

S E R M O N I X.

LUKE XIV. 23.

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

3dly. **I**F conscience be not seared and senseless, but awakens sinners to reflect upon their condition, and to seek for the pardoning mercy of God, he deceives them with false notions of faith and repentance, and hinders their entire compliance with the terms of mercy offered in the gospel. Final unbelief and impenitence utterly exclude men from salvation: for the death of Christ was not appointed to be a sacrifice for those sins. There is no salvation to be obtained without the remission of sin, no remission without the blood of Christ, no application of that precious blood without faith. This is the vital qualification required in all justified persons: for it has a peculiar efficiency in receiving Christ and pardon, and ascribes the glory of it entirely to the mercy of God and merits of Christ. It is said, "to as many as received him, he gave power to become the sons of God, to those who believed on his name." John 1. 12. Receiving is relative to God's offer of Christ to the condemned and miserable, and implies the taking him in all the essentials of his

office ; as a prophet, to instruct us in our duty and happiness by his word and spirit ; as a priest, to atone the divine displeasure by his propitiation and intercession ; as a king, to govern us by his law, and to bestow spiritual and eternal blessings on us. Faith receives Christ as a kingly priest, and a saving prince ; he is styled a " Priest upon a throne, a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance and remission of sins." He purchased the forgiveness of sins as a priest by his sufferings on the cross, and pardons as a king upon the throne : from hence it necessarily follows, that faith receives pardon from him in that relation wherein he procured it, and confers it. The apostle declares, " he died for our sins, and rose again for our justification," and thereby redeemed us, and acquired a dominion over us : then it is clear and consequent, that saving faith receives him for all those uses for which God did appoint him ; and accordingly " purifies the heart, overcomes the world, works by love : " and love is the spring and substance of every duty, the " fulfilling of the law." Now carnal men are deceived in this imagination, that the single act of resting upon Christ is sufficient to entitle them to the promise of salvation to all that believe in him : they desire an interest in Christ, to quiet their consciences ; and the world, to satisfy their affections. They will rest on him as a Redeemer, but reject him as a Lord : they would enjoy his salvation, but will not endure his dominion : they will come to partake of the festival entertainment, the pardon of their sins, but not for the honour of the bridegroom. As if the gospel were a free charter to sin, and gave an impure indulgence to the vicious affections ; which is as inconsistent with it, as the darkness of the night with noon-day in the same hemisphere : for then it would foil itself, and frustrate its own end. Our Saviour first redeems from sin, " from the vain conversation," 1 Pet. 1. 18. then from hell. There can be no regular saving trust on his death, without an unfeigned resolution to live within the compass of his laws. " He is the Author of eternal salvation to all that obey him." It is a blasphemous conceit, that he will save men with their sins. If they will die in such a pleasing dream, who can prevent it ?

2. Men are miserably deceived about repentance. This is indispensably required not only by the command, but as a disposition that qualifies the sinner for pardoning mercy. For al-

though the majesty and supremacy of God be illustriously visible in pardoning sinners, and it is most evident that his authority is above the rigour of the law, and his mercy is infinitely free; yet they are always exercised correspondently to his essential and unchangeable perfections, his ruling wisdom, his unspotted holiness, and governing justice: from hence it follows that a sinner remaining in the love, and under the power of his sins, is not a capable object of pardoning mercy. Who can conceive that a wise prince should send forth a proclamation of pardon to rebels, without their consent to return to their allegiance? John the Baptist, the forerunner of the rising Sun of Righteousness, the morning star of the gospel, preached the "baptism of repentance for the remission of sins." Even our Saviour begins his preaching the gospel with this, "repent ye, and believe the gospel." St. Peter directed those who were anxious and inquiring about their salvation, "repent, and be baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins." He repeats this doctrine in Acts 3. 19. "repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord." And he gives testimony of the resurrection of Christ, "him hath God exalted to be a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins." According to this unalterable tenour of the gospel, repentance is the condition that qualifies the subject, without which no man is pardoned. Some are strangely scrupulous of using this word *condition*, though it is authorized by the full current of the reformed divines, and I know none more convenient to express the necessity of it in a pardoned person. Our Saviour tells his disciples, "ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you:" are not those words a conditional assertion, upon what terms they possess that inestimable privilege of being his friends? Thus when God invites men to come out from the pollutions of the world, and to "touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you, and I will be your father, and you shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty:" are not these conditional promises? And upon the performance of the terms, the blessing will be bestowed, and not otherwise.

