

THE FOLLY OF RESISTING, THE WISDOM OF COMPLYING WITH
THE GOSPEL CALL.*

SERMON III.

MATTH. xxi. 29,

He answered and said, I will not; but afterwards he repented, and went.

THE scope of this parable is to shew, that many who have been the vilest of sinners repent and go to heaven, when others, who, though they have a profession of religion, never go farther than a mere profession, and so fall short; partly, also, to shew that many who had been publicans and harlots are now in a better case than the chief priests and scribes. To convince of this, Christ spoke the parable before us.—For understanding of which, I would notice, that the man in the parable represents God; the two sons, two different sorts of people among the Jews. Both had the gospel call by John the Baptist. The first of the sons points out the publicans and harlots, who, though they were formerly most vile and hopeless creatures, yet, on their hearing of John, repented, and became disciples indeed. The second represents the priests and pharisees, who, notwithstanding of their high pretences to religion, yet were indeed strangers to it, their practices did not correspond with their profession.

In the text, which concerns the first son, pointing out the penitent publicans and harlots, we have two things.

1. The sinner's first answer to the gospel call; and it is a short one; "I will not." Like Israel, Psalm lxxxix. 11, "But my people would not hearken to my voice, and Israel would none of me." The sinner so loves his sinful ease, that he cannot think of the work in God's vineyard. Observe in this answer, (1.) The rudeness of it. The son remembered not that he was speaking to a father, so has not so much as a fair word to bestow on him. O the rude treatment Christ meets with at sinners' hands! They remember not his authority over them, nor do they regard it; but they will be their own; who is Lord over them? (2.) The plainness of it. He tells the matter plainly; says not, he cannot, but he will not. It is want of will to the work of religion that is the great stop. Sinners' hearts cannot relish the work of religion: the bent of

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their hearts lies another way. (3.) The peremptoriness of it; he is at a point. The hearing of the word raises his heart against it. Let sinners hear of the work of religion, and that is enough, they desire no more of it. It is a plain case to them, they must not, they will not engage in such a task.

2. The second answer, in which the former bad answer is happily retracted; "But afterwards he repented, and went." He complies with the call he had before refused. The spring of this was, his heart was touched; he took second thoughts of the business, and changed his mind. He fell under after grief, anxiety, and solicitude, as the word signifies. Conscience, that was silent before, now begins to speak, and his blood begins to cool; he calmly considers what he had answered, and he calls himself beast and fool, that should have adventured so to treat his Father; and hence he takes up the work of religion, which he had before rejected. From this subject there arises this

Doct. That refusing the work of religion is not to be stood to, but retracted, and the sinner will see cause for it, if ever he comes to himself. They who have refused to comply with the gospel call, to engage in the work of the Lord, should take their word again, and heartily comply with it; and if ever they be wise, they will do it.

In illustrating this point, I propose to shew,

I. What is that work to which the gospel calls, and with which sinners will not comply?

II. Why is it that sinners will not comply with this work?

III. Why this refusal should be retracted.

IV. Make some practical improvement.

I. I am to shew, What is that work to which the gospel calls, and with which sinners will not comply? It is the work of practical godliness, to which most men are strangers. It is a large work, as extensive as the commandment, which is exceeding broad. I shall take it up in these two.

1. The gospel calls you to fall to your salvation work, Phil. ii. 12, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." Sinners, you are in a ruined condition; your souls are pining away in your iniquities; there is a burden of guilt on you that will sink you; there is a swarm of living lusts preying on you, that will devour you. O guilty creature! knowest thou not, that thou art God's enemy, justice's debtor, the law's criminal, and that the avenger of blood is at your heels? The gospel is calling you to consider your ways, and fall to the work of your salvation, before it be too late. This work has two parts: (1.) The work of faith, John vi. 29, "Jesus

answered and said, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent." Acts xvi. 31, "And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house." It is not that faith wherewith ye have lived in a good belief all your bypast days, so that you never had power to believe an ill tale of your own state; that is a faith of the devil's planting, and the gospel will have it rooted up. It is not that faith which consists in your going on in sin without fear. The devils' faith goes beyond this, for they believe and tremble, Jam. ii. 19. But the work of faith to which the gospel calls you, is that whereby a sinner, sensible of his undone state, flees out of himself to the Lord Jesus, to unite with him for righteousness and sanctification, 1 Cor. i. 30. It is that faith, which, when the house in which the presumptuous hoped, wherein the secure sinner rested in his sins, is overturned as by an earthquake, makes the sinner, naked and destitute, to flee to Jesus Christ, as the only rock and shelter. It is that whereby the sinner, sensible that he has lost his two eyes, and therefore cannot guide himself through the wilderness to Canaan, gives up himself wholly to Christ as his leader, prophet and healer; and seeing the flaming sword of justice pursuing him for sin, runs in under the covert of Jesus' blood, saying, This is my rest; and being willing to part with sin, but unable to master his lusts, puts himself under the protection of Christ as his King, that he may make havoc of his enemies. This, sinner, is your work, your foundation work. Haste, then, out of your natural state, and escape for your life to Jesus Christ.

