

SERMON XLI.

OR,

USES WE ARE TO MAKE OF THE MINISTRY OF THE GOSPEL.

'Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light to all that are in the house.'—MAT. v. 14, 15.

IN the next place, if the ministry of the gospel be light, let us open our hearts to receive in the light. In a morning we open our windows to take in the light; let us open our hearts to receive in the light: 2 Sam. xxiii. 4, 'And he shall be as the light of the morning, when the sun riseth, even a morning without clouds, as the tender grass springing out of the earth by clear shining after rain.' Lay aside all our former conceits, and embrace in the light of the truth. 'In thy light we shall see light.' Let not the earth be between this light and our eyes. Let us never be satisfied till we come to have the glorious light of the gospel shining on our hearts. Lord, thou hast said that thy gospel is light, when shall that light shine into my heart? And further, walk in the light when you have it. John viii. 33, 'They answered him, We be Abraham's seed, and were never in bondage to any man: how sayest thou, Ye shall be made free?' Let us all encourage one another to go to the house of the Lord, and resolve to walk in the light of the Lord. Isa. ii. 5, 'O house of Jacob, come ye, and let us walk in the light of the Lord.' Whenever you come to hear the ministry of the gospel preached, resolve thus with thyself: Lord, I come to receive light into my soul, and I am resolved to walk in that light that thou shalt let forth to my soul; it is time to arise while the light of the gospel shines on us. Isa. lx. 1-3, 'Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee. For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people; but the Lord shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee. And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising.' Now, thou hast not this light allotted thee that thou mayest play by, but merely to work by, and to work for thy soul too; and know that the work we have all here to do in this world, it is of infinite consequence and infinite concernment and value. Therefore we had need make use of the light while we have it. It were better ten thousand times that thou never hadst been

born, than that the light should be gone and thy work not done. Let us prize our light, and walk in it; and know that the work that God setteth us about here in the world it is an exact work, a work that must be exactly done, of that great work of making our peace with God for eternity. A man by twilight may be able to do some muzzling work that he need not be exact in; but if it be a work that we must be exact in, then we need great light to do it in. Now, the work that we have to do in reference to God concerning our eternal estates it is an exact work; therefore we have need of great light; therefore walk in the light. And there be many dangers in our way, many byways that we are like to be drawn into, therefore walk by light. And our time is but little that we have for our work; the time we have to provide for eternity it is but little, uncertain, and short, therefore we had need make use of the light.

Again, Every step that we go in darkness it is out of the way; every step that thou hast gone in thy way towards heaven before the light of the gospel comes unto thee, thou hast bewildered thyself, thou hast gone amiss, and gone so much out of the way. There will be no such comfort to thee on thy sickbed as to those who have walked in the light, and made use of the light to do their work by. Therefore those are rebuked from hence that are so far from walking in it that they are opposite to it. Though the light be never such a sweet thing, yet it is not good to sore eyes. Those adulterous guilty persons, those that love the work of darkness, the ways of sin, they care not for the light, because the light will discover them, and make known both them and their baseness; therefore it is that they love darkness, the light scorseth them. Some people, at the rising of the sun, it scorseth them, and then they shoot darts at it, and curse the sun; so this light, it will bring scorseth to the consciences of many men. Men that are distracted do not love the light; feeble men in their sickness they must have the light kept off from them; so it is a sign of a

