

the weak go from strength to strength. Thus shall you be helped to go through the most difficult duties acceptably, though not perfectly, to stand against the strongest temptations, to mortify the most powerful lusts, and to bear the heaviest crosses. This has made Christians attain to an eminent pitch of holiness, joyfully to embrace a prison, banishment, a gibbet, a fire, and the most cruel torments enemies could invent. The more you are emptied of yourselves, placing confidence in the Lord, the more will you be strengthened with might in the inner man; and when you shall be perfectly unselfed, if we may so express ourselves, so that there shall be no more of it to marr the communication betwixt Christ and you, then you shall be perfectly holy, and set above the reach of all evil; but because we are not properly divested of self-confidence in this world, therefore we do not arrive here at perfect strength. But all the saints, however, will give their testimony, that "when they are weak, then they are strong."—Amen.

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THE INTERESTING INQUIRY.\*

SERMON XVI.

MATT. xx. 6,

*Why stand ye here all the day idle?*

IN the beginning of this chapter, Christ spake a parable concerning the kingdom of heaven, the scope of which is to shew, that those who, by conceit of themselves and their actings for God, do place themselves among the first and chief favourites of heaven, shall be rejected of God, and treated as the last; they shall receive the last of Heaven's favours; while they who, through a feeling sense of unworthiness, dare not make such advances, shall be brought forward from among the last, where they placed themselves, and advanced to the first rank, where they shall be placed of God, who gives heaven as a gift to them that do not plead for it as a debt. This is plain from the occasion and conclusion of this parable: the vineyard is the church; the householder is Christ, whose vineyard it is; his going out at several hours is the call of the gospel at several times, coming to some sooner, to others later; the market-place is wherever the gospel comes. Our text is a pithy

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expostulation with those that are standing there idle, even at the eleventh hour, within an hour of sun-set; according to that, "Are there not twelve hours in the day?" They are idle, in so far as they are not taken up about their work for eternity. Our text, you see, is a close application; the nature of this day's work requires it; and I hope you will not think we misapply it, if we apply it to you. Every word in it has its particular weight.—The following inquiries are suggested from it.

I. Why are ye "idle?" What reason can ye give for your being idle?

II. Why are "ye" idle, more than some others?

III. Why "stand" ye idle?

IV. Why "here" idle?

V. Why idle in the "day?"

VI. Why idle "all the day?"

We shall attend to these inquiries in their order.

I. Why are ye "idle?" If ye deny the charge, there are two things at least, which must be yielded to by most, if not all of us.

1. Ye have been very busy doing nothing; but it is better, they say, to be idle than doing nothing. What is it that most of us are busy about, but nothing? Prov. xxiii. 5, "Wilt thou set thine eyes upon that which is not, for riches certainly make themselves wings, they fly away as an eagle towards heaven;" that which is nothing for our souls, nothing for a blessed eternity. Indeed man is a laborious creature; the life of the greatest sluggard is a continued succession of actions; the soul of man is like a watch that goes as fast when it goes wrong, as when it goes right. But, alas! laborious idleness and solemn trifling in the vanities of this world, is but a pitiful way of spending a man's life, which is but a short time of trial, in order to an unalterable state.

2. Ye have been very busy doing worse than nothing; like these, 2 Thess. iii. 11, "For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busy bodies." Alas! most of our lives are ill parted betwixt two; one is spent in weaving the spider's web, the other in hatching the cockatrice eggs, Isa. lix. 5; either spent in nothing, or worse than nothing; either sitting still or making more progress hell-ward: either letting the separation wall stand as before, or building it higher and stronger. But there is one thing that cannot be yielded, at least to the most part of this generation; that is, that they are busy in their great work. No, no; idleness in this respect is the epidemical disease of the day, under which both professors and profane are pining away. For your conviction in this, consider,

1. What else means the lean souls among us? Solomon tells us, Prov. xix. 15, "An idle soul shall suffer hunger," and Prov. xiii. 4, "The soul of the sluggard desireth, and hath nothing; but the soul of the diligent shall be made fat." We may take up that lamentation, Isa. xxiv. 16, "But I said My leanness, my leanness." Alas! for the many rickety children of the church this day, with their big heads, and lean slender bodies, who are puffed up with their knowledge, but are yet to learn the elements of practical godliness and experimental religion.—Consider,