2. The work of sanctification. Ezek. xviii. 31, "Cast away from you all your transgressions whereby ye have transgressed, and make you a new heart and a new spirit; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?"—Heb. xii. 14, "Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord." Sin is the great devourer and destroyer, and therefore the great salvation is from sin. Jesus saves his people from their sins. To think of being saved in sin, is a contradiction; for to be left in it, is ruining. The sick man does not desire the physician to remove death, but yet spare his disease; yea, but the foolish sinner is thus unreasonable in the case of his soul; he has no will that his clothes be burnt, yet he will needs carry fire in his bosom; he wishes not his feet to be burned, yet he will walk on coals of fire. Living lusts will devour the soul; therefore to work, sinners, for you must either kill or be killed! Let not the vineyard of your souls be any more like that of the sluggard. The sinner's soul is overgrown with hurtful lusts, there is no fence about it. O! then, work; seek holiness.

3. The gospel calls you to your generation work. Acts xiii. 36, "For David, after he had served his own generation, by the will of God, fell on sleep." Wherefore were you sent into the world, and made members of society? Was it not to honour God, and to be useful to your fellow-servants? Surely God sent none of us into the world to play ourselves, like the leviathan in the sea; nor to be like mice and rats, good for nothing but to eat that for which others have laboured. Far less did he send you to be agents for the devil, to advance his kingdom, and to oppose the work of the Lord in the places where you live; nor yet like the beasts, only to eat, drink, work, and sleep. To your work, then, your proper work, the service of God. Perhaps ye will say, ye have not been idle; but what have ye done for God in your day? What have ye done for the good of any soul? What have ye done to pluck any brand out of the burning? I fear, if we reckon our days according to what we have done for God in them, most of us may reckon our days lost days. Look up to God, who placed you in the world, and say for what good purpose you have taken up room in his earth. For what use are you in the world? God has given you a talent, what have you gained? He has placed you in such and such situations and relations, have you done the duties of each? I am to shew,

II. Why is it that sinners will not comply with this work?

1. Because it is the work to which, of all works, their hearts are most averse. Rom. viii. 7, "Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." They would rather do any thing than go and work in God's vineyard. It is against the grain with unrenewed minds. The prodigal would rather feed swine than go back to his father, till he came to himself. Judas would rather go to a halter, than go to Christ for pardon. It is like cutting off a right hand, and plucking out a right eye. The sinner's neck is flexible enough to the devil's yoke; but it is an iron sinew to Christ's yoke. He that has a will to any thing, he has no will to this, till a day of power make him willing, Psalm cx. 3.

2. Because of prevailing love to carnal ease; Prov. xxvi. 15, "The slothful hideth his hand in his bosom; it grieveth him to bring it again to his mouth." The man loves to sleep in a sound skin, and therefore will die in his nest, if God do not in mercy set a fire to it.* Sloth is so sweet a sin, that the carnal heart can never get a fill of it, Prov. vi. 10, "yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep." The man lies in the bed of sloth, and would not miss heaven if it would fall down into his mouth, or if *wishing* and *woulding* would do it. But if these will

not do, he must even want it, for he cannot leave the embrace of his dear ease. Fighting, running, praying, striving, wrestling, using heavenly violence, and the like, he cannot away with.

3. Because Satan furnishes them with work more agreeable, and it they will do; therefore God's work they will not meddle with: John viii. 44, "Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do." When the call of the gospel comes to sinners, Satan does with them as Pharaoh did with the Israelites, holds them more to their tasks; so they have always busy hands, and hearts full of their work, insomuch that they cannot get the work of religion minded to purpose. And what are they doing? They are busy weaving the spider's web; very busy doing nothing, or hatching the cockatrice egg, doing worse than nothing. They have much to do, having the desires of the flesh and mind to fulfil. They have more to do than they are able: they have the devil's swine to feed; they have a fry of living, lively, hungry lusts, that groan about their hearts, crying, Give, give, to satisfy. These they will serve all their days.

