

S E R M O N X I.

LUKE XIV. 23.

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

III. **I** Shall now prove it is the great duty of the ministers of Christ to apply themselves with a holy zeal to bring men to partake of the saving mercies of the gospel.

This will appear by considering,

1. The command of God, from whom they are sent, lays the highest obligation upon them to perform their duty. The manner and degrees of obedience, are measured by the greatness of the authority that enjoins it. To sovereign authority, immediate, absolute, and supreme obedience is due. The authority of God is more binding than the highest in princes, or the dearest in parents: what are all kings of the earth to him? less than nothing. Temporal greatness consists only in comparison. In the scale of magistracy, the superiors to some are subordinate to others: but the majesty of God is absolutely and truly infinite. And as the immediate servants of the king are under special obligations to obey his commands, besides the common duty of his other subjects; so the ministers of the gospel by their

consecration and immediate relation to God, are bound with all zealous diligence to do his will.

2. It is the principal end of their commission. God designs in the contrivance and revelation of the gospel, to glorify his mercy, and his Son in our salvation.

First. Love is the clearest and most adequate notion of the Deity; "God is love." Now mercy is medicinal, healing, and recovering love. The object of it is the miserable and unworthy. In God's moral government, mercy and justice are the leading attributes, and mercy in its exercise has the supremacy: "mercy rejoices against judgment." When our first parents were cited to judgment for their rebellious sin, mercy promised a Saviour before the sentence was pronounced. God is styled the "father of mercies;" it is his natural offspring, the freest and most delightful emanation from him. Judgment is his strange work, that by constraint he executes. "He does not afflict willingly the children of men:" God is more pleased to see the fruits of his mercy in his creatures restored to happiness, than the effects of his justice in the guilty and miserable. To be inclined to do evil and hurt, is an imperfection infinitely distant and opposite to the divine nature. "The Lord God is a sun:" and as it is proper to it to enlighten, revive and refresh the world by its operations and influences; it is accidental to consume and destroy, and proceeds from the imperfection of things upon whom his beams fall. Thus it is according to the nature of God to dispense the liberal effusions of his goodness to the creatures; if they feel the effects of his justice, it is for sin that deserves it, and draws it forth into exercise. Mercy is God's glory: by glory we understand the lustre that results from the perfection of things, and is attractive and worthy of admiration. There is light in one beam of the sun; but glory results from the union of all its beams in their full strength. Accordingly a double glory belongs to God.

1st. His essential glory, that results from his transcendent excellencies; the supreme beauty and brightness of that unapproachable light wherein he is said to dwell: every attribute being truly infinite, is most glorious.

2dly. Declarative glory, that consists in the operation and influence of God's perfections, and in the humble and thankful adoration of them by intelligent creatures. Some divine attri-

butes are more eminently the glory of God : as they are more declarative of his perfections, and more sensibly and powerfully affect the minds and hearts of men. In this respect mercy, as it is the most benign and comfortable, so it is the brightest light in all the constellation of the divine attributes ; it is our happiness we are under its aspects and influences. The other essential excellencies of God are regarded as the qualities of our sovereign infinitely above us, with most humble fear and respectful admiration : but his mercy represents him as our father and friend, and engages our affections entirely to him. When Moses desired to “ see God’s glory,” he told him, “ his goodness should pass before him.” Now mercy is the most excellent degree of goodness. It is goodness primarily excited and active from itself, and takes occasion from the misery of the creature to be beneficent. It is observable, when he was proclaimed in his glorious titles, “ the Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious ;” next to the Deity, mercy is placed as his dearest attribute : and of the thirteen titles of honour attributed to him, nine belong to mercy, to signify the advantage it has above justice. Mercy is his peculiar treasure : it is said “ he is rich in mercy,” not in possessions, “ though the earth is the Lord’s, and the fulness thereof :” his riches are not without himself, but in his own perfections. Now it is the great design of God to glorify this attribute in the salvation of the lost and miserable. Adam had sufficient grace to stand, but was free to fall, and by the fraud of Satan joined with his own folly, was seduced from his duty, and involved himself and all his progeny in utter ruin. It was very becoming God that his enemy should not obtain his end, that mankind should not be the eternal trophy of the tempter, and so noble a part of the creation be as it were abolished for ever. From hence the mercy of God took its rise, and most apparently and eminently declared itself, in sending his Son the heir of his love and glory, to be the redeemer and ransom of the lost and miserable.

The gospel is made up of arguments and endearments, of commands and compassionate calls, of encouraging invitations, and the most constraining motives, that sinful men would apply themselves to our blessed Saviour, and not perish for ever in their sins. And God has appointed an order of men consecrated to this service. This is most excellently expressed by the apos-

tle; "now we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us, we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God." 2 Cor. 5. From hence the duty of evangelical ministers is clear and consequent, that with zealous affections and persevering diligence they should endeavour to bring souls to partake of the grace of the gospel. An objection may be raised.

