



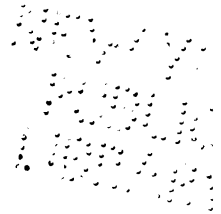
OLD PAXTANG CHURCH.

HISTORY
OF THE
SESQUI-CENTENNIAL
OF
PAXTANG CHURCH

SEPTEMBER 18, 1890.

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APPENDIX.

ORDINATION SERMON

Of Rev. John Elder, preached at Paxtang, Dec. 21, 1738.

TEXT.—*Psalms 119, v. 165:* "Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them."

God hath been mercifully pleased to implant in us a natural desire of happiness, which is so inseparable to human nature that 'tis impossible for us to forbear desiring what is good for us, or at least what appears good, for though through our own ignorance and inconsideration we many times mistake evil for good, and misery for happiness, yet such is ye frame of our nature that we cannot desire evil as evil, or misery as misery, but whenever we embrace a real evil, 'tis either under the notion of a less evil, or of a real and substantial good.

And since we have depraved our natures and debased our reason to such a degree as that we cannot now in many respects perfectly know what is our perfect good, or distinguish our happiness from our misery, He hath been farther pleased, in His holy word, to show us wherein our true happiness and felicity as to this life doth consist, namely in inward peace and tranquility of mind, resulting from a due sense of the divine favour, and the sincere love and goodwill of mankind. This the loyal Psalmist, as instructed by ye spirit of God, in the words of my text, was fully assured of, and, therefore, he boldly declares those truly blessed and happy that are in such a condition, that from their reflection on their sincere love to the laws of God and a life spent in conformity to religion and true piety, enjoy such a sweet calmness and composure of mind as nothing can disturb. "Great peace have they," &c.

All or most writers are agreed that David was the penman of this psalm, and indeed it breathes so much of that sincerely pious and devout frame of heart that ever shone so conspicuous in him that it puts it beyond all doubt. That he was taught by the spirit of God, was the compiler of it, his main scope and design in it is manifestly to command the serious and diligent study, as well as the constant practice of God's word, as incomparably the best counsellor and comforter in the world, and as the only way to true blessedness, and this he confirms by his own example, proposed to mankind for their imitation, declaring the frequent experience he had of its admirable sweetness and unspeakable benefit in every condition and especially in the time of his distress.

Its observable in this psalm that the word of God is diversely termed by the name of law, statutes, precepts, or commandments, &c., by which variety he designed to express the nature, ye great perfection and manifold uses of God's word. and there are very few of all these verses contained in this psalm in which one or other of these titles are not mentioned.

There is little or no connection observed in it, or dependence of one verse upon another. I shall not, therefore, spend time in considering the context, but shall come immediately to the words, "Great peace have they," &c. Where, by law, as I observed before, we are to understand the word of God contained in the Scriptures, and therefore the Psalmist declares that all who sincerely love God's word and demonstrate their love to it by conducting themselves agreeably to its statutes, all such as spend their time in the conscientious observance of our religious duties, shall enjoy either outward prosperity and happiness, (which God in his law hath expressly promised to good men.) or at least inward peace, satisfaction and tranquility of mind, arising from the apprehension of God's love to them and watchful care over them in all the concerns of this life and that which is to come; this shall be their sure lot and portion if they perform what is required on their part, and though they may meet with some disturbance and dissatisfaction yet their end shall be peace, as it is expressed Psalm 37:37, "And nothing shall offend them," though they may meet with losses and crosses and may be sometimes liable to the rude insults of the wicked and ungodly, yet none of these shall offend or scandalize them to such a degree as to throw them into mischief or utter ruin. Now from the words thus briefly explained we may observe this doctrinal proposition, viz: That

True peace and felicity results only from a religious life or a life spent in conformity to ye laws of God.

I. To consider the advantages of a religious life.

II. To remove some objections that may be made against the proposition. And then conclude with some inferences from what may be said.