feeble spirit in men that cannot endure light. So it is with men that love to satisfy the lust of the flesh, or rather the wiles of the flesh: they would go on in a secure way, and would fain have the light put out; it is a dangerous thing for men to sin against the light. As it is said in the book of Job, chap. x. 21, 22, 'Before I go whence I shall not return, even to the land of darkness, and the shadow of death; a land of darkness, as darkness itself: and of the shadow of death, without any order, and where the light is as darkness.' The light is as darkness unto them. There are many that do shut their eyes against the light, though it dazzles on them. The Lord causeth his truths to dazzle on their spirits, and they shut their eyes against it, and turn from it. There you shut your eyes against it, Job xxiv. 13, 'They are of those that rebel against the light; they know not the ways thereof, nor abide in the paths thereof.' These are of them that rebel against the light. That this scripture may not be verified of many of you, take heed that thy conscience be not forced to take this scripture and make it thine own; this is the man, this is the woman, that rebelleth against the light. The Lord hath caused them to come and live in the places where the light of the gospel is made known in a glorious manner, and they do not only turn from it, but the light follows them, and they run away from it. When you rebel against light, you rebel against God; for God is light, and in thy hearts rising against any light, it riseth so much against God. And further, know, in thy rebelling against the light, thou aggravatest all thy former sins. In the time of ignorance God winked at it; but now, if thou dost not repent, the axe is laid to the root of the tree. It makes thy sin to be greater than the sin of the heathen; there is none of all the heathen that have such an aggravation of their sin as thou hast, because thou livest under the light of the gospel: John iii. 19, 'This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men love darkness rather than light.' This is the condemnation, above all other condemnation. There is no greater condemnation amongst any other people of the earth than this, than to rebel against the light, seeing you do make yourselves wilfully blind. Shall a base lust be chosen before all that glorious blessed God that shines in the gospel? The Lord is pleased to let out himself in the gospel, and there the beauty and excellency of God appears in the gospel; and when it comes to shine on thee so to dazzle thine eyes, yet thou preferrest a base lust before all that shining; thou shalt be condemned with a witness, thy sins shall aggravate thy condemnation. As if he should say, You that live as without a God in the world, though you were never so profane and ungodly, yet had you but embraced

the light when God sent it amongst you, then your souls might have been saved for ever; but this is that that will make your torments out of measure terrible, in that light is come into the world, and you sin against that light, and you rather choose darkness than light. You will say, I can do nothing of myself. Yea, thou dost choose darkness rather than light. You that do rebel against light, you that do sin against light, it is just with God to take it away from you, it is just with God to take the gospel away from you. There is a threat pronounced against you in Micah iii. 6, 'Therefore night shall be unto you, that ye shall not have a vision; and it shall be dark unto you, that ye shall not divine; and the sun shall go down over your prophets, and the day shall be dark over them.' It would be the dread-fullest judgment in the world against any nation, for God to take away the light after he hath been pleased to try them with it; it would be a curse to the generation to come.

And, further, know that if so be you live under the light of the gospel, and you choose darkness rather than light—that is, if there be any one way of sin that thy soul closeth withal, and thou rejectest the light because it is against that sin of thine—there is a most terrible scripture that we have in 2 Cor. iv. 3, 'But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost.' Oh that you would lay this scripture on your hearts, and that it might be as a dart on our spirits! Lord, how long have I lived under the voice of the gospel, and what do I know of it? Is it not hid from me? If the gospel prevail for salvation, and doth it not prevail for illumination? That is a sad judgment, when God shall give a people up to blindness of mind, under the light of the gospel. There are some that have had the light of the beams of the gospel shining on them, and their hearts have been taken off from some base lusts that formerly they have had; but I come, and the Lord knows they are hidden from me. 'If our gospel be hidden, it is hidden to them that are lost.' And, further, know that thy end shall be in eternal darkness. Thou lovest darkness, and that darkness shall be thy end; therefore look on this as a most dreadful thing, the rebelling and sinning against knowledge, that that thou sinnest against now will be a terror to thee hereafter. The Holy Ghost makes it to be a special argument of sincerity to look on the light. Those who are able to behold the light—those whose ways are such as they can appeal to God that there is no truth of God that God doth set to them but they walk in it; here is one that is able to behold the light, and cursed is that content that cannot stand with the light.

