laughs at them* (¹⁴¹⁸⁴Psalm 2:4), and may own *that the heavens do rule,*” ²¹⁰³⁵Daniel 4:26. What is said of the idols is here said of their worshippers (who in this also shall be like unto them), *They shall perish from under these heavens,* ²⁴⁰¹¹Jeremiah 10:11. They shall be not only excluded from the happiness of the invisible heavens, but cut off from the comfort even of these visible ones, which are the *heavens of the Lord* (¹⁴³⁵⁶Psalm 115:16) and which those therefore are unworthy to be taken under the protection of who rebel against him.