I. Then I am to consider ye advantages of a religious life that constitute that peace or happiness mentioned in the text. Now these advantages are many, but what we may account the first and the chief ingredient in all the rest, is piece with God reconciled to us by the satisfaction in which Christ our glorious redeemer, and this peace or reconciliation upon the account of Christ's atonement, he hath promised to

all such as sincerely love and endeavor to live agreeably to his laws. And this is indeed an unspeakable privilege and advantage, to live in perfect peace and harmony with such a kind and patient friend, to whom we carefully open all our wants, express our griefs, and impart our cares, with assurance of relief and support, can betake ourselves to him in our greatest extremities with boldness and confidence, as children to a father, who is perfectly able, as well as ready, to supply our wants, and vindicate our cause which was still the main support of the godly in all ages of ye world, and bore up their sinking spirits under the heaviest pressures and difficulties.

It was this that comforted David in his declining years, when he had arrived at the highest pitch of experience, and was fully convinced of the instability of sublunary things, and of the little comfort and satisfaction they can afford us, as it is expressed, II Sam., 23 : 5, "Although my house be not so with God ; yet he hath made me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things sure, for this is all my salvation and all my desire," &c., he was fully satisfied that he had made religion his principle study, that he had still respect to ye divine law, he was fully persuaded he devoted himself to the service of God, that he had entered into covenant with him who was faithful to fulfil all his promises, and would never make void his covenant ; all of which afforded him the most peaceful and satisfying reflections, and therefore declares concerning himself, Psalm 46 : 1, 2, 3, "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in time of trouble ; therefore I will not fear though the earth be removed, and though ye mountains be carried into ye midst of ye sea ; though ye waters thereof roar and be troubled, though ye mountains shake with ye swelling thereof." And likewise the 27 Psalm ye 1 and 3 verses, "The Lord is my light and my salvation ; whom shall I fear ? the Lord is the strength of my life ; of whom shall I be afraid. Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear ; though war should rise against me, in this will I be confident."

What glorious pitch of happiness and felicity was good David now advanced to, when ye sense of the Divine favour, peace and reconciliation was so strong in him, that nothing could baffle his hopes, or shake ye firm repose of his mind ; when he could exult in ye midst of sorrows, and triumph over all his enemies, how numerous and powerful soever, when he could bear the heaviest strokes of an adverse Providence, and face the greatest danger, with courage and resolution, with no other support, or stay, but purely his sense of the Divine favor and a life spent in conformity to His laws ? Could we but once then, in

imitation of this singular pattern of true piety and devotion, make religion our chief and principle study, and the laws of God our only delight, then might we assure ourselves of the divine favour, than which there can be no greater blessing, for it is the height of our perfection and the sum of our desires, and is productive of all the peace and prosperity, the comfort and satisfaction we can enjoy, both in time and to eternity. This is the first and main advantage of a religious life and all the rest are consequent upon it, such as inward and outward peace, plenty, and prosperity, and,

1st. Inward peace and tranquility of mind, that sweet repose and calmness of spirit that are the sure concomitants of a religious and virtuous life, for as the mind of a wicked and ungodly person, is disturbed and distracted, his conscience galled, his affections divided into opposite factions, and his whole soul in a most diseased and restless posture, so on the other hand a truly pious and religious person who sincerely loves the word of God, and lives agreeably to its precepts, his mind is free from those disorders and distractions, his conscience calm and easy in all occurrences, his passions pure, regular and harmonious, and his soul enjoys a perfect ease and rest.

For by a consciousness of our sincere piety and devotion, we shall be discharged of all those restless cares and anxieties, that distress and prick us like a crown of thorns; by our hearty submission, to his will contained in his laws we shall ease our conscience of all that horror, rage, and anguish, that proceed from the things of our sin and guilt; by our loving admiring and adoring him our affections will be eased of all that inconsistency and inordinacy that render them so tumultuous and disquieting: and these things being once accomplished, the sick and restless soul will universally find itself in perfect health and ease; for now all her jarring faculties, being tuned to the sweet and harmonious laws of religion, there will be a perfect concord in her nature, and she shall have no disquieting principle within her; nothing but calm and gentle thoughts, soft and sweet reflections, tame and manageable affections, nothing but what abundantly contributes to her repose and satisfaction. Now she is no more tossed and agitated in a stormy sea of restless thoughts and guilty reflections, no more scorched with impatience, or drowned with grief, or shook with fear, or bloated with pride and ambition, but all her affections are resigned to the blessed empire of a spiritual mind, and clothed in the gay but decent livery of religion.

