

ON THE
FREENESS OF THE GRACE AND LOVE
OF GOD.

SERMON I.

“ Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with my own ? Is thine eye evil because I am good ? So the last shall be first, and the first last ; for many be called but few chosen.”—MATT. XX. 15, 16.

I do intend, God willing, to shew you the freeness of the grace of God in reference to men's employments and sufferings, and therefore have made choice of this scripture, wherein you have the parable of certain labourers in the vineyard ; the parable is propounded and applied ; propounded from verse 1 to verse 16 : “ For the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which went out early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard, and when he had agreed with the labourers for a penny a day, he sent them into his vineyard ; and he went out about the third hour, and saw others standing in the market-place ; and he said unto them, Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right I will give you, and they went their way ; and again he went about the sixth hour, and the ninth hour, and did likewise ; and about the eleventh hour he went out and saw others idle, and he said unto them, Why stand you here all the day idle ? and they said unto him, Because no man hath hired us : he said unto them, Go you also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right, that shall you receive. So when even was come, the Lord said unto his steward of the vineyard, Call the labourers, and give them their hire, beginning from the last even to the first ; and when they came that were hired about the eleventh hour, they received every man a penny, but when the first came they supposed that they should have received more, and they likewise received every man a penny, and when they had received it, they murmured

against the good man of the house, saying, These last have wrought but one hour, and thou hast made them equal to us that have borne the burthen and heat of the day. But he answered one of them, and said, Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst thou not agree with me for a penny? take that thine is, and go thy way; I will give unto this last, even as unto the first. Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with my own? Is thy eye evil, because I am good? So the last shall be first, and the first last; because many are called, but few chosen."

And thus far the parable goes, to shew that all is of free grace, both for service and for suffering. Now if you mind the 1st verse of the parable, you will find it brought in with a, *for*: "For the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man," &c. The former chapter saith, "For we have forsaken all to follow thee, and what shall we have? But Jesus saith, He that hath forsaken father or mother, wife or children, houses or lands for my sake, shall receive a hundred fold, and inherit eternal life; and they that are last shall be first, and the first shall be last."

Thus shall it be in suffering, many that are first shall be last; and so it shall be in service, in employment, and in labour. For after he had spoken this parable of the labourers, he concludes, "the last shall be first, and the first last;" concluding for suffering and for service: and he gives the reason of it from our election; "For many are called but few chosen:" and shews the grounds of it, that it is of free grace; "The first shall be last, and the last first." So that as to service and as to suffering, all is of free grace. Now take these words as they are in relation to the former, and they will afford us this doctrine:

That there is much of the freeness of the grace of God laid out both in our services and sufferings.

Free grace in the matter of our services and labour, and free grace in the matter of our sufferings: "The first shall be last, and the last first; for many shall be called, but few chosen."

For the prosecution of this doctrine, I shall

First, labour to shew you, That it is a great mercy to be used for God, and by God, either in a way of service or suffering for his name.

Secondly, That there are some that God doth especially single out to serve him, or to suffer for him.

Thirdly, That it is the free grace of God that one serves above another.

Fourthly, I shall shew wherein this free grace of God doth appear or shine forth in the matter of our employment and sufferings.

Fifthly, I shall shew why God will order and dispose of our services and sufferings in the way of free grace or free love.

First, I say, It is a great mercy to be used for God, or by God in the matter of service or sufferings, it is a great mercy to be employed in any work for God. For,

1. The more serviceable any man or woman is for God, the more they honour God; and the more they honour God, the more will God honour them. When I testify of any excellency in God, then I honour God; when God testifies of any honour in me, then God honours me; as now when God calls me to any service, then God testifies an excellency in me, then God honours me. When a governor puts any honour upon a common soldier, he calls him forth to special service; so it is an honour for a man to be serviceable to God. This was the honour of Moses; "Moses, the servant of the Lord." And when the Holy Ghost puts an honour upon David, he says, "The Psalm of David, the servant of the Lord." Not, The Psalm of David, the king of Israel; no, The Psalm of David, the servant of the Lord. So in the New Testament, this was Paul's honour; "Paul, the servant of the Lord." Now is it not a great honour to honour God, and to be owned by God? Thus it is with them that serve the Lord.

2. The more serviceable any man is for God in his generation, the more apt God is to accept of his work, though there be failings in the work. Observe what great failings there was in Aaron, yet God accepted of the work.