If God be pleased with the salvation of sinful men, why are not all saved? for nothing is the object of his will, but is within the compass of his power.

The objection is specious, and may surprise at first, but duly considered, may receive a sufficient answer.

1. It is a leading rule, that when doctrines are clearly revealed in the scripture, we must yield our assent, though we cannot resolve all the difficulties that are raised against them. It is unreasonable to deny what is evident, because we cannot unfold what is obscure. There is no doctrine more frequently and emphatically asserted in the divine writings, than that the repentance of a sinner, and his acceptance of pardon and life is very pleasing to God. He assures us in the most sacred and solemn manner of this: "As I live, saith the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way, and live:" Ezek. 33. 11. he is willing they should be saved, and they are wilful to be damned. With what tender and melting compassions does he argue with them, "why will ye die, O house of Israel?" as if they were upon the brink of hell, and ready to drop into irrecoverable misery.

2. We must distinguish between his decreeing will, and his approving will: whatever God decrees to effect, shall be infallibly accomplished; but many things that he approves, are left undone. His commands are his will, the rule of our duty, but not of his purpose what he will do. The scripture mentions "the word of God's power," and "the word of his holiness." The word of his power effects all things according to his will: but the word of his holiness, his laws declared to regulate our lives, are often opposed, and without efficacy.

3. The wisdom of God directs all the operations of his attributes; that orders the dispensations of mercy, and the inflictions of justice. When the apostle had considered the astonishing economy of providence with respect to the Jews and Gentiles,

he breaks forth, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!" Rom. 11. 33. That so great a part of the world live in darkness, and die in darkness, and go to their fathers where they shall never see light, and the Day-spring from on high visits other nations, is according to the counsel of his will.

4. God does afford assisting grace to sinners, which if they improved, he would not desert them. The gospel "is the ministration of the Spirit," to illuminate, excite and persuade sinners not to forsake their own mercy. "He strives with them," he woos "and waits to be gracious," till by their obstinate resistance they quench his holy motions. It is true, he dispenses grace in different degrees, for he is the master of his own favours: but though effectual converting grace is not bestowed upon all, yet there is common grace, that has a tendency to conversion, which if humbly and thankfully improved, such is the most free and excellent goodness of God, men would receive further supplies. But they are careless and opposite to his gracious operations, therefore the Spirit is most righteously withdrawn from them. He that in luxury has wasted his estate, it is just he dies in poverty. Besides this, it is very considerable, that men shall be condemned at the last day not for mere impotence, but obstinate opposition: they loved "darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil:" John 3. 19. not for the want of that grace they did not receive, but for the neglect to improve that grace they had received, and rejecting what was offered. The slothful servant was condemned for hiding his single talent in a napkin, not because he had not five talents. Matt. 25.

Secondly. It is the great design of God to glorify his Son. When he brought his First-begotten into the world, the command was, "let all the angels of God worship him. God has given him a name above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and earth, and under the earth; and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." Heb. 1. Those who cross his supreme wisdom and sovereign will, shall by a constrained submission acknowledge the high dignity of his Son.

The great command of the gospel is, that "men should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ:" 1 John 3. 23. "him hath God exalted to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance and remission of sins." Acts 5. 31. The death of Christ may be considered as an act of obedience to God, and of love to men. His intention was to glorify God, by bringing lost souls to him. Now it is promised as a reward of his sufferings, he "shall see of the travail of his soul, and be satisfied." He is infinitely pleased with the salvation of souls, as the fruit of all his anguish and bloody agony. The election of a number of the lost world, that shall believe in him, and be adopted and saved by him, has a special respect to his honour, that his death might not be in vain: that the Son of God may be magnified in his unspeakable love to them, and their sincere obedience to him: his relative glory, as head of the body, will shine in them for ever.

It is also observable, the decree of election which is of infallible accomplishment, both as to the conversion and perseverance of the elect, because the divine will is unchangeable and insuperable with respect to the events determined by it, hath a peculiar regard to the glory of Christ. No principle of opposition in the corrupt heart of man can frustrate the operation of God's Spirit, either in the powerful entrance, or sure continuance of his grace. Our Saviour tells us, "all that the Father gives me, shall come to me." John 6. 37. And, speaking of his sheep, he saith, "my Father which gave them me, is greater than all: and none is able to pull them out of my Father's hand." John 10. 29. The purpose of God, and purchase of Christ secure their salvation: for these our Saviour intercedes, "Holy Father, keep through thine own name, those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are." John 17. 11. His mediation is never interrupted: when Christ's prayer and God's power are ineffectual, then may they fall away totally and for ever, whom God keeps, and Christ commends to his keeping. From hence it appears, that the ministers of the gospel are indispensably obliged zealously to endeavour the salvation of souls, which the Father has designed for the honour of his mercy, and which the Son of God esteems his dearest glory.