It is objected, that the asserting repentance to be the condition of pardon, lessens the grace of the gospel: but this is a

great mistake, for repentance is an evangelical duty and grace. The law requires innocence and perfect obedience, or condemns without mercy: the gospel commands and accepts repentance. This grace was purchased by our Saviour, and is wrought in us by the Holy Spirit; and joined with faith, are the firstfruits of the returning sinner to God. When it is exercised in the most eminent degrees, it has not the least merit nor causality in the obtaining pardon. If a repenting sinner could fill the air with his sighs, and heaven with his tears; if all his vital springs were opened, and streams of blood flowed out, they cannot be satisfactory to God's injured justice. The irreconcilable hatred of sin, the ardent love of holiness, and steadfast resolution to follow it, which are ingredients in sincere repentance, though they are pleasing to God, yet are the duty of the reasonable creature before the commission of sin, and therefore can deserve nothing of God. But the ordaining an inseparable connexion between repentance and pardon, is honourable to God, and very beneficial to men: for there is no state of misery more miserable than for the sinner to be hardened in his sins. But to return from this digression.

The scripture describes repentance by a sincere change and renovation of the mind, the leading faculty; by the entire turning of the heart from the love of sin to the love of holiness; by the active lively passions, sorrow, fear, shame, indignation, zeal, that are principal ingredients in it; and by the fruits "worthy of repentance, and works meet for repentance." It is called "repentance from dead works," and "repentance unto life." Now men are willingly deceived with an insincere and ineffective repentance: either with a mere mental change, or with broken resolutions instead of the entire heart; or with the leaving some sins, and retaining others that are suitable to their humours and lusts. They confess their sins, and condemn themselves for them: sometimes they have flashing thoughts, melting affections, good purposes to forsake sin, this they think to be sincere repentance: but when a temptation appears, they are easily overcome, and live in the habitual practice of their provoking sins. This conceit of their being true penitents, is as unreasonable, as if one that has a returning ague, should think himself freed from his disease in the intervals of his fits. Now to quiet conscience, they readily apply to themselves the words of the

apostle, "what I do, I allow not." And since the best saints, while they are in sympathy with frail flesh cannot be perfect, but many sins they unwarily and unwillingly commit, which are infirmities lamented by them, and graciously forgiven by their heavenly Father; therefore indulgent sinners take shelter under this pretence, that their relapses are mere unavoidable infirmities. But what weakness can be pretended for wilful habitual sins? Such excuses do not cover their guilt, but discover their strong affections to their lusts: they have not the excuse of ignorance: to pretend the flesh and the world are omnipotent enemies that cannot be resisted, is to blaspheme the grace of the Holy Spirit. In short, a new life is inseparable from repentance in its reality. Sad and serious thoughts, sighs and tears, the sorrowful confession of sins, and good purposes against them, are the blossoms of repentance, ineffective without the substantial fruits of it in a reformed conversation. It is one of the arts of satan to join things together that are inconsistent: in paradise he assured the woman that she might taste of the forbidden tree, and of the tree of life: and he now deceives many with the hope that their indulged repeated sins are consistent with repentance. But if men do not forsake the foul sins they lament, their sorrow will go with them to hell, and settle in the worm "that shall never die."

Fifthly. The tempter hinders men from compliance with the present invitations of grace, by suggesting there will be time enough for accepting them hereafter, and a future repentance will be sufficient to redress all their miscarriages. By this deceit he trains them on to ruin. By this he eludes the force of present convictions: that without repentance they must perish for ever, and puts men out of the compass of conversion. It is clear by its own light, and needs no other proof, that present obedience is due to the commands of God; "to-day if you will hear his voice, harden not your hearts:" yet against all the evidence of the world without, and of conscience within, satan so strongly deceives men, that they rebelliously neglect their duty, till their time and life are expiring. But how unbecoming, how difficult, how hazardous is a late repentance? How unbecoming is it to put off God till hereafter? Such is his glorious majesty, we should with the most reverend respect, and humble thankfulness obey his first call. If a prince should invite a subject to come

to him for some great favour, would he so break all the rules of decorum, as to delay his coming, by saying, hereafter will be time enough? And what is the greatest majesty on earth to the God of glory? no more than a mote to the sun: and proportionably the indignity arises to neglect the offers of his grace.