3. The more serviceable any man is whilst he lives, the more comfortably he will die, when he comes to die. What is a man's comfort upon his death bed, but that according to his measure he hath served God? Saith Christ, "Glorify me, O Father, for I have done the work that thou hast sent me to do." And so it is a man's comfort to do the work that

God gives him to do; yea it will be his comfort at the day of death.

4. The more serviceable any man is whilst he lives, the more he shall speak when he is dead; there are them that being dead yet speak. Why what speaks Abel, but faith, good works, good examples? He offered a better sacrifice than Cain; he was truly serviceable to God in his day, and now he speaks when he is dead. Thus Abel did, and thus it is with a serviceable man. Look how it is with a wicked man that is serviceable to the devil, and that writes wicked and wanton books that speak when he is dead; so is it with a man that is serviceable unto God. This honour is in the service of God above all others: and, to say no more, this is the thing that is desired more in some respects than the enjoyment of heaven: "I desire (saith the apostle) to be dissolved, and to be with Christ, which is best of all; yet nevertheless, for your sakes, and the service of the churches, I desire to live." So that I say, in one respect, this is more desirable than heaven; for no such work is to be done in heaven. And is it not a great matter, very great to be serviceable unto God, to be used and employed by God either in service or suffering?

As it is a great mercy to serve for God, so is it not a great mercy to suffer for God; to be called out to suffer for the name of Christ? for saith the former chapter, "We have forsaken father and mother, wife and children, houses and lands for the sake of Christ; but saith Christ, He that forsakes so much for me, shall receive a hundred fold, and eternal life; yea, he that suffers for me shall reign with me." You carry a burthen, but Christ carries the heavy end, and you have communion with Christ also thereby; and thereby, also, your heart shall be filled with comfort, yea, even the comfort of the Holy Ghost. The Spirit of God dwells in every believer; and that man that suffers for God, the Spirit of God rests upon him as the dove rested upon the earth. And so saith Peter; "The Spirit of God and of glory resteth in you." A man is never more glorified than when he suffers for God. Remember that. When our Saviour Christ was upon the cross, he was then glorious before the eyes of heaven, and never more glorious than then, for

“now is the Son of man glorified:” so may you say when in sufferings, Now am I glorified. Oh, the glory of a christian! Nay, says the martyr when going to the stake, Now I begin to be a christian. And thereby he is assured of eternal life and salvation. “Our present light afflictions (saith the apostle) work an eternal and exceeding weight of glory.” And says our Saviour, “If ye be reviled and reproached for my sake, happy are you.” And if you look into Phil. i. 28, you will find that sufferings are an evidence to us. Thus now you see, it is a mercy, yea, a great mercy to suffer for the name of Christ. That is the first thing.

Secondly: But then there are some that God doth graciously single out to service, or to suffer for him; this honour all the saints have not, but some God doth graciously single out not only to service, but to suffer for him. Now there is a providential service, and there is a mercenary service; there is a judicial service, and a gracious service; some that God doth single out graciously: possibly a man may be providentially used in the service of God; thus Naaman had a servant in his house that was providentially made use of for his conversion. So I say, a man may be made use of providentially, and also mercenarily and judicially. So the devils have been; “Whom shall I send to be a lying spirit in the mouth of the prophets? Send me; and he went.” This is a judicial service; and thus the devils do serve for wages; and them also that are the instruments of the devil. Persecutors are judicial servers; they are them that make clean the dishes. So that I say, there are them that may serve God providentially, mercenarily and judicially. Providentially, and so all the creatures serve him. Mercenarily, so they served him that said, “Lord, Lord, have we not done many wondrous works, yet Christ says he never knew them, depart from me.” And then there is a judicial service, as when God gave license and power to destroy the ten tribes: but then, as there is a providential service, a mercenary service, and a judicial service, so there is also a gracious service; there are some that God doth graciously single out to serve him and to serve him in suffering for him. Did not God graciously single out Caleb to serve him? For it is said, “he followed God fully.” And did not God in the New Testament single out Paul? “Go thy way to Ananias.

And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said, Arise, go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou shalt do," Acts ix. 6. So I say, God doth graciously single out some not only to serve him, but to suffer for him.