THE APPLICATION.

1. From hence there is just cause to admire the glorious grace of God in converting sinners, and making them willing to comply with the terms of the gospel. Indeed it is strange to amazement, that men involved under the guilt of sins so numerous and so heinous, and liable every hour to the sentence of the law, so sure and severe, eternal death for their sins, should neglect a pardon so dearly purchased, and so graciously offered, and not with the deepest humility, with ravishing joy, and the highest thankfulness receive it. Is there no spirit, no understanding left in them? Nay, are sensible nature and its inviolable inclinations so extinguished, that they are enemies to themselves? But if we consider the depravation of mankind so inveterate and invincible, we shall turn the current of our wonder another way, that the obstinate perverseness of any is subdued, and that with consenting wills they receive Christ as their Prince and Saviour. Election is the fountain of distinguishing grace: "many are called, but few are chosen." Ephes. 1. Conversion, adoption, justification, sanctification, glorification, are all the fruits of electing mercy. Rom. 8. Ephes. 1. 2 Thess. 2. By the most gracious and free act of his own will, he chose some out of the corrupt generality, (and they are but a little diminutive flock) to make them vessels of honour, Acts 13. that his goodness might be the more admirable. Those who are made a willing people, John 12. were by the natural and contracted hardness of their hearts, as averse and repugnant to the heavenly call as others; if after a thousand repulses, the spirit had been withdrawn, they had died in their sins: but as it is said of Lot's miraculous rescue from the flames of Sodom, "While he lingered, the angels laid hold upon his hand, the Lord being merciful to him, and brought him forth, and set him without the city;" so the free and omnipotent grace overruled their reluctant hearts, and strongly and sweetly inclined them to God their supreme and satisfying good, and to come to Christ as the only means to restore them to the favour and enjoyment of God. The natural man is no more able to believe with a saving faith in Christ, than to obey the whole law: "it is the gift of God," He provides the means of salvation, and applies them; he by

victorious grace "leads captivity captive," and bestows that most precious gift upon his people. How many that enjoyed the same gospel, and did not reject so many invitations, nor so often grieve and vex the Holy Spirit, nor so long abuse the patience of God, were justly left in their sins? this will set a lustre upon special and saving mercy. O, what a conspicuous discovery, what a lively and thankful sense will there be of this grace in the next world! Our Saviour tells the unbelieving Jews, "There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves turned out." Luke 13. 28. The comparison of the opposite states will then be more joyful and transporting to the saints, and more manifest and tormenting to the reprobates. They shall feel a burning thirst after the happiness they have lost, and be tortured between desire and despair for ever.

2. Let those who make light of the invitations of grace, consider what will be the issue of their obstinacy. Within a little while conscience will awaken the remembrance of their careless contempt of the divine mercy, and that will awaken despair. To instruct such persons, and make them afraid, that they may fly to the sanctuary from the destroyer, let them consider,

(1.) This will render them inexcusable. Their obduration and final ruin will be of themselves. God is pleased to appeal to the human understanding, "What could I do more for my vineyard, that I have not done?" His works and his words are declaratory of his will, how pleasing the repentance and life of sinners is to him. He has prepared a Saviour and salvation, and offers them to lost souls. In the year of jubilee, liberty was proclaimed for all the Israelites who had been servants; but if any one would not leave his master, his ear was bored, and he was a servant for ever. Thus the acceptable year of the Lord is proclaimed in the gospel, a happy freedom to sinners by Jesus Christ: but those who are in love with their reigning lusts, refuse this freedom, and are condemned to the worst bondage for ever. God by his authority commands them to "repent and believe the gospel:" he invites them by the most gracious promises to accept and receive them: he expresses the most tender compassions towards perishing sinners; "Why will ye die?" He reproaches their unaccountable folly, "How long ye simple ones will ye love simplicity?" He urges them by terrible

threatenings, not to neglect his offered grace. But they are deaf to his loudest calls: if a lust whispers from their earthly affections, they are presently moved. No mercy will soften them, no reproofs will reform them; the richest means of grace are lost, and they prodigally perish. Now how justly do they fall under the condemning sentence of the law, who slight the mercy of the gospel? "God takes no pleasure in the death of a sinner, but they take pleasure in their sins: they die in their sins, because they will die:" they are deprived of life, "because they will not come to Christ that they may have life." At the day of judgment lost sinners will entirely clear God, and deeply charge themselves with their deserved ruin.