2. The little desire there is among us after the heavenly rest: Job tells us, chap. vii. 2, "A servant earnestly desireth the shadow, and an hireling looketh for the reward of his work;" so if we were not idle, we would be more desirous of that rest that remains for the people of God. But I fear, if I would speak agreeable to their consciences, they would say, that the Turks' paradise would fit their desires better than the heavenly rest. It was the language of a profane Cardinal, I would quit my part of paradise for present enjoyment; so no doubt many would quit their part of heaven on lower terms, for they only desire heaven, because they love not to go to hell. They care not for the heavenly rest, because they trouble not themselves with the work meet for heaven.—Consider,

3. The little appetite after our spiritual food. The labouring man's work makes him find his stomach, and the Christian labour would make men prize the table covered to them in ordinances. The ordinances are greatly slighted this day, it is lamentable to think how little they are regarded. It is only in the Lord's hand to cure it, by filling folk's hands with heart-work about their soul's case. It is this that would readily make them eager of help.

*Lastly*, What else means the rank poverty, and rotten rags, which is all the portion of many souls? Rev. iii. 17, "And knowest not, that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." How many are there, who are the genuine offspring of the serpent! on their belly do they go, and dust is their meat; they feed on nothing but the husks of created comforts, wherewith the devil feeds his herds; as for communion with God, and sense of his love, they know no more of them than if they had immortal souls for no other end than to keep their bodies from rotting. They go up and down in the rage of their profanity, and lusts, like so many ghosts in their grave-clothes, busy in nothing but dead works.

I inquire, then, why are ye idle?

1. Is it because ye have nothing to do? Truly, ye have very much.

(1.) Ye have your salvation-work upon your hand: Phil. ii. 12, "Work out your salvation with fear and trembling." Many have

never begun that work yet ; many that have seemed to have begun, are at a stand with it now. Ye were born children of wrath, under the curse of the first covenant ; what are ye doing to get free from the wrath to come ? There is a burden of guilt lying on you, what are ye doing to get it off ? Divers living lusts hanging about you, what are you doing to mortify them ? Is there any time to be idle, while that work is not wrought out ? Salvation-work is weighty work, for damnation-work is very terrible ; ye have that to undo that ye have been doing. Thou hast been weaving thy life into one web of sin, and ye have it to open out again into self-examination, repentance, and bitter mourning.

(2.) Ye have your generation-work to attend upon : Acts xii. 36, "For David, after he had served his own generation, by the will of God fell asleep." God made thee, and sustains thee : some of you in higher, others in lower stations ; what have ye done for God, what service to your generation ? The sun, moon, and stars are useful in their several places ; plants, yea, and beasts, are all useful. For what use art thou in the world ? for Him who set thee there, and to those he has set thee among ? Assure thyself, God will call thee to answer that question. I fear most of us have that work to begin yet.

2. Do ye think ye will get sleeping to heaven, and that your short-winded wishes for mercy will secure you from the wrath of God ? Prov. xiii. 4, "The soul of the sluggard desireth, and has nothing." No ; ye must "so run that ye may obtain." Take the kingdom by force ; strive, wrestle, else ye are ruined ; deceive not yourselves, as if ye would just make a slip of it, out of Delilah's lap into Abraham's bosom. Thou wilt find it a leap out of that bed of sloth into a bed of fire and brimstone, where ye will lie down in eternal sorrow, if you do not seasonably bound to your feet, and put hand to your great work.

3. Do you think the devil is as idle about your souls as you are ? No ; though ye cannot creep out of your bed of sloth, the devil is going about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour ; though ye will be at no tolerable pains to secure your salvation, he will spare no pains to secure your damnation. Sleep ye, or wake ye, Satan is at your right hand ; and if ye be not rowing against the stream, he will carry you down the stream, till he have you in the ocean of God's wrath, where you will never see the shore.—The second inquiry is,

II. Why are "ye" idle, while others are gone to work in the Lord's vineyard ? Why do ye sit still, while others are fleeing from the wrath to come ? Why are ye sleeping, while others are wrestling with God as for their bare life ? Why are ye dressing, eating, and

drinking, while others, moved with fear, are preparing an ark against the day of wrath in these lands, and in the world.

