

S E R M O N V I I .

LUKE XIV. 23.

The Lord said to the servant, compel them to come in, that my house may be full.

OUR blessed Saviour in the days of his humility, among other instances of his admirable condescension, was pleased in his sermons to stoop to the capacity of the hearers, and instruct them in a familiar easy way. The infirm eye of flesh cannot behold spiritual things in their immediate purity and glory, but as shadowed under sensible comparisons. Therefore his excellent goodness made use of parables, to illustrate and explain by representations and patterns borrowed from things common and known, things of a sublimer nature, and more distant from our apprehensions: and by this engaging lively manner to awaken the spirit to consider by what is said, what is signified: and to insinuate into the affections divine truths so pleasingly conveyed to us.

Now of all the parables in the gospel, this of the marriage feast, both in respect of the excellence of the matter, and the manner of expression suitable to our capacity, deserves the serious application of our minds and hearts. I will make some observa-

tions upon it, that may be useful and introductive to the following discourse.

Two general parts are to be considered, in it : viz.

I. The narrative of the preparations, and the persons invited to the feast.

II. The success of the invitation.

In unfolding these generals, I shall consider the substance of the parable, without straining it by far-fetched parallels beyond the intention of our Saviour. It is a curious folly to turn every figure in scripture into an allegory. The parable is the same in substance with that in the 22d chapter of St. Matthew, from the 2d verse to the 15th : that indeed has more of circumstance and magnificence in the relation. The 'certain man that made the feast is there styled a king,' that is, the blessed God ; 'and the feast is for the marriage of his Son :' under this figure of a royal marriage is represented the mystical marriage between Christ and his church, and the type is infinitely excelled by the reality. If we consider the persons joined in this divine alliance, the Son of God, of the same nature, of equal and eternal greatness with his Father, to unite himself to sinful miserable creatures in a conjugal relation, the most tender and entire, what an immense distance was to be overcome ? What a seeming disparagement was it to him ? In order to this it was necessary there should be a conformity of nature between us : he therefore "was made flesh, that we might be one spirit with him : " he assumed our nature in a personal union to the Deity, that he might marry our persons in a spiritual union. He was a Saviour to redeem us, that he might be a husband to enrich us. Astonishing love ! The Lord of glory, higher than the heavens, stooped so low as to espouse poor dust : he gave his life for us, and himself to us for ever. What honour and happiness accrue to us by this alliance ! the Lord of angels is our husband. His gifts are answerable to his love : he is heir of all things, and endows his church with heaven and earth : the apostle assures believers all things "are yours, and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's." Our communion with him is so perfect, that he discharges us of all the evils that we cannot bear, our sins and the curse due to them, by taking them upon himself, and bestows upon us all the blessings and blessedness we are capable to enjoy, "Wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption."

By the great supper prepared, we are to understand the manifestation of the Messiah, with all the most precious and invaluable benefits purchased and conferred by him upon believers; the pardon of sins, adoption into God's family, the graces and comforts of the Spirit, and eternal glory, the becoming testimonies of his greatness and love.

The prime guests invited to this feast are the Jews, the select people of God, "to whom pertained the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises: whose are the fathers, and of whom concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever." Rom. 9. 4, 5. When other nations were excluded from the alliance of God, his presence and worship was their privilege, and for them this feast was principally intended.

The servants employed in the invitation were, first, Moses and the prophets, inclusively to John the baptist; all 'to whom the oracles of God were committed,' Rom. 3. 2. Deut. 18. and by whom the eternal counsels of his wisdom were declared concerning the Messias. All their prophecies, as so many lines, meet in this centre. Psal. 2. Isa. 40. The other servants were the apostles, who were commanded "to preach the gospel first at Jerusalem." Luke 24. The first order of servants, and the second, both proposed the same Messias, as the object of our faith and love; but the prophets under shadows and figures in the promises, the apostles clearly in the truth and accomplishment. The first invited while the preparations were making; but the evangelical ministers are more earnest and pressing, "Come, for all things are now ready." And in comparing these two periods of time, there is the most shining and sensible evidence of the truth of the christian religion: for the marks of it are clear in the prophecies by their exact references to the accomplishment in the person of Christ; and they are clear in the accomplishment by the correspondence to the prophecies. Who can suspend assent that our redemption by Jesus Christ is the work of divine providence, when the design of it is so exactly delineated in the prophecy?