(2.) Such are irrecoverable. The gospel is the only dispensation of grace; if men obstinately reject it, their condition is as desperate as if they were bound in chains of darkness to the judgment of the great day. Mercy alone can heal us; and if that be wounded, our sickness is incurable. "He that believeth not the Son, shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him." John 3. 36. His doom is sealed and irreversible. God now speaks in a still voice, but hereafter he will speak in a whirlwind to the despisers of his grace. It is true, we cannot say a soul is quite lost while there is a delay of judgment: but the scripture declares, that sinners by their stubborn refusals of mercy, make God inexorable to their prayers: Luke 19. 42. there is a day of grace, and the lapse of it is fatal to the neglecters. Of this there have been very fearful examples: how many despisers of the grace of the Redeemer in the course of their lives, yet in the agony of their last departure, when their sins with a ghastly aspect appear, and with frightful horror they look into the bottomless pit, conscience anticipates the divine judgment. Let the most compassionate ministers offer them the cordials of the gospel, and tell them they despair too soon! the self-condemning conscience replies, they repent too late. O that men were early wise to secure their eternal interest!

(3.) The neglect of salvation, will aggravate the sin of men. "This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men love darkness rather than light." John 3. 19. The higher the disobedience, the lower the damnation will be of sinners. The heathens in their race of ignorant rebellion are not so guilty, nor liable to so heavy a sentence as those who dis-

obey the gospel. The Israelites had so abused the mercies of God to his dishonour, there were no such rebels on earth; the prophet was fain to descend to hell for a comparison to equal their wickedness: "hear the word of the Lord, ye rulers of Sodom; give ear unto the law of our God, ye people of Gomorrah." Isa. 1. 10. But those who turn the grace of God into an occasion of their sinful security, are not to be paralleled in hell. The devils rebel against the Creator, against his authority and laws, but men rebel against their Sovereign and Saviour, and his admirable grace. The Son of God interposed as Mediator to make God reconcilable to the world: "but he did not assume the nature of angels, he took no hold of them, nor can they take hold of him." Heb. 2. The golden sceptre was never extended to them: justice was strict and severe; for the first sin they were presently expelled from the habitation of glory, and their doom is irrevocable. But men are within the reserves of mercy; God spares them in order to pardon, and renews his compassionate calls to them to forsake their sins, and live: by his word and wonderful patience he invites them to repentance, and by repentance to his favour, and to happiness. Now what a violent provocation is the contempt of such mercy; the furnace of hell is heated seven times more for the despisers of the gospel. How will the remembrance of their folly rack their torn minds? The fiercest furies cannot so torment them as their self-condemning consciences.

3. Let the ministers of the gospel be excited to discharge their commission with fidelity. I shall set down some directions and motives in order to it. The general direction is this, *salus populi suprema lex esto*: the salvation of souls is the end of preaching, and must regulate it. The qualifications of a minister to make him successful are,

First. Excellent knowledge. An ignorant minister is a plain solecism, as to say a blind eye, not capable to perform the act proper to it. The office and authority without abilities to exercise it, is in vain. The apostle declares the perfection of the scripture, that it is profitable "for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." 2 Tim. 3. He is to instruct the ignorant, to remember the careless, to refute the erroneous, to resolve the doubting, and com-

fort the afflicted. Not only fidelity, but wisdom is requisite in the servant whom his lord made ruler over his house, to give them meat in due season. Matt. 24. 45. There must be substantial learning to convince gainsayers, and spiritual skill to understand the arts of the tempter, who will sail with every wind, and make use of the various dispositions of men to do them mischief. He feeds the blazing presumption of indulgent sinners: he speaks peace to them when God is their enemy: if there be sometimes a sad countenance, the shadow of repentance, it is sufficient. But he perplexes tender and fearful spirits, by suggesting they do not mourn enough, to damp their endeavours, and make them heartless in God's service. Now it is a principal duty of an evangelical minister to unmask the malice of satan, and defeat his design: to preach the word in that distinct manner, that secure sinners may be afraid of vengeance, and that the penitent may apply the divine mercy. "He that wins souls is wise." Prov. 11. 30. The terrors of the Lord must be set in array against the rebellious obstinate transgressors; but the indulgent love of our heavenly Father, the tender compassions of our sensible Head and Saviour, and the consolations of the Holy Comforter, are the portion of relenting and returning sinners.

An understanding minister instructs his people in their duty and happiness: he will not offer them "stone for bread;" intricate controversial matters that astonish and cannot edify, but plain evangelical truths, the proper food for the soul.

The manner and language in preaching must be answerable to the majesty of divine truths. There is nothing more odious than a sacred subject triflingly handled. The affectation of wit and flaunting eloquence frustrates the end of preaching, that is, to convince sinners of their guilt and misery, and by the conviction of conscience to make them fly to the sanctuary, our blessed Saviour, for protection: partly because those things that flatter the fancy, are not proper to affect the conscience: light trimmings of language, gaudy expressions, glittering points of wit please the imagination; but conscience is excited and inflamed by representing eternal things with powerful plainness, and in a solemn manner: and partly because the human spirit being limited, while one faculty is attentive, another suspends its activity and operations; so that the exercise of the fancy hinders

the mind from serious reflecting on divine truths, and applying them to the soul. Vain ornaments in a sermon are like a painted complexion, the more it is advanced to the eye, the more it is abased to the judgment.