1. Is it because the work in the vineyard is too coarse for your fine fingers? John vii. 48, "Have any of the rulers or the Pharisees believed on him? but this people that knoweth not the law is accursed." It is lamentable to think how religion is almost grown out of fashion among the fashionable people of this degenerate age; and shocking to see with what contempt some look on seriousness about soul matters, resolving that these silly people as they call them, shall for them enjoy their folly alone. Certainly these men would never have taken their name from one crucified between two thieves, if it had not been the religion of their country. But these that are wise in heart think differently, and glory in the cross of Christ.

2. Is it because you have another thing to do? Many in our day are of Pharaoh's opinion indeed, that religion is only for them that have no other thing ado. Ye are idle; but for them they have their families and farms, &c., to look after. But, man, hast thou not an immortal soul to look after, as well as others? They said of Herod, It is better to be his swine than his son. I am sure, many a man's soul may say to him, Well is your beasts, in comparison of me; for one thought that is spent on my case, there is ten on theirs.

3. Are not ye by nature under the wrath and curse of God, as well as others? Yes; Eph. ii. 3, "And were by nature the children of wrath, even as others:" and therefore let me say to you as the penitent thief to his fellow, Luke xxiii. 40, "Dost thou not fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation?" Better go to heaven with a few, through all the labours of the Christian life, than to slide away to hell, at your own ease, with the multitude; better weep now, than weep eternally, for it will be no comfort to go to hell with company.

4. Will ye be content to see the labourers set with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and yourselves, with the fellow-loiterers, shut out? you must either set to their work now, or you will see your doom at length, digest it as you will.—I now inquire,

III. Why stand ye "idle?" Have you put on a whore's forehead, and refuse to be ashamed? It would set you better to hide your head, as ashamed in that ye take up room in the world to no good purpose, living in a shameful neglect of your own souls, and the great end of your creation, which was not to sleep away a lifetime on the earth, nor to stand like a barren tree in God's vineyard, drawing away the sap from others, but to glorify God by acting to and for him.

1. Why then stand ye idle in the sight of men? Have ye a mind to tell the world, that go to God's vineyard who will, ye have no mind to stir? embrace God and his service who will, ye will have nothing to do with him, nor it neither? Are you afraid you want witnesses to stand against you before the tribunal of God, to testify how little you valued the working the works of God? The groans of those that warned you to your work, that were grieved at your licentious lives, will witness against you; nay, the stones and timber will cry out of the walls within which you live against you, and witness how little God was in all your thoughts, how little ye ever wrestled with God about your soul's case, and how the prayer, when ye made it, has died in your mouths.

2. Why stand ye idle in the sight of the all-seeing God, who set you down in this world to work your great work? There are many that seem to be diligent workers, but God knows them to be mere idlers; what they work is before men, but their vineyard in the inclosure of their breasts is all overgrown with weeds, and they are at no pains to pluck them up. Have ye bid a defiance to the great Master, whose eyes are upon you in secret, as well as in public, that sees your heart, as well as your outward conversation? Be sure, he will call you to account.—The inquiry, next, is,

IV. Why stand ye "here" idle, even in the market-place, where the great Master has been often calling whom he found here, and you among others, to go and work in his vineyard? and you had not been standing here idle, if you had been willing to work.

1. Why stand ye *here* idle, in a land of gospel light? Isa. xxvi. 10, "In the land of uprightness will he deal unjustly, and will not behold the majesty of the Lord?" If you will serve the devil and your lusts, why do ye not go to the dark places of the earth, and work your works of darkness there? but why must they be brought forth in the face of the sun? why here, in this covenanted land, a land under the sacred bond of solemn covenant to the work of holiness, and the means of holiness; a bond which neither the breaking nor burning of them could loose; and they had never met with that treatment, had not men been as great enemies to piety as to Presbytery. But I dare say, there is no land where men must buy their ease at so dear a rate as in Scotland.