Thirdly, What is it that makes the difference, that some are employed in the work and service of God, when others are not? It is only the free grace of God. It may be, you may think it is from men, that the providential hand doth fall upon one more than upon another; or that it is the will of men to single out whom they will for sufferings; but it is only the free grace of God. Look, what the sovereignty of God doth in a way of judgment and affliction, that, the free grace and love of God doth in a way of mercy. As now, suppose two men be together in a transgression, one is singled out to judgment, the other is not. Why? The sovereignty of God orders it so. "Think ye that they on whom the tower of Siloam fell, were greater sinners than others." No. A man may be wrapt up in great afflictions and calamities as Job was; and why so? It is the sovereignty of God: I will do what I will with my own. So look, what God's sovereignty doth in a way of judgment, the same the free grace of God doth in a way of mercy. Oh, is it not a great mercy to be singled out to suffer for the name of Christ, Phil. i. 29, "Unto you it is given not only to believe, but to suffer for Christ." So I say, it is not only to believe, but to suffer; and so God doth graciously choose some and not others for this great work.

Fourthly, But wherein doth the free grace of God shine forth and appear in the matter of our services and sufferings?

I answer, In many things: will you begin with your own employments? What is the reason one man is called forth to an employment, and not another? It is only the free grace of God. What is the reason one man hath success in a work, and not another? It is only the free grace of God. But to clear it the more unto you; the more unlikely any person is to serve or suffer for God, the more the free grace of God shines forth in that person. Now who are those that God doth generally make use of in his service, but those that are the most unlikeliest persons? As now will you instance

n matter of men's places, estates, callings; there were two servants concerned in the conversion of Naaman; the servant of the prophet, and Naaman's own servant. Who is the most likely now? Certainly the servant of the prophet; yet you see the other doth it: so that I say, the unlikeliest oftentimes God makes use of, which is to shew forth the freeness of his grace: will you instance in the matter of ability as to the ministry; who more unfit and unlikely to be used in the gospel, than a company of fishermen, poor fishermen? for it is said, they perceived they were unlearned, and yet you find them made use of by our Saviour for the promulgation of the gospel. Will you instance in the matter of free grace? Who was so commended as Nathaniel that came to Christ? "Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no guile." Who more unlikely to be used in God's service than Paul? Was it likely Paul should bring any honour to God, who was whipt and scourged up and down town like a malefactor? yet this man preached: and do you think he was like to do any good by his preaching? yet you find it is said, "He did more than they all;" and God blessed his ministry, and he converted the gentiles. Why is this but to shew that God will make use of them that are most unlikely to do him service: "For they that are first shall be last;" and this only to shew the freeness of his grace.

But wherein doth the grace of God appear as to our sufferings? for the great thing is to stand our ground: to this I answer;

Is it not a great mercy, that the great God of heaven and earth should call us worms to bear witness to his name, his great name, yea, to suffer for it?

Is it not a great mercy and favour, that God will take notice of all the injuries that are done unto them that suffer for him, as done unto himself? "I know thy works," saith God; do men jeer thee and reproach thee for the sake of Christ? then happy art thou. What wrong is done unto them that suffer for God, he takes it as done unto himself: so that I say, it is a great mercy and favour, that the God of heaven should take those injuries as done unto himself, that are done unto us. Nay, saith God, "I will give you a mouth, and tell you what you shall speak when you come be-

fore men." "Take no thought for what you shall speak for it shall be given you."

Is it not a great mercy, that your hearts shall be filled with joy in the midst of sufferings? "They went away rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer."

Is it not a great mercy, that some shall stand, that are likeliest to fall, when others fall, that were likely to stand?

Is it not a great mercy, that those whom the adversaries think shall dishonour and mar the work of God, that they should bring more honour to God, and suffer more powerfully and strongly for him than others, and that they should be used most for God?

Is it not a great mercy, that when God seems to have most displeasure against us, his love should be then most set upon us, as it is in sufferings? Who would but think, that when we are given into the hands of wicked men, it is from the displeasure of God against us, when yet it is from the free grace and great love of God unto us?

Is it not a great mercy to consider, that what is our greatest misery *seemingly*, that that should contribute to our greatest mercy? Thus it is in our sufferings for the name of God: you see what great and wondrous things were done by the death of Christ; so also what wonders were done by Joseph in Egypt when he was sold thither by the maliciousness of his brethren; it is the way of God unto his people that the more others work to do them *harm*, the more God doth order it to prove for their *good*; which is only from the free grace, love, and favour of God. We never did any work yet, but free grace paid us for it: even the work of suffering God pays us for that: he was a preacher to day, yet carried to prison, that paid him for it. Yea, christians are paid for the work they never did: and what is the reason of it, but only the free grace of God. Thus you see wherein the free grace of God appears and shines forth.