Thus the unchangeable firmness and stability of God's counsel is the foundation of our faith. The consummation of the marriage will be at the second coming of Christ.

II. The success of the invitation is related, "They all with

one consent began to make excuse. The first said, I have bought a piece of ground, and I must needs go to see it: another said, I have bought five yoke of oxen, and go to prove them: and another said, I have married a wife, and I cannot come." Luke 14. 18, 19, 20. All the carnal affections are readily and presently conspiring in the refusal. It may seem that the allegations of a purchase and marriage for not coming to a feast were very reasonable: but the feast represents celestial happiness, in comparison of which all the profits and pleasures of this world are but loss and dung: it is evident then, their excuses are strong accusations of their folly and ingratitude: of folly in preferring shadows before substantial felicity, moments before eternity: of ingratitude, in rejecting contumeliously the most gracious and earnest offer of such a happiness. This is spoken of the Jews, who lived in the time of the Son of God's descent for the salvation of men: the love of the world caused them to despise his mean appearance, and neglect the call of humble mercy. Upon their refusal, "the servant came and showed his Lord these things; then the master of the house being angry, said to his servant, go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind. And the servant said, Lord, it is done as thou hast commanded, and yet there is room. And the Lord said unto the servant, go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled. For I say unto you, that none of those men that were bidden, shall taste of my supper." Ver. 21, 22, 23, 24.

The refusers are for ever excluded from the joy of this royal feast, being as unworthy as unwilling to partake of it. This judgment is still visible upon the nation of the Jews, who consent to their progenitors rejecting and condemning the Messiah, and will not be convinced of the obstinate imposture that was devised to prevent the belief of his resurrection. But it did not become the wisdom and goodness of God, that such costly preparations should be lost: it was requisite that some persons should actually come to the feast, that is, obey the heavenly call, and receive the gospel; for otherwise the redemption the Son of God so dearly acquired, had been without fruit, he had died in vain, which is directly contrary to the promise of God to him. "I will give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salva-

tion to the ends of the earth." Isa. 4. 9, 6. Accordingly the servant is ordered to bring in the "poor, the lame, and the blind, and to go into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that the house may be filled." These expressions declare the extreme misery of the heathens, who were at that time "without Christ, aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world." Ephes. 2. 12.

"Compel them to come in." The papists alledge this text to give colour to their cruelty, in their violent ways of making proselytes to their idolatry. Their convincing arguments are swords, and racks, and gibbets, and fires. If this be a proper method of converting men to religion, the greatest tyrants are the most infallible teachers. The vanity and impiety of the pretence will appear by the considering,

1. It is ridiculous to reason, to use forcible means for such an end: for the understanding is a reasonable faculty, and can only be convinced by instructing reasons. It cannot judge of things but as they appear, nor assent against its judgment. Indeed threatenings and tortures may make men infidels, but not sincere believers: it may make them hypocrites and comedians in religion, but not unfeigned professors. This is abundantly exemplified in France, where the vast number of servile converts have been made by their dragoons, not their doctors.

2. This is most contrary to the practice of our Saviour, and to the spirit of the gospel. The sword that Christ useth in subduing his enemies, and making them willing subjects to his sceptre, "Goes out of his mouth." Rev. 19. 15. His kingdom was introduced into the world by preaching and miracles, by doing good and suffering evil: he opened the way for the gospel not by killing his enemies, but by dying himself, and in his members: the establishing and enlarging his religion are by suitable means, the illumination of men's minds, the persuasion of their wills, the drawing of their affections to embrace it. Accordingly the apostle tells us, "The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds; casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ." 2 Cor. 10. 4, 5. The weapons are suitable to the warfare, and the warfare to the

kingdom, which is spiritual, "not of this world." The using of force to constrain men to embrace the christian religion, is contrary to the love, the goodness, meekness, clemency and benignity, the blessed temper of the gospel plants in the breasts of christians. How severely did our Saviour rebuke the fiery spirit in James and John? Luke 9. 55. "You know not what manner of spirit you are of; the Son of Man came not to destroy men's lives, but to save them." It is contrary to the golden rule given to all his disciples, "What you would have others do to you, do you to them."