And tho' there may be sometimes a strong conflict between the law

in our members and the law in our minds, yet it shall end still in a glorious victory and happy peace ; and those divided streams, our wills and consciences, our passion and our reason, shall be united in one channel, and flow towards one and the same ocean, and being thus joined and knit together by the ties and ligaments of virtue and true piety, our souls shall be perfectly well and easy, and enjoy a sweet calmness and serenity within themselves. This is one advantage of a religious life, and cannot be obtained by anything else, for were it attainable by riches, by favor or worldly interest, what a happy state would the rich, ye great and honorable be in ; how would they glut themselves in worldly ease and luxury, and enjoy a delightful paradise even on earth itself ; how should their inward peace and tranquility concur with their outward plenty and prosperity, in making them unspeakably happy. But do we not generally find it quite otherwise ? How often may we see those who are advanced to the highest pitch of outward happiness and felicity, most deprived of inward peace and satisfaction ? With what significance and lively expressions do they sometimes discover their dread and horror when their conscience begins to gnaw, to twit and accuse them for their transgression of the equitable laws of God ; how often may we see them racked and tortured by their jarring passions, and rent and torn by the envenomed things of their own guilty consciences, while the poor and indigent that have scarcely bread to support their natural lives, and clothes to defend them from the injuries of the weather, enjoy inward comfort and contentment, sowing in hope and reaping with gladness, and pursuing their several callings with all desirable cheerfulness and gaiety ? This is of a religious and righteous deportment, of a sincere love to God's word, and a life spent in obedience to His laws.

But again, secondly, such as live agreeably to God's word, and do sincerely love His laws, shall enjoy not only inward peace and satisfaction, but this God hath himself promised to all his true saints and servants as it is expressed in 29 Psalm, the 11th ver. : "The Lord will bless his people with peace." Though they may hear of rumors of war on every hand, yet this shall not vex or disturb them, for God shall make their v-ry enemies to be at peace with them, as the wise man hath told us. Prov., 16 : 7. "When a man's ways please the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him ;" he disappointeth them of all their malicious designs, and either removeth their enmity by changing it into a real and sincere regard or causeth them to smother it so that it shall never hurt the truly virtuous.

Thus now the religious person enjoys a perpetual peace from every

thing about him, for his enemies as well as his friends, and from the noxious and hurtful as well as from ye innocent creatures, for God maketh peace in all his borders ; He is his guardian and protector, his defense, his shield and buckler ; He maketh him to be in league with the stones of the field, and ye beasts of ye field to be at peace with him, nothing from within or without can perplex or trouble him, but he may lie down in peace and rise without fear, and nothing to break his rest, or shake ye firm repose of his mind, and may solace himself in every condition with the same devout confidence and trust in God, that enabled good David to say : Psal , 4 : 8 : " I will lay me down in peace and sleep, for thou Lord only makest me to dwell in safety."

And as he is thus blessed with inward and outward peace, so he has also the prospect of plenty and prosperity. For, as the Apostle Paul said, " Godliness is profitable unto all things having the promise of this life, as well as that to come." 1 Tim., 4 : 8 ; which is indeed most reasonable and equitable. Since it is God that is the supreme Lord and proprietor of the universe, is it not fit that we should distribute the good things of this life to such of His subjects as are most deserving, and live most conformable to His laws, at least such a portion of them as He knows necessary for their support and convenient to their happiness, and therefore saith the Psalmist in that 84th Psalm, 11 verse, " The Lord sha'l give grace and glory, and no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly."

These now are the advantages of a religious life that constitute that true peace and felicity mentioned in the text, namely, peace with God, inward peace and tranquility of mind, peace with all around us, and plenty and prosperity ; 'Tis true indeed the religious and sincerely pious are not always blessed by God with the greatest affluence of temporal good things ; but the discussing this point belongs more properly to my

II Head of discourse, wherein I proposed to remove what objections might be made against the doctrinal proposition I laid down.