4. Because the world gives them another thing to do. Like the people invited to the marriage-supper, Luke xiv. 18, "They all with one consent begin to make excuse." There are too many of Pharaoh's mind, that think religion is only for them who have no other thing to do; as for them, they have no time for these things, and they wonder how any person should expect it of them. They are so delighted with considering what they shall eat and what they shall drink, that they cannot get time to think what they shall do to be saved. They have enough to do to get their daily bread, they cannot get their starving souls minded. They have so much to do to provide for to-day, and to-morrow, that they cannot get time to provide for eternity. They never had such joy in the everlasting covenant, in the benefits of it, or seals of it, which they have in a good bargain where they gain something. Therefore they live like moles in the earth, never to open their eyes, till in hell they lift them being in torment. I go on to enquire,

III. Why this refusal should be retracted? why they should repent and aim at compliance with the gospel-call.

1. Because this refusal is against the respect and duty which you owe to him who calls you to the work: Mal. i. 6, "A son honoureth his father, and a servant his master: If I then be a father, where is mine honour? and if I be a master, where is my fear? saith the Lord of hosts unto you. Have you no regard to the authority of God? or has not he that made you a power over you, to prescribe your work? Will ye follow the dictates of your own corrupt pas-

sions, even against the plain dictates of his Spirit? Shall we thus by our obstinacy affront our heavenly Father, and grieve his Spirit?

2. Because this refusal is full of the basest ingratitude. What is the meaning of all the gospel-calls, but—Sinners, do yourselves no harm? Your interest is advanced by working; Job xxxv. 7, “If thou be righteous, what givest thou him, or what receiveth he of thine hand?” If thou ply the work of religion, the advantage is thine own; if not, the loss remains alone with yourself: Prov. ix. 12, “If thou be wise, thou shalt be wise for thyself; but if thou scornest, thou alone shalt bear it.” It is a great favour that thou hast access to the work. Had not the Son of God made way for it through his own blood, thou hadst never got such a call.

3. It is the most foolish and unreasonable refusal that can be; and if the sinner were not out of himself, he could not be capable of it. What! will a starving man refuse to have meat when it is offered him? or will a convict refuse liberty? But this ye do in refusing Christ’s call, and so judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life. Are sinners so foolish, as to hold fast and drink the cup of poison, when they are entreated to throw it away? This folly and madness will be bitterness in the end.

Lastly, You are ruined if you stand to your refusal. That obstinacy will bar you out of heaven and the favour of God for ever. Heaven is a rest prepared, not for loiterers, but for labourers; and you that will have your ease now, must bid farewell to it for ever in another world: Prov. i. 24, “Because I have called, and ye refused. I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; but ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof; I also will laugh at your calamity, I will mock when your fear cometh; when your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you. Then shall they call upon me, and I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me; for that they hated knowledge, and did choose the fear of the Lord.” Salvation-work will not work, unless men bestir themselves; but damnation-work will go on when men sit at ease, and are carried down the stream into the ocean of the wrath of God.

IV. In the last place, I am to make some practical improvement; in doing which, I shall confine myself, for the present, to an use of exhortation. I would exhort refusers of Christ and of religion to take their word again, and to comply with the gospel-call. Ye have had many calls to engage in the work of religion with earnestness, but the answer of the most part is, I will not; and thus one refusal comes on the back of another.

You have had many calls from the word of God to fall to your work, and what has been your answer to these messages of God by his servants, but that—I will not? Have you not heard many exhortations which have never affected you? Have you not gone back to those very sins for which reproofs have met you in public ordinances, and yet you have held them fast? Has not duty been laid plainly before you, and you have found means to put it by? and still the answer is, I will not.

2. Has not God pursued some of you by afflictions to drive you to your work, and yet no awakening to repentance and reformation, but still the language of your practice has been, I will not. The Lord, in his holy providence, has sent you losses, crosses, and distresses of divers sorts, to bring you to your duty; but, O! may it not be written on rod after rod, You have not yet returned to the Lord?

3. Nay, has not the Lord sometimes so met you in a sinful course, that you could not but say, This is the finger of God? and yet ye would be froward, ye would go back to the sin again. What is the language of that, but—I will not? Have ye not fallen under Jotham's curse again and again? Judges ix. 15, whereby fire has flashed out of some one or other bramble, under which you have rested, on your faces to burn you, instead of that shade ye thought to find under it to refresh you. Has not your conscience awakened on you sometimes, and the arrows of conviction fastened on you, and yet you have refused? Ye have murdered convictions, and never been at ease till conscience has been silenced. You have run away from God, even with his arrows sticking in you, saying in opposition, I will not.