Besides, how incongruous is it to give the flour of our time and strength to our lusts, and to reserve the bran for God? To spend the age of our vital and vigorous actions in the vanities and business of the world, and to allow only our languishing age for the obtaining of heaven? That men should content themselves with dead affections in his service who is their life, that were so lively in the service of sin that is their death?

How difficult is a late repentance? Can you repent and believe at your pleasure? Men think that in their age, after the ebbing and retiring of the carnal affections, they shall more easily forsake their sins: but it is a pernicious deceit. The native corruption of men's hearts, alienates them from a dutiful return to God; and contracted corruption by habitual practice, fastens them in sin as their centre. In youth, when the blood and spirits are high and fierce, the body has a corrupting influence upon the mind; but by custom in sin, the mind is so depraved, that it heats the frozen blood and corrupts the body. Suppose the exciting grace of the Spirit be not totally withdrawn, which has often been ineffectual; can it be expected that after men have been hardened in the commission and continuance of sin, they should be more receptive of heavenly impressions? A disease neglected at first, that stealthily slips into the habit of the body, and gradually weakens nature, becomes at last incontrollable and incurable.

How hazardous is it to neglect present obedience to the call of divine mercy? Our days, in the language of the psalmist, "are but as an hand-breadth;" and can men extend their lives beyond their span? A vast eternity follows without dimensions, an undivided duration. It is no more in their power to continue time to come, than to recal time past. How many are surprised by hasty death in their security, and die in their unrepented sins, and perish for ever? The wise man alarms the sluggard with approaching poverty, and his expressions are very applicable to the delayers of repentance: death comes like a traveller, gradually by silent steps; and as an armed man, will

irresistibly arrest them : and damnation follows, which they can neither repel nor discover till they are seized by it. O that deduced sinners would consider, that nothing so ripens them for death, and accelerates judgment, as the presumption that the season of grace will continue notwithstanding their lavish and careless wasting it!

But suppose that life be extended to the utmost date, can you expect that the Holy Spirit should visit you that have been so long putrefying in the grave, and breathe a new life into you? It is the most severe threatening, "my Spirit shall not always strive with man," and then their case is desperate. There is a fearful example recorded in scripture; the old world was first drowned in sensuality, and resisted the Holy Spirit till he was withdrawn; and then the deluge washed away those swine in the mire. Can you expect that at last when the world and your sins leave you, God will accept and receive you? You are commanded to seek him in your early spring, in the first dawns of his light and favour, and is a poor remnant of your life sufficient for obtaining his mercy? The harlots respected not the dead, but contended for the living child: satan and the world strive to have the prime, and best part of your lives, but will God be contented with the dying remains? Or, do you expect an easy composition for all the abuse of his benefits, because of his patience? Do you presume because he forbears so long, he will readily forgive at last? The servant not called to an account till he was run into an irrecoverable arrearage of ten thousand talents, was delivered to the tormentors till he should pay all his debt. How are men degenerated, and fallen lower than the brute creatures? "The stork in the heaven knows her appointed times; and the turtle, and the crane, and the swallow observe the time of their coming; but men know not the judgment of the Lord." Jer. 8. 7. This consideration made our compassionate Saviour dip his words in tears. "He beheld the city, and wept over it, saying, if thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things that belong to thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes."

O wretched deceived souls! how long will you neglect a Saviour and salvation? How long shall "he wait to be gracious," and expect your lingering repentance in vain? Remember the time of grace is limited: if you refuse obedience to the present

call, do you know he will renew the offers of his grace? "Now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation:" will this *now* last for ever? There is no *now* of favour and hope in hell. It is true, God is merciful; and it is one of his royal titles, "the God of patience:" though threatenings are denounced against sinners, and judgments are ready to seize upon them, he repents and stops his wrath: but there is no state more fearful in this world, than when men by neglecting repentance, make God "weary of repenting." "When patience has had its perfect work" towards the unrelenting and unreformed, justice succeeds: before God cuts off a sinner, he cuts off all his excuses. Read with fear the first of the Proverbs, "because I have called, and you refused; I will laugh at your calamity, and mock when your fear cometh." God's frown, much more his scorn, is infinitely terrible and insupportable. Those who delay repentance till the body is diseased all over, and death is printed in the countenance, and the languishing lights are almost quenched, and the vital frame is near a dissolution, yet presume a few sighs will transport their souls to heaven, how just and dreadful will their disappointment be? However they "are deceived, God is not mocked, as a man sows, he shall reap."