The discourse of a preacher should directly go to the heart: it should be so framed as to prove and illustrate the subject, and work on the understanding and affections. We have the pattern of this in scripture, where the love and mercy of God to his children, and his justice and power against his enemies, are represented in the most pathetic manner. I will produce an instance of both: "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet I will not forget thee." Isa. 49. 15. What can be more supporting and comforting? The other instance is as terrible. "God is angry with the wicked every day. If he turn not, he will whet his sword; he hath bent his bow and made it ready. He hath also prepared the instruments of death." Psal. 7. 11, 12, 13. This description of God's righteous displeasure is more powerful to shoot through the conscience of hardened sinners, than the bare threatenings that justice will surely punish them.

Secondly. A minister should be zealous and diligent in the discharge of his office. St. Paul adjures Timothy in the most solemn and fearful manner, "I charge thee before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing, and his kingdom: preach the word, be instant in season, and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long-suffering and doctrine." 2 Tim. 4. 1, 2. Did the apostle stir up the fire in so vigilant a minister, how much more needful is it to blow up the embers in our drowsy spirits? Certainly if conscience be not seared and dead, so sharp a charge will rouse it to the performance of our duty.

Zeal for the glory of our Saviour, if it inflame our hearts, will fire our lips, and animate our sermons. Let knowledge be the breath to blow the sacred fire, and the most burning zeal is not excessive. But our affections at the highest are very defective: how many preach the word so coldly, as if they had no desire to save souls from eternal death?

How many ministers lie down in their laziness, and wretchedly neglect their duty, to better themselves and benefit others

in preaching the gospel? Idleness enervates and unstrings the bent of the spirit: the mind is benumbed by a useless and ignoble dulness.

Some who are deputed shepherds, may think it a disparagement to their greatness, to be frequent in so mean a work as preaching; whereas the Son of God was a preacher of the gospel. Others make a gain of the flock, but put off the instructing and care of it to others. They will serve Christ by proxy, who died for us in his own person. How can they commit to others the charge immediately entrusted to themselves? What exemption can they plead, what account can they give to the great Shepherd?

Thirdly. Let ministers, that they may be successful, adorn the holy, (and without holiness dangerous) office of the evangelical ministry, by a suitable conversation. Innocence, and abstinence from foul sins, are not sufficient to recommend them; but "the power of godliness, and the beauty of holiness" must shine in their lives. They can never effectually teach others what they do not practise themselves: if any sin reigns in them, their prayers cannot ascend with acceptance to God, and descend with a blessing on the people. Let a minister preach divine doctrine, yet if his conversation be earthly and sensual, he is more likely to harden sinners than to convert them. How unbecoming and disgraceful are unholy ministers to their profession? What a scandal do they give to the profane, and occasion to blaspheme their high and holy calling? Let such prepare themselves for "many stripes:" they cannot escape a double damnation, for the neglect of their own souls and the souls of others committed to them. Though a heavenly light shines in their sermons, if in their practice they are "dark clouds, the blackness of darkness is reserved for them for ever."

Fourthly. Union among ministers is a happy advantage to recommend their doctrine to the people. Division and jealousy will lessen the authority and efficacy of their preaching. If one dog opens, the deer is not alarmed, but the full cry rouses him. When ministers with one consent declare the wrath of God from heaven against sin, the profane and secure are afraid: and the awful fear of justice makes them seek for mercy. It is true, there cannot be expected an entire conformity in opinions among the wisest and best men: therefore in doctrines not so clear nor

of that moment as the great truths, a mutual forbearance is our duty. But to coin controversies about clear and necessary truths, and obscure them by opposition, is a great hinderance to the success of the gospel. Some worthy men earnestly deny the gospel to be a law: will they reform the scripture? Is not the gospel called the law of faith, the law of liberty, the law of the spirit of life? It is true, the gospel is a covenant of grace, but it has all the essentials of a law: it is the revealed will of the sovereign Lawgiver, commanding sinners to repent and believe, upon no less reward and penalty, than eternal life to penitent believers, and eternal death to those who disobey the gospel. Now the command and sanction are the proper characters of a law. If we duly consider it, the sovereignty of God is such, that whatever covenant he offers to the reasonable creature, has the force and obligation of a law. I instance in this one point, that of late has occasioned an unhappy difference. O the blessed state above, where ignorance and strife are abolished for ever!