Learn we from what Christ saith, that the ministers are the light of the world. Learn we, then, to

lighten our candle at this light. The Scripture calls the conscience of a man his candle: Prov. xx. 27, 'The spirit of man is the candle of the Lord, searching all the inward parts of his belly.' The spirit of man is the candle of the Lord. 'The spirit of man is able to sustain his burden: but a wounded spirit, who can bear?' The spirit of man is the candle of the Lord. God hath put in every man and woman a conscience, and that conscience is a candle; it hath some light in it. If you will have so much light as to search out what the condition of thy soul is, thou must light thy candle at the word, and so carry those truths. That light you have met withal there, carry it home in your conscience, and be searching into the corners of your heart—into all your ways. Be not afraid to take the light to search into all your ways. When the minister darts some lights into the consciences of men—yet he cannot dart into every secret sin—the souls of men have the light of the truth shining on them; but there are some corners of the heart that the light doth not shine into; but if a man takes a candle he can go to every corner of the house, and look into every chink. You have been hearing the word, and the word hath convinced you; yet there are many secret sins that the word hath not met withal; therefore you should light your candle, and search every corner of your heart, and cast out all your sins there. 'Ye are the light of the world.' They are light in their doctrine and conversations too. The doctrine of a minister is one witness, and conscience another, and if they both agree, they must both be light. And so Christians in their ways may be said to be the light of the world. Phil. ii. 15, 'That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a perverse and crooked nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world.' Prov. iv. 18, 'But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.'

Every family where there is a godly man or a godly woman, that godliness and holiness in that family, it is a light—that light that vexeth many a man. The light that there is in a gracious son, it may convince the parents; and so of a gracious servant. Every one should labour so to shine in the place where God hath set them in, to hold forth this light. Your hearts should be taken off from all other things; and make account that this is that that you live for, for to hold forth the beauty and excellency of the name of God in the places where you live. 'Ye are the light of the world;' and it followeth—

'A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid.'

This expression, with the other of 'a candle set on a candlestick,' it aims at the same thing, and makes way to that useful exhortation, 'Let your light so shine before men that they may see your

good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.'

'A city that is set on a hill.'

Some interpreters do carry these words to the church of God—not only to the apostles, but saints in a spiritual corporation; and indeed the Holy Ghost calls the church by the name of a city. Ps. xli. 4, 'There is a river, the streams thereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the most High.' Ps. xlviii. 8, 'As we have heard, so have we seen in the city of the Lord of hosts, in the city of our God. God will establish it for ever.' Ps. lxxxvii. 3, 'Glorious things are spoken of thee, O city of God.' Ezek. xl. 2, 'In the visions of God brought he me into the land of Israel, and set me upon a very high mountain, by which was as the frame of a city on the south.' This is the law of the house upon the top of the mountain; the whole limit thereof round about shall be most holy. Behold, this is the law of the house. And so the church is set on a hill. There should be that union as in the city for coming together. But I cannot think that this is the scope of Christ to set forth this, but to set forth the eminency of the gospel. You are sent into the world to preach and administer the ordinances of the gospel, and go forth in a public way, and the eyes of all men will behold you. You had need look to your ways, for the eyes of all men will be upon you. As a city that is set on a hill cannot be hid, and if there be any time of danger, that city is presently discovered; and you must go and preach in the world, and you must not think to lie hid, as some there are that have a sordid spirit, and had rather lie hid, and be of no use, than to appear publicly, and to be of use for Christ. No, saith Christ, you must not think to lie hid and be in safety, but you must be content to be the object of all the world. Luther on this place,† saith, Therefore you must not conceal anything of the truths of God. You must go and preach, and preach the truths of God plainly, and not have any respect unto the reproach or shame in the world, nor have any respect unto poverty, unto riches, unto hatred, unto favour, unto life, or unto death, because the apostles, and so the Christians, did make profession of those truths that the world saw no reason for. It is to draw the eyes of the world upon them; and because that they did seek to hold forth a higher way of religion and godliness than other men held forth, it drew the eyes of men upon them. Upon which Tertullian‡ saith on this place, How comes it to pass that our Lord compares us to a city on a high hill? Know that we are awakened in our lusts, all the ministers

* This may be understood of peoples. So the Chaldee Paraphrase takes it. See Ainsw.