And contrary to this, may be advanced that complaint that hath been usual in all time and ages of the world, namely, that it fares best with the world and worst with the best of men. This hath indeed been a common complaint, and through the commonness of it 'tis now grown into a maxim. But to remove this we must consider that we are apt to pity the miserable and to envy the prosperous ; and that those passions do naturally bribe our judgment to think worse of the one and better of the other than either deserve ; for those whom we pity we are

inclined to love, and those whom we love we are inclined to think well of; so on the contrary, those whom we envy we are inclined to hate, we are inclined to think ill of; and then because God doth not reward or punish men according to the sentence that our blind pity or envy passes on them, we are ready to quarrel with His providence, and to pronounce them vicious or virtuous according to the biased or prejudiced notions we form of them. And besides there are many base hypocrites in the world, that make a mighty show and ostentation of piety, do secretly indulge themselves in many ruinous and wasteful vices which frequently reduce them to poverty and misery; and these we commonly rank among the good, it fares ill with, as on the contrary there are many good men that in the course of a reserved, modest, and unaffected piety, which makes very little show in ye world, are blessed and prosperd, and these we all commonly rank among the bad that fare well.

Since therefore we are such incompetent judges of good or bad men, we should be very careful how we object against the providence of God, such maxims as are only founded on our fallacious observations, and should not by our mistaken notions rashly pronounce those bad who may be good, or good who may be nevertheless bad, from the circumstances of life we see them enjoy. And could we but once strip ourselves of pity and envy and penetrate into the insides of men, I doubt not but we should soon be satisfy'd that good and religious men have much ye advantage of profane and wicked men as to ye happiness and prosperity of this world.

For a good man in any condition on this side pinching want, is ordinarily, even in this life, far more happy than ye most easy and prosperous sinner whose outward glory and greatness, is usually nothing but ye gaudy cover of a fragile inside, of a mind that is tortured with pride and envy, with boundless hopes, insatiable desires and foul reflections that dash and embitter all his enjoyments; while ye good religious man, under his mean and simple outside, carries a great and happy soul, a contented mind, a cheerful heart and a calm conscience which mightily sweeten all his enjoyments, and make his homely morsel outrelish the most studied luxuries. Thus now we may see how vastly ye happiness of the righteous is preferable to that of the wicked, either in his outward life or in his inward peace and tranquility of mind.

But some may further object here, how is it possible for such a one to enjoy inward peace and satisfaction, since his conscience is so scrupulous and tender that it will immediately twist and gall him upon the smallest transgression of Divine laws.

It's true indeed that the best men in this corrupt and imperfect state are frequently sinning, their best services are attended with many imperfections and their fairest graces have their several blots and blemishes, and their conscience will immediately accuse them of their smallest miscarriages and remind them of their duty. But this is so far from being their misery, that it is their greatest happiness; for by this means they are kept from continuing in a course of sin, and whenever they have strayed from the path of virtue, they return vigorously to their duty rejoicing with joy unspeakable that they are so happily escaped from the paths of sin and death and destruction; while the wicked continue in their immoral practices lulling their consciences to a profound sleep and making their hands stronger and stronger, till they awaken in despair and horror, and become unspeakably miserable with the dismal prospect of their approaching unavoidable damnation. So that all circumstances considered, as ye wise man saith, Eccles. 8:12, 13: "It shall fare well with the virtuous and religious but ill with the wicked forever." And therefore my doctrinal proposition will hold good notwithstanding all objections that may be made against it, namely: that true peace and felicity result only from a religious life.

From this then we may observe the wisdom and goodness of God in making our duty and our happiness both in time and to eternity so sweetly to comport the one with the other. So that they go hand in hand promoting that great and gracious design of our sovereign Lord and lawgiver. What remains then but that we should apply ourselves to the study of piety and pure religion, and to the sincere love of God's laws, as the unerring guide of our lives and the just measure of all our actions. When shall we taste ye ravishing sweetness of a religious life, and shall be obliged to own that all her ways are ways of pleasantness and all her paths are peace. Then shall we enjoy peace with God, inward peace and tranquility of mind, peace with all around us, and plenty, and prosperity. Then shall our lives be easy and comfortable to us, and we shall be all perfectly happy as we possibly can be, till once we arrive at those blissful regions above, whence everything that offends and they that commit iniquity are removed and nothing is found but undisturbed peace; perpetual love and harmony dwell and reign forevermore.