Fifthly. Frequent and earnest prayer to God is a powerful means to render our ministry successful. "Paul plants, and Apollos waters, but God gives the increase." Let a minister be completely furnished with learning, judgment, eloquence, yet all his labour will be fruitless without divine grace. A key that is exactly fit to all the wards of a lock, cannot open it without a hand to turn it. Let the most proper and powerful motives to work upon the reasonable nature be represented, yet they cannot open the heart, unless they are managed by the Holy Spirit.

It is very observable, that in the narrative of the miracles by the prophets, some circumstances are related, that declare they were done by the divine power. Sometimes the command of God was before the performance: thus in all the astonishing works done by Moses, the command of God was the beginning. "Take thy rod, stretch out thy hand," Exod. 7. 16, 19. & 8. 5. & 16. 9, and other orders that demonstrate the miraculous actions not to proceed from an inherent virtue in his person, but from a superior and borrowed power. Sometimes prayer was addressed to God before the miracles were done: thus Joshua first speaks to the Lord, before he commands the sun to stand still upon Gibeon, and the moon in the valley of Ajalon. Josh.

10. 12. Thus Elias and Elisha revived the dead by prayer to the Lord of life. 1 Kings 17. 20, 21. 2 Kings 4. 33, 34. This was declaratory, that the prophets were but instruments, and that God was the absolute author of them. Accordingly in the conversion of souls, which is a work as miraculous as any of those illustrious miracles, there must be the divine appointment of the means, and ardent prayer to God for his blessing. It is the great encouragement of ministers in their service, that whatsoever is God's ordinance shall effect that for which it is ordained: the rod of Moses was powerful to subdue Egypt, to drown Pharaoh and his host in the red sea. Three hundred soldiers with Gideon, only armed with lamps and pitchers, destroyed the numberless army of the Midianites. Astonishing victory! "And the gospel is the power of God to salvation." But prayer is requisite to obtain the Holy Spirit, by whose influence the word is effectual to recover lost souls to heaven. And it is evident, that numerous and entire conversions of sinners have been by the ministry of holy men, who made it their great and earnest request that they might be successful in bringing souls to Christ. Cold formalities are unacceptable to God, and without efficacy; but prayer actuated with life and holy heat of affection, ascends to heaven and prevails. And what is more worthy of our constant and most ardent desires, than the salvation of precious and immortal souls?

II. To excite ministers to a faithful discharge of their duty, let them consider,

1. The example of our blessed Saviour. It was one principal part of his office to preach the gospel: this he undertook in wonderful mercy, and performed with amazing diligence. He rises before day, and retires himself into a solitary place to pray, that he may lose no time in preaching. He preached on the mountain, in the desert, in the ship, in the synagogues, in the highway, in the house: no place, no persons, no time was unseasonable. It was "his meat and drink to do the will of his Father." Mark 8. 35. Matt. 5. 1. Mark 6. 36. Matt. 13. Luke 10. 39. John 4. 34. Thus constant and delighted was the Son of God (who laid aside his majesty and glory, that he might instruct the people without terrifying them) in his blessed work, How does his example reprove and upbraid our negligence? How should it inflame us to imitate and honour him?

2. His love to us should make us ardent and active to save souls, as a testimony of our love to him. Thus he speaks to Peter, "lovest thou me? Feed my lambs." It is his delight and glory to be the Saviour of sinners. How dearly has he bought our love? How willingly did he redeem us when we were enemies? His love condescended to our low state, to become a servant, that he might exalt us to his state, to be the sons of God. How does he out-love us? We do not love him glory as he loved our meanness, not him the blessed God, as he did us cursed creatures. O the miracle of his ardent love to us! O the strangeness of our cold affection to him!

Love cannot be idle, but will add fire and vigour, and cause unfainting perseverance in our Lord's service. Love and duty will overcome all difficulties. If we consider by how many titles he deserves our service, and feel the dear obligations he has laid upon us, we shall compel "them to come in," that our glorious King's "house may be full."

I shall only add, that to save souls, the work is glorious, and the reward is more glorious. In the assembly of immortal spirits above, all united in perfection and felicity, "those who turn many to righteousness, shall shine with a brighter glory, like the stars for ever and ever." Who would be so unhappy as to prefer sluggish ease before a brighter crown in heaven?