† On Mat. v. 14.

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of God and Christ. God hath put them in a place of eminency; therefore it should be their care to walk inoffensive, because the eyes of men are upon them. Our Saviour Christ makes this an argument that they should walk exactly in their ways, and let their ways shine before men, because the eyes of men are upon them. It concerns all ministers and Christians to walk inoffensive, because the eyes of men are upon them, and therefore walk inoffensive. Take heed, when they look upon you, that they do not spy out some base and evil way, that they do not spy some filthiness and impurity in your conversations. This will be to the dishonour of Christ, and to your own dishonour.

And further, that Christ saith that ministers and Christians are in the view of all others. It should teach those that are godly to maintain the honour of the ministers of the gospel. But further, this is the main thing that our Saviour aims at, a city on a hill: I send you to preach; do not you regard your own ease, but do you hold forth my truths and mine ordinances publicly.

Note.—It is the duty of all ministers and Christians to hold forth all duties, all ordinances, to the uttermost they are able, to the view of all the world.

Therefore whosoever shall in any private way exercise any ordinance, as the preaching of the word, if they might do it publicly, there is no man that is faithful, that loves Jesus Christ, but he would rather do it in a public way a great deal. But if any doth it in a private way, and might do it publicly, certainly he doth offend against this scripture. Yet I would not have you to be hinderers of men in public, and afterward to cry out of them in private. The apostles they preached publicly. They came and preached in the temple; but they could not break bread there, they could not be suffered there; but as much publicly as they could do they did.

As a city set on a hill, that cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick, and it giveth light to all that are in the house.

You have received some light, but your light is as the light of the candle. If a man hath a candle, the way to preserve it is to put it under a bushel, then it will not burn out so fast as to stand on a candlestick. It is true, saith Christ, though there is this vile

spirit in some of you, that you think to hold forth what you think may cause envy or opposition, and put you to a great deal of labour and trouble; therefore you had rather hide your gifts and your talents under a bushel, partly through pride, that you are loath that others should know that which you know. Saith our Saviour, If so be that you have any gifts, any parts, any light, any knowledge in you, improve them to the highest, to the uttermost, although you spend yourselves the sooner. This is the exhortation to ministers, to all people. There is no man that hath any light, but doth hinder much if he will keep it in. It is a great deal of ease for a man that hath parts and gifts to lie still and be idle, and hath means coming in. But saith Christ, Where was it that you lighted your candle? hath God given you more light than others, and do you think that you must have more ease than another? Have you any parts for to fit you for any service for God? draw them all forth, and be of public good in the place that God hath set you in. It concerns not only all ministers, but all people also. All the gifts that thou hast are but as the talents of God, and thou must be accountable for all of them. And know, that all the sins of omission are as accountable before the Lord as the sin of commission. Oh that men would look to this, if there be anything that is evil in the place where I live, if I by any means that God hath given me could prevent this evil, and I do not do it, I am guilty of the evil done. If God hath blessed many in their trade, and they have gotten an estate, and live a brave life, and leave their trade, indeed it is an idle life, and little useful to the families where they are. They have enough coming in every year, what need they trouble themselves to exercise themselves in that which may be to the public good? It may be you may please yourselves in such thoughts as these are, but certainly they are very sinful before the Lord. If you have any talents for to bestow for the Lord, do not hide them under a bushel, but set them forth in the places where you are, that others may have the benefit of them, and the good of them. Sometimes a servant may be good to hold forth light to the family. But above all, the governors of the family, masters of families, if the Lord hath given you such talents, do not you keep them in, but hold them forth to the uttermost, that they may be improved for the good of all people.