

THE PULPIT.

MOTIVES TO REPENTANCE.

"Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel."—*Ezekiel XXXIII.: 2.*

The Almighty in this chapter is expostulating with the rebellious Jews who had not only violated his commands, profaned his name, defiled his altars, and polluted his worship, but proceeded further: they murmured against God; they represented Him as not equal in his dealings—severe in punishing! A God thus ungratefully treated might speak in other terms than those of mild remonstrance; yet He whose right it was to take men to account for their conduct, condescends to give them an account of his! He argues the case with them: he appeals to their reason, whether He did not observe the strict rules of equity in his dealings with them. "Hear now, O house of Israel," He says: "are not my ways equal." And when He sees them still hardened against his remonstrances, how does He entreat them?—"Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel."

Now there is something very significant in all this. Does the Almighty threaten us? We tremble, yet have hope that mercy may interpose. But does God, as it were, lay aside his Majesty? Does He, instead of threatening, seek to convince us of the reasonableness of His dealing and of the evil consequences to ourselves of disregarding His Word? Then we are sure that His forbearance is well nigh exhausted—that the day of grace is about to close. Therefore it is that the words in the text strike upon the ear as almost the last accent of the mercy of God. The Lord of heaven and earth appeals to sinful men as to the justice of His administration. He challenges them to establish one instance of injustice towards them. "O My people" He says. "What have I done unto thee? testify against Me."

All God's ways with sinful men are ways of mercy and forbearance. How great is his long suffering! To this men owe the delay of punishment and the opportunity of repentance. God has not dealt with us after our sins. In mercy He has preserved us. Surely His sparing mercy must be intended to bring us back to Himself. He restrains His anger that our hard hearts may be melted down by a sense of His goodness. And how wonderful, above all, is His goodness as seen in the sufferings and death of the Lord Jesus Christ! Would He have ransomed sinners at so costly a price?—Would He have astonished angels by so wonderful an act of mercy and love as to send Him who was the brightness of his glory, to assume the nature of feeble flesh, to submit to our low condition, to endure the agony of Gethsemane, the ignominy of the cross—had not He been "long suffering and gracious, slow to anger, and abundant in mercy?"

He not only contrived the plan of our redemption, but proposes the most powerful inducements to us to comply with His merciful designs. Every thing that could be supposed to work upon our feelings or our fears is set before us. The veil is lifted up from the invisible world. The joys of saints and the sufferings of the lost are revealed to us. He