2. Why here, where the Lord is in a special manner calling you to work, setting up his standard, and is about to cover a table for his labourers? will you be idle spectators, while Christ is to be sacramentally crucified before your eyes? will you be idle here, where the Lord is in a special manner calling you to search and try yourselves? If you will stand here idle, it will be a new item, in great

letters, in the accounts of the despisers of Christ, and slights of the power of godliness in Yarrow\*.—I may once more inquire,

V. Why stand ye idle in the “day?” The day brings with it a call to work, though indeed it is the time when the wild beasts enter into their dens, and lie at their ease, Psalm cii. 22, 23. But better to be a beast, than to be like a beast; they that sleep, sleep in the night; but what shall we say of them that cannot be got awakened, even in the day?

1. Then why are ye idle, when ye have a day to work in? No wonder our forefathers were idle, when they were wrapt up in the midnight darkness of Paganism and Popery; but though it was night with them, it is day with us; the sun of the gospel is arisen above our horizon, it has been long up, and will ye be idle in the day? God has not only set up the candle of conscience within you, but has made the sun of the gospel to arise and shine without you, to call you to work, and to let you see to work: Tit. ii. 11, 12, “For the grace of God, that bringeth salvation, hath appeared to all men, teaching us, that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world.” Such a day idled away will make a dreadful night!

2. Why are you idle, when you have but a day to work in? John ix. 4, “The night cometh when no man can work.” It is to-day, if ye will hear his voice. The time of your life, and the season of grace, is but a day, and that day will soon be over; there is no working in the grave, Eccl. ix. 10. The candle burnt to snuff cannot be lighted again, and time once gone can never be recalled; God will not turn night to day, to let the sluggard see to work, who turned his day to night. Now, when you have but a day, will you idle it away? Ye will, it may be, count it rather by years yet to come; but sure I am, the Spirit of God never learned you that way of counting: James iv. 14, “Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow; for what is your life? it is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.” Psalm xxxix. 5, “Behold, thou hast made my days as an hand-breadth, and mine age is as nothing before thee.”—I shall only inquire,

VI. Why are ye idle “all the day?” Will no less than all the day serve? May not the time past suffice? Is it not high time now at length to awake? Is it not the eleventh hour with many of you? and the youngest here knows not but they may be in the last hour of their day. And are ye not afraid your glass run out ere your work be done? Sure it looks very like the very last hour of this church

\* The place where this discourse was delivered.

and nation's day: we have had a long day, but now we may say, Jer. vi. 4, "Woe unto us, for the day goeth away, for the shadows of the evening are stretched out." We are threatened with a dreadful eclipse of gospel-light, and a dark night, and we may well conclude as to many of us, that our eyes will never see the breaking of the day again.

As the practical improvement of this subject, I shall only call on you to ponder seriously in your mind, the important inquiries addressed to you;—to pose your consciences closely with them as in the sight of God,—to profit by the instructive lessons afforded from them;—and, in short, that you study a being diligent in business, fervent in spirit, always serving the Lord.

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CHRIST'S PRESENCE WITH GOSPEL MINISTERS.*

SERMON XVII.

MATTH. xxviii. 20,

And lo, I am with you alway.

OUR Lord Jesus Christ having, before his death, as a prophet, revealed his Father's mind, and taught the doctrine of salvation, confirmed the same by many miracles; and having in his death, as a priest, offered up himself a sacrifice to atone for the sins of his people, and so brought in an everlasting righteousness; appears here after his resurrection, as a King, ordering the affairs of his own kingdom, which is his church. And, *1st*, He asserts his power, his supremacy, and headship, ver. 18, given unto him as Mediator. *2dly*, He gives a commission to his apostles, and in them to their successors in the work of the ministry, to raise up unto him a kingdom out of the kingdoms of the earth, to proclaim his laws among them, and to enjoin obedience to these laws in his name, and to take men solemnly engaged thereto, vers. 19 and 20. Then, in the words of the text, by promise, he secures their encouragement, for the due discharge of their duty, in the words under consideration: "And lo, I am with you alway."—In these words consider,

1. The parties to whom this encouragement does belong: You, that is, (1.) The apostles, to whom these words were immediately directed: (2.) Ordinary ministers, succeeding to them in the ordinary work of the ministry, teaching and baptising, as is clear from

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