Lastly. I will finish this discourse with an earnest persuasive, that men would comply with the invitations of the divine mercy. Who can without some sparks of pity and indignation seriously observe that men are slight and foolish in things of eternal interest, beyond all the degrees of folly in the concerns of this world? Who would that is in danger to lose his life or estate, and has but one day to secure them, waste it in frivolous matters, when the opportunity is so short, and the omission is irreparable? Yet although the present life be certainly short, and uncertainly continued, and eternity depends upon our present securing the favour of God, and our title in his kingdom, men employ their time to "gain the world," and neglect their salvation, in comparison whereof all the affairs of time are a busy folly, and vain impertinence. Stupendous security! Now to persuade men to come to Christ for life, let them consider,

1. It is God's call, to which present obedience is due. Carnal sense is apt to object, is it not a man I see and hear? It is

true, but the message is the King's, not the ambassador's that brings it. A spiritual eye looks beyond the object of carnal sight, and sees Christ in the minister by the light of faith. Were this believed, how would it fasten our minds and senses in the most serious attention to the preaching of the gospel!

2. Make judicious comparisons between this world and the next. As in the light of the sun there is an influence that cherishes the vital heat, and a power that extinguishes the kitchen fire; so the light of God's word has a double efficacy, it kindles heavenly, and quenches earthly affections. Indeed there wants neither glory nor joy, nothing of complete happiness in the world to come, to raise our affections and fasten them upon it; and in this world all is vanity and vexation to alienate our affections from it. What infinite distance and disproportion is there between the objects of our choice? Who would think it possible, but that it is visible every day, that they who have immortal souls should be careless of eternal things, and spend all their pains and passions about things that expire with the flux of time? That they should neglect solid happiness, and pursue shining bubbles? But the present world fascinates their understandings, inspires their fancy with dreams of happiness here: sensuality charms them into stupidity: they are unwilling to be disenchanting; they enjoy their error, and are entertained with pleasant delusions, till awakened by eternal flames.

Let the enlightened mind consider and judge, the soul is of a divine original, a spiritual substance of an everlasting duration, and can never be happy but in the enjoyment of those objects that are divine and spiritual, commensurate to its capacity and duration. Let a man possess the world with all its advantages and delights, the starved soul would suffer infinite want, and can only be satisfied with the fulness of God.

Under what notion soever happiness is conceived, it is only to be found in God. What can enrich a spirit but spiritual treasures? Holiness is the richest jewel in the celestial crown. What can dignify and ennoble a spirit, but an alliance to God as a father, and the likeness of him in his divinest excellencies? What can satisfy an immortal spirit, and replenish it with joy, but vital union with God, and the immediate influence of almighty and eternal goodness? Carnal men when they obtain their immediate end, riches, honours and pleasures, they fail in

their main end, true happiness: they seem wise for the present, and are fools for ever.

The scripture tells us, "the less is blessed of the greater." How can the present world that is so inferior to man in the nobility of his nature, afford perfection and satisfaction to him? How unsuitable, how insufficient is it to fill the largest and strongest desires of the soul?

The world may cloy, but cannot satisfy us; but the favour of God, the more it is enjoyed, the more it is desired, and delighted in. Carnal joy seems, but is not; fear and stings of remorse may be disguised and glossed over with a cheerful countenance and carriage, but are not extinguished. Spiritual joy seems not, but is: the apostle tells us, "as sorrowful, but always rejoicing:" 1 Cor. 6. 10. there may be a winter in the face, and a flourishing spring in the heart. There is a secret sweetness in the practice of religion, that the unrenewed are strangers to: they cannot see or taste.

Carnal joy cannot repel its contrary; it cannot endure the assaults of the slight and transient evils, to which we are exposed here. Sickness, disappointments, apprehensions of evils that hover over us, may imbitter the most pleasant condition. A wounded spirit, like an ulcerous palate that is fretted and pained with the sweetest things, turns all the pleasures of the world into vexation. Fear struck Belshazzar at his feast into a trembling. "But peace with God, and the joy that flows from it, the world can neither give nor take away:" it is as unable to destroy it as to produce it. "Believers rejoice in tribulations." Rom. 5. 2, 3.

All carnal joys are of short continuance. "The world passes away, and the lusts thereof." 1 John 2. 17. Life is dying, and the comforts of it. "All flesh is grass, and the glory as the flower of the grass;" that by heat or cold, by a blast or a worm is soon destroyed. All the objects of the sensual passions are very fading. The finest stamp of beauty in the countenance, how easily is it defaced by sickness or sorrow, by many accidents or age? Riches take the wings of the morning, and flee away from the possessors: honour is casual and uncertain: the sceptre of David, so great a king, the royal branch of his family, degenerated into a poor carpenter.