But this must be acknowledged, that it is very congruous that the papists make use of the material sword, when 'the sword of the Spirit, the word of God,' strikes through the heart of popery. The doctrine of the mass is a clear contradiction to the scripture, and a notorious derogating from the value and virtue of Christ's death: they say it is an unbloody sacrifice of Christ, propitiatory for the living and the dead: whereas our Saviour was offered up once, the mass is ten thousand times in a day repeated. Christ's sacrifice was with blood, and an unbloody sacrifice is not propitiatory, nor can obtain remission. Where can they find in scripture the religious worship of the saints? They set up an infinite number of intercessors, and rob our Saviour of his glory, as if he were defective either in his compassionate love to us, for whom he mediates, or in his power with God. They prefer his mother before him in dispensing mercy of which sinners have the most need: they represent him as strict and severe, but she is composed of sweetness, he is the Judge, she the Advocate and Saviour; we will leave them to the jealous God.

I shall only observe farther, that many erring sects preserve their allegiance to the divine authority in the scripture, for they do not assume an infallibility to themselves, but mistake the sense of scripture: but the papists by asserting that the authority of scripture depends upon the testimony of their church, that is, the sun borrows its beams from her eyes, and by arrogating an infallibility to it, do in effect renounce homage to the authority of God in his word. And from hence it is that the adherers to that religion are so invincible: though sense, reason and scripture discover their doctrines to be plainly impossible. Their doctrine of transubstantiation involves such contradictions as

destroy the essence and end of miracles: their doctrine of the pope's supremacy implies there are two monarchs of one kingdom, two heads of one body, two husbands of one spouse. No errors are more strong and fatal than such as are armed with authority, especially if that authority be esteemed sacred. But to return from this digression, though not impertinent.

"Compel them to come in." The word signifies the use of all constraining motives, and the most earnest entreaties that are congruous to prevail upon those who are invited to a feast. The same word is used Mat. 14. 22. "And Jesus constrained his disciples to get into a ship;" which certainly was not by violent driving or drawing them, but by his commanding authority. So it is related of the two that were with our Saviour in the journey to Emmaus, that they "constrained him to abide with them:" Luke 24. 29. the constraint was by earnest entreaties, far from force. The same word is used of Peter's compelling the "Gentiles to live after the rites of the Jews:" Gal. 2. 14. that was by his example. Thus the nations were compelled to receive the gospel by the apostles, the ambassadors for Christ, who did ardently, "in season and out of season," pray them in Christ's stead to be reconciled to God. Their doctrine was recommended by the holiness of their lives, and confirmed by the lustre of their miracles. In short, the expression signifies how pleasing it is to God, that those who are invited by the offers of grace in the gospel, should come to Christ to obtain life: and that the invitation shall be effectual in the hearts of those who belong to the election of grace.

The proposition that I shall insist on is this:

It is the great duty of the ministers of Christ to use their best endeavours, to instruct and persuade men to embrace the saving mercies of the gospel.

The commission was immediately given to the apostles, but extends to the end of the world, till the ministration of the gospel shall cease. I will explicate the doctrine in this order.

I. Consider what is implied, the averseness in men from consenting to the terms of salvation offered in the gospel.

II. The means by which they are wrought on, and induced to come to the celestial feast.

III. Prove that it is the greatest duty of the ministers of Christ

to apply themselves with a holy zeal to bring men to partake of the saving mercies revealed in the gospel.

