Job XXIII, 14.

“For God maketh my heart soft, and the Almighty troublith me.”

Man as a social being and Moral agent has been wisely constituted for the exercise of natural affection and moral sensibility. By the principle of sympathy prepared to sympathise with his fellow creatures, for the end of the latter. But the unenlightened man is awakened to a sense of his danger, the mourner in Zion is bowed down with penitential grief and the Christian believer prepares for the consummation of religion in the present world, and for a state exquisite state of happiness in the Kingdom of God.

The words of our text expound the state of a man in a sense of his temporal calamities, his moral condition, and the deep concern which he felt in regard to his future destiny. His affections had softened his heart, exercised his moral feelings, while the dark mysterious dispensions of divine Providence had tendered his future prospects exceedingly gloomy and distressing. Hence he exclaims, “For God maketh my heart soft, and the Almighty troublith me.”

This subject will lead me to consider, the influence of tempers of heart, the state of moral sensibility, and the means by which it is brought into exercise, precisely.
I. What is implied by tenderness of heart. We shall at first consider this part of the subject, as it is very important. By tenderness of heart, in the first place, we mean a constitutional adaptation to the exercise of acute sensibility. In this respect, it may exist without the influences of religion, and is frequently displayed by the benefitted Heathen as well as the Christian believer.

2. Tenderness of heart, in the second place, refers to the exquisite emotions which we realize under the affective dispensations of divine providence, and the effect of this kind of softening is either transient, fatal, or solitary. By the sadness of the Countenance the heart is, of necessity, made better, but it sometimes happens that these emotions may be so great that they forget their trouble or sink in despair and put an end to their existence.

3. Tenderness of heart, in the last place, implies the exercise of those moral feelings which we profess as subjects of God’s moral government, capable of holding intercourse with Him in the present world, and of expecting reward or punishment from Him hereafter. Into these remarks, we shall dismiss the part of our subject.

II. We shall now proceed to consider the means by which the heart is softened, made soft in the threethold sense just described.

1. A constitutional adaptation tenderness of heart is implanted in our nature by the Almighty, as the author of existence—the Maker of our bodies, the Preserver of our lives, and the Father...
of the spirits of all flesh. And thus he has made in the constitution of some persons, a more amiable, tender, and compassionate spirit, is possessed by others. Thus he makes the heart soft as the God of Nature. While this is a general sameness, yet we find a remarkable variety in the physical and moral constitution of mankind. Some are taller, larger, more active and more comely than others. Some are naturally bold, forward, and talkative, whilst others are more retiring, and slow of speech. Many persons manifest a cold indifference to everything around them whilst others are full of motion and feeling. And you may trace the difference among little children. Some are naturally sharp, quick, and cold-hearted, whilst others are more generous, affectionate and affectionate in their disposition.

2. This natural sensibility is calculated to render persons more amiable and useful. Men are generally ashamed of being seen in tears, but true grief is always tender and sympathetic. Hence we are told by Homer, that Achilles his bravest of men, was often seen to weep, and we learn that the God of all wept at the grave of Lophrus. Thus the charms of female beauty become doubly attractive when they are blended with these teears of compassion tenderness which rise from an affectionate heart. The moment a female appears she has lost one of the most lovely amiable qualities of her sex.
And for the heart of the Constitution, tender and soft, many are unprepared to sympathize with their suffering fellow creatures. They reflect the poor, the sick are not visited, and the unfortunate are despised, because their feelings are not brought into exercise.

But the constitutional tendencies of which we have been speaking, affords no argument in favor of fatalism or the doctrine of unconditional election and reprobation, for while some are more easily excited than others, none are entirely devoid of these tender emotions which may be cultural and improved by the influences of religion. And while the natural frame of some will impress the heart with more pleasant exercises, the superior judgment of others will often lead the conduct more consistent.

But there are circumstances, which will soften the heart and excite the affections of the more calculous and unfeeling, whose sensibility has not been destroyed by a long course of useful or vicious indulgence.
I have seen young men bidding each other adieu at the close of a college season, and I have seen them gath'ring to tears like Joseph his brethren in the land of Egypt. They had long studied and toiled together, and the thought of parting perhaps to meet no more in this world has excited the sympathies of their nature.