Fifthly. Why will God carry on the work of our services and sufferings in the way of free grace? Why, God will order our employments and sufferings in a way of free grace that we may not be proud of them; we are apt to be proud of our employments and sufferings, and therefore God will carry on his work so, as that he may keep us from the sin of pride and haughtiness, when we shall con-

sider it is the free grace of God to single us out to service or sufferings. Why should we be proud? God loves to confound the wicked and ungodly in the world by making those that are the most unlikely to be serviceable to himself; and by ordering their services and sufferings in a way of free grace. This God doth to confound the wisdom and reason of worldly men. "Many are called, but few chosen." God hath set the weak to confound the strong. Again, God doth dispose of his work in a way of free grace, that none may be discouraged from his service, or suffering for him. If none but great and mighty and holy men were to be used in God's service, then the weak would be discouraged and despised, and we should be ready to say, I am not worthy. Now God doth so order and dispose of his work, as not to discourage the weak, but to give encouragement to all. Well then if so, a word for application. Is this a truth that we have heard, that all that God doth either as to the ordering of our services or sufferings is in a way of free grace? What have we then to say, but as Job, "The Lord gives, and the Lord takes away; blessed be the name of the Lord?" You say, that God chooses whom he pleases to serve him, or to suffer for him; and that it is out of free grace: if so, why should not *all* suffer? But you hear it is not all but some, that God doth graciously single out to suffer for himself.

But here some may say, I am weak, and do not any work for God.

But give me leave: is family work nothing? The apostle insists much upon that in his epistles, he calls much upon parents, children, masters and all to do their duty. Reformation work is a great work, or else the apostle would never have spoken so much of it, and exhorted so much to it.

Is it nothing to do the work of your generation; to do the work that is suitable unto your condition? All men are not called to all works: there is a peculiar work to every man. Now is comforting work nothing? Is supporting work nothing? Is relieving work nothing? This comforting work it is angelical work. Is it nothing to improve the talent that God hath given thee? This will be the great question at the day of judgment, Faithful or not faithful? There are none but have talents more or less, which they must then answer for.

But you may be ready to say, I have no work. That is a

mistake ; for there are none but have work : therefore look unto that which is your work.

But you may say again, Though I have work and service, yet my service may be a judicial service, or a mercenary service, or a providential service : now how shall I distinguish my service, whether it be a providential, a judicial, a mercenary service, or whether God hath graciously singled me out to serve him in a way of free grace and love ?

In answer to this, take these two or three things.

1. If it be a work or service given you by free grace, then God will lead you more and more, and bring you to be acquainted with the design of his work. When Peter was called to open the door of the temple, at first he did not know the design, but afterwards he was told it. So thus it is with thee : if God do call thee to work, he will acquaint thee with the design of the work.

2. If you serve God in a way of free grace, then you will be contented with your work : yea, you will be contented to be used for God, to be laid out for God, you will say, I am contented, because God hath called me.

3. When God doth make use of a man in a way of free grace, then that man doth not make any great bargains for himself : they that serve God any other way, will make great bargains for themselves, make use of his service to increase their estates : but now they that serve God out in a way of free grace, will not do so. Therefore now you that are at work, do you pocket up at work ? Do you make great bargains for yourselves ? If so, this is no free grace work.

But you will say, I am afraid I do not serve God in a way of free grace, because I have no success in my work. But you may observe in the scripture, that sometimes a man may be called to work by free grace, and may have success at the beginning as Joseph had many years, and yet the success may leave him.

As now there are them that preach many years, and never convert one soul, yet this should not discourage them ; for free grace may call you to a work, and yet you may not find that success in it which you expected.

But then again, here is the great question yet behind ; suppose God doth deal with the children of men in a way of free grace and love, then what is my duty, and what shall I

do, that I may so serve and suffer, as to serve and suffer under the conduct of free grace ?

In answer to this, you may take in these following particulars.

If you would serve and suffer under the conduct of free grace, then serve your call fully ; and go to the utmost of the thing called unto, leaving God to do his work : do your work to the utmost, and leave God to do his. When God called Joshua to do a work fully and he did it, God shewed mercy to him, and to his posterity after him : and so when Jehu was called to a work, and he did it by halves, God blew upon him, and upon his posterity after him. Therefore I say, when God calls us to a work, let us do our work fully, and leave God to do his work.