I. There is an averseness implied in the expression, "Compel them to come in." This will be evident by considering, that the world, the flesh, and satan, are enemies in combination against the souls of men, and raise an army of objections against their submitting to the terms of the gospel.

1. The world is the general temptation: the natural world, and the corrupt world, the things and men of the world hinder our coming to Christ.

1st. The natural world, comprising all the creatures in it, was originally very good, both in respect of the things themselves, and their designed use: for they were beneficial to man, in order to his serving and enjoying the blessed God. But since his fall from the state of unstained nature, they are accidentally evil to him. "The creatures are made subject to vanity, not willingly:" Rom. 8. they are perverted from their innocent use, to foment and gratify men's vicious appetites. Therefore the apostle declares, "the whole creation groans and travels in pain, is in a kind of agony ready to faint, not for the labour, but the indignities they suffer." The charge that God fastens upon idolaters, is true against worldly men: "Ye have taken my silver, and my gold, and have carried into your temples my goodly pleasant things." The riches, the pleasures, the greatness and glory of the world are the idols of their heads and hearts. The interposition of the earth darkens their minds, eclipses their esteem of the fruition of God as their only happiness; the love of it alienates and estranges their affections from him, their trust in it slackens their due dependance upon him. From hence it is, that the world, which, made by God, was a fair and bright theatre of his perfections, to raise the thoughts and affections of men with delight and wonder to the blessed Creator, as it is managed by satan, and abused by the lusts of men, "is the shadow of death:" such as some trees cast, that not only intercept the refreshing light of the sun, but shed a malignant contagious influence. Strange alteration!

The world is present and sensible, and makes an easy entrance into the bosoms of men. Their souls are surprised and deceived by the suggestions of the senses, that represent earthly things as

great realities : spiritual and future things are to them but matters of fancy and conceit. The present and succeeding world are like counterbalances ; as the one rises, the other sinks in men's opinions. When the world has got possession of them, it commands and captivates all their powers and faculties. All the preaching in the world is in vain, a throng of business or loose diversions causes the neglect of the great salvation. Represent to them the attractive mercies of God, his melting bowels opened in the gospel to all repenting sinners ; they are unmoved, frozen in their dregs : remember them, that their bodies are dying every day, and their souls are already dead, and that without sincere coming to Christ they cannot be recovered to the life of grace and glory, it is in vain : tell them, they must shortly appear before the dread Lord of spirits, and be accountable for all things done in this world, and the consequence will be eternal ; all is in vain : they have other affairs, other desires, which they regard and pursue ; they are lost in the labyrinth of the world, and have no time nor inclination to secure their main interest.

It is further observable, from the excuses alledged in the parable of a purchase, and a marriage, and as it is said in Mat. 22. " That the invited made light of it, one went to his farm, and another to his merchandise ;" that those temptations of the world are most persuasive and fatal to men, that seem to be very natural and innocent. For what duty is more clearly natural and reasonable than to make provision of supplies suitable to their condition and state, to their charge and families ? It is true, conscience and prudence require that men should be diligent in their callings, for the support and comfort of the present life. ' But the kingdom of heaven, and the righteousness that leads to it, must be sought for in the first place.' The highest valuations, the most inflamed affections, the most vigorous and constant endeavours are due to heaven. Now the minds and faculties of men are limited, and cannot with intense and equal ardency apply themselves to various objects. If the world be the main object of their care and counsel, the vigour of their leading and instrumental faculties will be less free and active for heaven : and from hence it is, that the affairs and engagements of this world, though immediately they do not deprive men of heaven, yet mediately they are destructive to them ; for they lessen their esteem, cool their affections, slack their endeavours to