When the warrior has fought the battle of his country, he delights to lay down his arms and return to the home of his Father. (In the record of the ten thousand books.) The tender emotions of our nature are beautifully described by Campbell in his "Soldier's Dream" —

When General Lafayette, long in this county for the last time he met with an old Colo. man in McIntosh who had been a soldier in the Revolutionary war, and was present when the last battle was fought at Little York. The moment his name was mentioned, the General re-called him and embraced the old soldier in the street with all the affection of a brother —

When the mariner is placed upon some distant strand he anticipates the time when he shall return to his family and friends in his native land. Safe in hope the wispy anchor, sheds his canvas, and directs his course toward his far off home.
weather’s the storms of the sea. What must be his feelings, when he discovers his native shore rising upon his view in the distant horizon.

Some years ago a vessel went out from Harwich, and after she had been gone a long time, she was given up for lost. The friends of the crew were in great distress, and the wife of the supercargo was rapidly declining under the affliction. But unexpectedly news arrived, that the vessel had got into Hampton Roads, as she came up the river at a salute was fired from Fort St. James and Fort Nelson. Citizens came down to the wharf to witness the arrival, and as the vessel neared the shore, the sailors waved their hats and exclaimed the ship is almost gone, but she’s about to land a rich cargo. They were greeted by their friends on the wharf, and I what a happy meeting it must have been between the supercargo, his affectionate companions!
II. The heart is softened by the afflictive dispensations of divine Providence. To this, "For God maketh my heart soft, and the Almighty troubleth me." In the midst of health and prosperity, man is apt to become ungrateful, hard-hearted, and forgetful of God. The worldly minded young man is engrossed with the pleasures of the world. He strives to forget that there is an Almighty Sovereign who will reward the righteous and punish the wicked. Perhaps, he has inherited an ample fortune from his father's estate and is eager to conclude that he has nothing to do but to dress and profligate, and enjoy the society of the gay, the merry, and the humorous. The worldly minded young lady spends her time in studying the fashions, in dressing her person to visit or to be visited, or in planning some scheme of future pleasure and amusement. She is unwilling to think that her charms will presently fade— that seeking will spoil her beauty, and that her flesh will become food for the crawling worms of the earth. The avaricious man seeks his happiness in hoarding up riches— his great business is to buy and sell and get gain— He rises early and sets late, he exposes himself to cold and to heat. He spends the face of the poor and eats the bread
If carefulness that he may increase his earthly prospects, and when he has amassed a princely fortune he be happy to conclude that he will be one of the happiest men that ever lived.

But my brethren the Almighty frequently disappoints the children of men in their expectations, that their hearts may be softened and their stubborn will subdued.

Were it not for trouble and affliction, many persons would become too strongly wedded to the things of the world. Were it not for trouble and affliction, many persons would be lifted up with pride and vanity. Were it not for trouble and affliction, many persons would become calomnious, hard-hearted, and unfailing witnesses.

But when the worldly-minded young man has exhausted his prospects by his extravagance and debauchery, when his wants are pressing upon him, and his friends have turned him out of society, he is soon ready to weep over his sad misfortunes.

When the gay young lady is brought upon the bed of affliction she loses her and desires her thoughtful associate, she is ready to conclude that all is vanity and vexation of spirit.

When parents are called to give up a son or daughter to the cold embrace of death their tenderest sympathies are brought into exercise, and their tears of affliction fall.
in thick succession around the silent grave which has entombed the object of their love. Trouble and affliction in some shape or form await us all. Man that is born of a woman is of few days and full of trouble. Riches frequently make to themselves wings and fly away; Our health frequently fails and renders us incapable of earthly enjoyment, and death will soon dissolve the tenderest ties, and leave us to weep over our sad extremity.

But the tenderness of heart produced by affliction is often very transient. When death has entered the family circle and taken away a father, a mother, a husband, a wife, a brother or sister, the surviving relatives weep and mourn for days and weeks. They feel sorrow and solemn, and resolve to seek their lasting rest in God. But in the course of a few months their tears are dried up, their good imitations are lost gone, and they return again to the pleasures and amusements of the world.

O how many parents have forgotten their little children who have gone to the kingdom of heaven; and how many husbands have forgotten the dying request of their departed companions? They are making no effort to meet them around the throne of God.
What a great difference do we sometimes between the same persons in sickness and in health. When they are seized with some alarming disease, and the symptoms of death begin to fasten upon them, how many begin to pensive, to confess, and resolve to lead a new life if the Almighty should restore them to health, but as soon as they have been raised from their bed of affliction they have forgotten their promises, and sinned against God with a high hand and an outstretched arm. And how often has this been the case with many who hear me to day—

3. The softening influence of affliction frequently gives the impulse to a holy life. David could say it was good for him that he had been afflicted, and the prodigal son was staved back to his father's house. Many will rejoice in the day of eternity that they were ever afflicted.