If you would serve God under the conduct of free grace, then when you find any warmth or heat upon your affections, take the hint of this opportunity for the doing of that work God calls you to.

If you would serve God under the conduct of free grace, then do not envy others that are more employed, that have better success, and are better paid than yourselves : observe how it is with two servants in a great shop, the one at one end, the other at the other end ; the one may take more money than the other, yet they do not envy one another : and why ? but because they both serve one master. Thus it should be with the saints and servants of God, they all serve one Master ; and therefore one should not envy another because he is more employed or hath better success.

If you would serve God under the conduct of free grace, then be sure you do not serve for wages ; mercenary in your service. It becomes those that serve under free love to be very free in their service : saith one, I have been wrought upon by my neighbour, and ever since I have endeavoured to do him good. Now it is God that hath wrought upon us by his free grace ; and if so, let us freely serve him and labour to do him all the honour we can. When the prodigal first thought of returning home unto his father's house, he saith first, " Let my father make me as one of his hired servants." This was a legal expression ; I will be hired, " Let him make me as one of his hired servants ;" but when he saw his father's love he talked no more of his hired service. Inheritance is

not of the bond-woman but of the free. I do confess, indeed, it is not unlawful to look unto the recompence of reward; yea, it is lawful for us to do it. But now do you desire to serve under the conduct of free grace, then look not for wages; do not do as an hireling, as the labourers of the vineyard: no, do it freely in a way of love, thankfulness and believing.

If you would serve under the conduct of divine love, then serve God with fear upon the account of his goodness "Work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure." If you do serve and work, then fear upon the account of God's goodness to you.

And to conclude this application. If you would serve as those that serve under the conduct of free grace and love, then have a care that in all your workings you depend upon nothing but the free grace of God in reference to your call; and if so, why then should you not willingly suffer for the name of Christ? Would you know whether you are called to suffer? why this is a certain rule, when the case is so with you, that you must either suffer or sin.

But then a second word of application may be this. Is it so, that so much of the free grace is laid out in reference to our services and sufferings? then let us freely and willingly suffer for the name and cause of Christ.

Is it so, that so much of the free grace of God is laid out in reference to our services and sufferings? then why should we not be contented with our sufferings; not only contented in suffering, or contented upon suffering, but contented with sufferings. Our Saviour tells us, that "they that will be his disciples, must deny themselves, take up the cross and follow him." Not only take up the cross, but follow him; yea, and deny themselves. Some will deny themselves in this or that, but will not take up the cross; but saith our Saviour, "If any man will follow me, let him take up the cross and follow me." Thus, now, if Christ calls us to suffer, let us suffer freely, because his grace is free.

If you would serve under the conduct of free grace, then take heed of any legal *therefore* upon your sufferings, Matt. ix. 27, "Then answered Peter, and said unto him, Behold, we have forsaken all and followed thee, what shall we have,

therefore?" This was a legal *therefore*. Christ answered and said, "You shall have your reward; but many that are first shall be last, and the last first." The only way to take away this legal *therefore*, is to look more and more upon the free grace of God, either in your services or sufferings for him; for this all must do, that either serve God or suffer for him, under the conduct of free grace. Do you desire to serve God either as to employments or sufferings under the conduct of free grace and love? then look more and more upon his free grace, and depend upon it in reference to your call, in reference to your assistance, in reference to your dependence, and in reference to your reward, seeing all is of free grace, bless the name of the Lord. Thus it is both in suffering work and in service, the first shall be last, and the last first.

Therefore as you would desire to serve or suffer under the conduct of free grace, rejoice and bless God for his free grace; remember this, that whether we serve or suffer it is of free grace.

Thus you see how the free grace of God shines forth both in our services and sufferings. "Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with my own: is thine eye evil because I am good? So the last shall be first, and the first last, because many are called, but few chosen."

SERMON II.

"Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace; comfort your hearts, and establish you in every good word and work."—3 THESS. II. 16, 17.

HAVING already treated of the freeness of the grace of God in reference to our employments and sufferings, I do intend to shew you, also, the freeness of the grace of God in reference to our comforts and consolations; and this text, you see, saith, God hath given us "everlasting consolation," and tells us further, that God hath given us this everlasting consolation "through grace."

Therefore, without any further explication, you see that