obtain it : they oppress their spirits, engross their time, that they have no leisure to "work out their own salvation:" they make them receptive of many temptations, which wound their souls to death for ever. The constant spring of the sins and misery of men is from hence, they have forgot the regular use of the creatures, as means and motives of their ascending to God; they understand not the rule of wisdom, to make temporal things subordinate to eternal; they have lost the happy temper of not totally declining the world, nor of eager embracing it. In short, they would enjoy the world, and only use God in their exigencies. It is therefore inculcated in scripture, "That the friends of the world are the enemies of God, and that the love of the world is inconsistent with the love of the Father." It is a most dangerous sin, being so hardly discernible, and hardly cured: for the more appearance there is of reason and the less of sensuality in a sin, the more it insinuates and prevails. We usually judge of sins by the foulness of the external act, but the guilt of it principally arises from its inward contrariety to God. The love of the world dethrones God in the hearts of men: other sins dishonour him in breaking his laws, this reproaches him as less worthy of our respects. When it has free dominion, it will as certainly, though silently, destroy the souls of those who are of a fair reputation in the eyes of men, as the riots of notorious sinners will be their ruin.

2dly. The corrupt world, those who are styled the "children of this world," by their example, and by their opposition, are obstacles in the way to heaven,

(1.) By example: for the broad way is beaten by the multitude, and few strive "to enter in at the strait gate that leads to eternal life." Now men easily receive the impression of example. Of this there is palpable evidence; for when sins are common, the numbers of the guilty diminish the sense and shame of the guilt. But if conscience be sometimes unquiet, they smother the sparks of conviction in their breasts, and make a resolute reckoning they shall be in no worse condition than others. Miserable comfort! as if one tortured on a rack could receive any mitigation of his pains, by the sight of many others suffering the same torture. So contagious are the fashions and manners of the world, that a principal end of our Saviour's death was to "deliver us from this present evil world:" Gal. 1. that is,

not from the place, but from the depraved state, and sinful practices of the men of the world. The apostle Peter remembers believers, "Ye know that ye are not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation, received by tradition from your fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ as of a lamb without blemish and without spot." 1 Pet. 1. So deep was the pollution, it could only be washed out in that precious fountain. The principles and ways of the world have a mighty influence to blind and harden men in conformity to them. The heathen idolatries and impurities were continued so long in the world, being commended and established by public custom: and accordingly the apostle tells the Ephesians, "they in time past walked according to the course of this world."

Now to apply this more closely to the present subject: it is visible by the conversation of men in the world, that their aims, their appetites, their endeavours are terminated in the world: their souls cleave to it, the train and tendency of their actions leads to it. A superficial tincture of religion, a complimentary visit to God sometimes in public worship, contents the most; but their thoughts, their time and strength are spent to obtain and enjoy the present world; for it is esteemed their main interest, and heaven is only sought by the by, as an accession to their felicity. Now we usually approve and effect things according to common opinions and practice, though unreasonable and exorbitant. The psalmist speaking of the gathering uncertain riches, observes, "this their way is their folly, yet their posterity approve their sayings:" Psal. 49. they imitate the folly of their progenitors, though fatal to them. Men are vain in their minds, and secure in their sins, by conformity to the numerous examples that encompass them. Nay, a regenerate man by conversing with the unregenerate world, is in danger to be tainted in his judgment, and to be irregular in his affections to earthly things: he is apt to conceive so highly, and to frame such glorious and goodly ideas of worldly excellencies, that his desires are inflamed to attain them, and proportionably he is chilled and controlled in the alacrity and vigour of his endeavours after heavenly things. Thus as a fresh water river by its nearness to the sea has a brackish taste; so even the citizens of heaven are prone to be earthly minded, by their society with the

children of this world. It is the wise and earnest advice of the apostle, "be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your minds, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God." The corruption of the world has deeply seized upon us since to purge it away; a man must be melted anew and transformed into another creature. So difficult it is for a carnal man to resist the united force and potent sway of corrupt nature and custom.