The greatest in the world, and the most proud of their great-

ness, the luxurious voluptuaries, shall their pomp and delights continue with them in the grave? Can they reign and revel when their bodies are in the dust, and their souls in hell? Where is their admired happiness? Is it not all dead with them? Nothing will then remain but the tormenting remembrance of their folly. "But the word of the Lord endures for ever:" 1 Pet. 1. 25. it is an immortal seed, and makes the ground it is planted in, to live for ever. We are assured, "he that does the will of God, abides for ever." The blessedness of heaven is everlasting, as God the object of it, and the soul that enjoys it. There is nothing defective in the state above, where happiness is surrounded with eternity. This is worthy of our most aspiring ambition, of all our hopes and desires. Now is it possible that the present world, as empty as the froth of the sea, as vanishing as a puff of air, should be chosen before celestial happiness? It is by the most, so prodigiously are carnal men swayed by sense, that like brute beasts they are violently drawn by present things, and little moved by things spiritual and future. The devil brings ready money in his hands, and tempts them with this present world; the Son of God offers in his word eternal happiness, which is despised in the comparison. If one should choose a small sum at present before the sure reversion of an estate that would enrich him all his life, would he not be despised by all for want of understanding? Yet men allow that folly in their own practice, that they would condemn in others. But such is the mercy of God, that to persuade and prevail with us, he uses all the arguments that can work upon the minds of men. Hope and fear are the strongest springs to move us; he therefore sets before us heaven and hell, to attract our hope, and excite our fear. He makes use of hell to kindle our zeal in seeking the kingdom of heaven. The most violent passions are overruled by fear. Now in the threatening of hell all the motives of fear are united. Little evils are despised, not feared: great evils that may be easily avoided, or apprehended very remote, are not feared. But evils that are imminent and destructive, are the most powerful objects of fear. Now every man in his sinful state, hangs by slender strings over the bottomless pit: and for his under-prizing and neglect of heaven, falls under the sentence that determines his state in an everlasting hell. There is no dawning in that darkness of sorrow, no refreshing in those flames. There

is a restless remembrance of what is lost, as a light that comes through a cranny in a dungeon, that the forlorn caitiff may remember the pleasant reviving light of which he is deprived. A thousand years of torment cannot expiate the offences of those who disobey the gospel: they are full of misery, and fuller of guilt, that remains in its weight upon them for ever.

The fear of this, if duly believed and considered, will bridle the strongest desires after this vain world, and make men wise, that they may not perish in their choice.

To conclude, Let those who are invited to this heavenly feast, come with "the wedding garment: it is an allusion to the decent custom of wearing rich apparel for ornament and lustre at marriage solemnities, to express joy, and to honour the persons that are married. Accordingly all that are in the visible church, should adorn the gospel by a conversation becoming the dignity and purity of their high and holy calling. Unfeigned faith that unites us to Christ, and is effectual and evident in all good works, is the wedding garment. The apostle exhorts the Romans "to walk honestly, as in the day, not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envy;" and whereas it might seem congruous to have added, in direct contrariety to those foul sins, put on temperance, chastity, patience and charity, he directs them to put on the Lord Jesus Christ: because he is the only fountain of supernatural grace, by which our lusts are mortified. Faith "covers us with the robe of his righteousness, and clothes us with the garment of salvation." Isa. 61. 10. A counterfeit livery of profession will not make us accepted of God. Is there any real christianity without faith in Christ? and is there a lively faith without obedience to him? Can you be a subject without subjection? Christ is the king of saints; they are the citizens of his kingdom, and only enjoy the privileges of it. How many are christians in title, and infidels in practice? They live in the bold contempt of the divine law, as if they were afraid the justice of God should not have cause enough to condemn them, or they would put it to a venture, whether he would be true to his threatening, and punish according to his law? Others, [though of a fair conversation, are but half christians: they do not sincerely and entirely comply with the terms of the gospel, to receive Christ for their "Prince and Saviour." Let such remember, "the king came in to see

the guests, and saw a man without a wedding garment :” Matt. 22. 11, 12. this signifies God’s judicial observation of all that are in his church, not one can escape his all-discerning eye, the closest hypocrite is transparent in his sight. It follows in the parable, “ he saith unto him, friend, how camest thou in hither without a wedding garment ?” Nothing will be available in judgment, not the most specious and glittering profession, without faith in Christ, and a renewed heart and life : yet many fondly dream they may be saved, though not sanctified. “ He was speechless,” reduced to a defenceless silence and confusion. The heart of man is deceitful above all things, and above all things deceitful to itself : how often in the trial of his spiritual state, by excuses and false glosses he deceives and satisfies himself. But there are no apologies before the King : all things are entirely open to his eyes : the thoughts of men will be their accusers, and their works will depose against them. And how fearful is the judgment that follows ! “ Then said the king to the servants, bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness ; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” “ Bind him hand and foot :” the expression signifies that the revenging power of God is inevitable and irresistible. “ Cast him into outer darkness” that signifies the separation from the reviving presence and communion of God : “ there is weeping and gnashing of teeth ;” the expression signifies the deepest sorrow and highest fury in the damned. What a discord and tumult of the tormenting passions is there ? What misery, when the quickest sense to feel, and the greatest evils to be felt, are there ? Hell is an intolerable climate, where cold despair and hot rage are in extremity for ever.