Lastly, Have you not often delayed complying with the call of God, and set the time for your going to work? Yet for all that is come and gone, your eyes have never seen that time yet. What is delaying but plainly a refusal?—"I will not." For there is no word of God that says, Go, work to-morrow, or the next day; it is, To-day, if ye will hear his voice; son, go work to-day. So that he that will not work to-day, but pretends he will do it afterwards, plainly refuses the call, and will not.

To promote your compliance with the call, I would offer a few weighty motives; as,

1. Repent now, and fall to that work ye have formerly refused; for it is a work preferable to all other works. The work of religion is your main, your chief work. (1.) It is the most pleasant work. Many are disgusted at the work of religion, because they think it unpleasant. But they have not yet tried it, and therefore are not fit judges. You have a more favourable account of it from Prov.

iii. 17, "Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace." See also Psalm iv. 7, 8, "Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and their wine increased. I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep; for thou, Lord, only makest me dwell in safety." There is work indeed in the vineyard that is very unpleasant to corrupt nature; but even out of this arises the most refined satisfaction to the new nature. And what are all the pleasures of the world, to reconciliation with God, and that peace of conscience and joy that there is in believing? (2.) It is the most profitable work. The profit thereof is both for time and for eternity; 1 Tim. iv. 8, "For bodily exercise profiteth little, but godliness is profitable unto all things, having the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come." The profits of it are durable profits: they last, and will be profitable, when all others will be of no avail. Hereby you will gain the life of your souls, and, as the loss is incomparably great, so also is the gain of it. (3.) It is the most necessary work. It is the one thing needful, absolutely needful, Luke x. 42. We cannot be happy here or hereafter without it; we are undone for ever.

2. Ye are always working something. The greatest idler on earth is in some sort always busy. God does not require of you more work, but other work. The soul of man is like a watch, that goes as fast in going wrong as in going right. How sad is it, that, seeing men are always doing something, they should refuse only that work which would honour God, and save their own souls! Will you not, then, for God's sake, and your own sake, change your work?

3. It is sad work you are working while you refuse this. If you be not working out your own salvation, you are working out your own damnation. We are always going forward; if not pressing a step nearer heaven, you are a step nearer hell. Every refusal, yea, every sin, is a new impediment in your way to heaven, a new call to Heaven for vengeance on the sinner, builds the separation-wall the higher, and lays on the greater weight to sink you for ever under the wrath of God.

4. Consider, if ye be not in some sort at as much pains to ruin your souls, as otherwise might save them. There are difficulties in the ways of sin, as well as in the ways of God. Is the work of religion a toilsome work? but do not ye many times weary yourselves to commit iniquity? Is there not as much pain when a sinner deprives himself of his night's rest, racking himself about the world, as when a saint communes with his heart on his bed about eternal things? The sinner travels to bring forth sin, Psalm vii. 14. What more than this at the hard duties of religion! Since he that en-

gages not in the work of religion is cumbered about many things, had he not better take up with the one thing needful? The saint has but one master to serve; sinners have many, not only at war with God, but at war among themselves, one lust dragging them one way, and another another way.

5. The time is coming, when working in the vineyard will be over; and if ye continue to refuse, ye know not if ever you will get another offer; "for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest." This day's delay may be an eternal loss, for you may be in eternity before another day. A new refusal is dangerous; God may take you at your word.

6. Our Lord is content yet to invite you to his work, notwithstanding your former refusals; you will still be accepted: "Him that cometh unto me," says Jesus, "I will in nowise cast out."

7. Whatever hardships may be in the work of religion, it is not long ere you shall be freed from them all; you shall be made more than conquerors: "You shall rest from your labours, and your works shall follow you."

Lastly, If you will not, then remember death will make you change your mind, and you will get a long eternity to repent that ye did not repent in time. But such a change can then be of no avail, but to increase your misery. Infinitely better, then, will it be for you if this change take place at present; "for now is the accepted time, and now is the day of salvation."

THE NATURE AND EFFECTS OF A WEANED DISPOSITION OF
SOUL.*

S E R M O N I V.

P S A L M cxxxix. 2,

My soul is even as a weaned child.

THIS psalm is David's profession of piety, wherein he discovers what was the habitual bent of his heart, and course of his life. The occasion of it seems to have been the injury done him by Saul and his courtiers, who reproached him as a proud, ambitious, and turbulent man. His comfort is the testimony of his own conscience,

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