(2.) By opposing those who sincerely comply with the heavenly call, either by scorn and derision, or violence and persecution. Human nature is very sensible of disparaging reflections, and it is one of the spiteful arts of satan to make use of his instruments to deride serious religion out of the world. It is equally profane and pernicious to turn into railery and wild mirth the impieties and impurities of the wicked, and the holiness that shines in the lives of excellent saints: for the "making a mock of sin," takes away the just horror and detestation of it; and the scurrilous vilifying of holiness, takes away the veneration and high respect that is due to it. Carnal men who live in pleasures, without restraint of their licentious appetites, upbraided by the holy and heavenly conversation of sincere christians, cannot with patience suffer others to practise what they neglect; and to countenance their own looseness, and from revenge, scurrilously abuse whom they will not imitate. "Pure and undefiled religion" is the game that winged wits fly at. He that avoids the appearance and approach of sin, that "strives to be holy as God is holy in all manner of conversation," is the mark wherein their poisoned arrows are fastened. "The just upright man is laughed to scorn." Job 12. 4. Nay, even dull wretches will set up for wits, and attempt by their insipid jests, and thread-bare fooleries to abuse the saints. But all the bitter sarcasms that are darted upon religion, are infinitely more hurtful to the despisers than the despised. It argues a prodigious depravation of mind in those who take a perverse delight in scorning holiness, the glorious likeness of God in man: such in the account of scripture are the worst sinners, the most forlorn wretches, whose condition is dreadful, if not desperate.

This scornful exposing religion to make men ashamed of it, is most successful upon the dispositions of young persons, and those who are of higher birth and rank in the world. Youth is

the blushing age, and has a tenderness of face, that cannot bear the prints of disgrace. If one in his early age begins to breathe the life of holiness, if he abstains from fleshly lusts that war against the soul, he is represented as fondly nice, and ridiculously scrupulous: no less than the special grace of God is necessary to fortify his holy resolutions, and make him superior to the scorn of the wicked.

The honourable are fearful of disgrace, and more tender of their reputation, than others, being in a greater light, and exposed to more eyes and observations. If one of noble quality renounces the vanities and enticements of the world, "makes the fear of the Lord his treasure;" if he zealously endeavours to be more distinguished from others by his eminent virtues, than by the splendour of his condition, he is scornfully traduced as a melancholy fop, as a low spirit: as if constancy in devotion, and the practice of mortification were a descent from his dignity, and cast a dark sad shade upon his honour. Thus the vain perverted world vilifies that holiness in men, which the blessed angels adore in God. Isa. 6.

But alas, how many that had serious inclinations to be religious, and were entered into the way of life, have been cooled and checked in their first fervours: they could not firmly sustain reproach, and endure conflicts with the passion of shame, therefore returned to the course of the world, and with it have perished to eternity. We read of the Israelites after their coming out of Egypt, they met in the way with Amalec, who "feared not God, and smote the feeble, and faint, and weary of them:" Deut. 25. 17, 18, 19. therefore the Lord strictly charged them to blot "out the memory of Amalec from under heaven." In this type, profane scorers, that discourage beginners in religion, may see their doom.

To conclude this first general, I shall observe, the parable represents to us, that those who were first invited, "not only made light of it, but entreated spitefully the servants, and slew them." Matt. 22. Their neglect of the gracious invitation, was like the sleep of one oppressed with the fumes of wine, that does not hear a message sent to him: their cruel rage against those who invited them, was like the awaking of a distracted person, who hearing the voice that calls him, and by an error of judgment mistaking what is said, in fury snatches his sword,

and destroys those about him. Wicked men are of satan's society : he " was a murderer from the beginning," and hates the word of life. As soon as our Saviour was born, and pointed out by a new star in heaven, there was a design to destroy him. It is true, the subtle tempter does not at first inspire men with rage against the gospel : but as in the art of dying, some colours are preparatory for others, the cloth is first dipped in blue before it takes a black ; so by several degrees in sinning he brings them to extreme wickedness. Thus the neglect of the gospel makes way for the contempt of those who bring it ; and contempt proceeds to hatred, and hatred sometimes produces mischievous and deadly effects. Now the fear of temporal evils, especially if extreme, to which men are open and obnoxious for the gospel, will hinder them from embracing it, or cause them to forsake it, if they are not supernaturally enlightened and confirmed, by " the Spirit of power and love, and of a sound mind." 2 Tim. 1.