

SERMON UPON MARK IV. 24.

And he said unto them, Take heed what ye hear ; for with what measure you mete, it shall be measured to you again ; and unto you that hear shall more be given.—MARK IV. 24.

WHAT one said of laws is true of sermons, that there are many good laws made, but there needeth one good law to put them all in execution ; so there are many good sermons, but there wanteth one good one to reduce them all to practice. This scripture conduceth to this very purpose : ‘ And he said unto them, Take heed what you hear, ’ &c.

The words are a special admonition touching the right way of hearing the word.

Wherein we have—

1. A duty.

2. The reason to enforce it, from the fruit and benefit ; intimated in two proverbs, ‘ For with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again ; ’ ‘ and unto you that hear shall more be given.

1. The duty, ‘ Take heed what you hear. ’ Attend diligently to the matter of doctrine which I deliver unto you. In Luke viii. 18, it is $\pi\omega\varsigma$, ‘ Take heed how you hear ; ’ and take heed $\tau\lambda$, namely, what you hear ; so it is here. It is a doctrine most true, as being of divine revelation, most necessary, and of great importance to your happiness ; you are utterly undone without it : most excellent, as being about the greatest matter, the enjoyment of God, and the saving of your souls.

2. The reasons, expressed in a proverb, and a promise grounded upon a proverb.

[1.] A proverb : ‘ With what measure you mete, it shall be measured to you again. ’ This passage is often repeated in the gospel ; sometimes as a threatening : Mat. vii. 2, ‘ For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged ; and with what measure ye mete it shall be measured to you again. ’ Sometimes in the way of a promise, and differently applied ; to alms : Luke vi. 38, ‘ Give, and it shall be given unto you ; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom : for with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again. ’ To ordinances ; so here in the text ; as you deal with God so will he deal with you. Look, what measure of diligence and conscionable care is in you to hear the word, the like measure of spiritual fruit and profit shall you reap by the blessing of God.

[2.] A promise grounded upon a proverb : ‘ And unto you that hear

shall more be given.' Those that make use of what is said to them, that mark diligently, and practise accordingly, the more knowledge and grace is increased. This is built on a proverb, *habenti dabitur*; For he that hath, to him shall be given. *To have* doth not only signify the possession of a thing, but the use which is the end of possession; so he that hath is he that hath to purpose, that occupieth the gift and grace received; a man that useth and employeth that which he hath, and so maketh it to appear to the world that he hath such a talent from God; for in scripture we are said to have that we make use of. 'To him shall be given;' he shall increase his stock; he shall be having, and having, and having, till he come to a glorious estate in all spiritual riches, knowledge, love, humility, zeal, temperance, and patience, and all manner of grace. That the expression is proverbial is out of question with the learned; for it is an assertion verified in all ages and places that the rich have many friends, and he that hath much shall have more. Every one will be giving to them, and they have greater advantages of improving themselves than others. Upon this occasion were the words first used, which our Saviour is pleased to translate and apply to his own purpose of growth in grace by a diligent use of the means.

Doct. That a serious attention to the doctrine of the gospel is the means appointed for the attaining of saving grace, and a plentiful increase therein.

In stating this point let me observe to you—

1. That in the communication of grace as well as nature, God observeth the order of means; because he dealeth with us as reasonable creatures; and this becometh the wisdom of his government; and so he meeteth with us in our way, and we meet with him in his way. So Christ is the principal means, and called, therefore, 'The way to the Father,' John xiv. 8. Other subordinate means are instituted by him.

2. That among the subordinate means, the principal is the word; called therefore 'The power of God unto salvation,' Rom. i. 16. All the parts of it are fitted to their sanctifying use. His doctrine to teach and fill us with due conceptions and apprehensions of God; threatenings to drive, promises to draw, examples to move; and all these formed into a covenant strongly to engage us to God.

3. This word, that it may profit us, must be diligently attended unto; for this is Christ's admonition in the text, 'Take heed what you hear.' The gospel serveth it; our profiting requireth it.

[1.] The gospel serveth it; partly for the sublimity and excellency of the mysteries therein contained, which are enough to ravish the thoughts of angels, 1 Peter i. 12; therefore we cannot conceive of them without much consideration. Great and excellent things do even force their way into our minds. Now all other things are but toys and trifles to this. What is a greater speculation than God made accessible to us in Christ, as he was manifested in the flesh? than God reconciled by the propitiatory sacrifice of his death? What is all the glory of the world to everlasting communion with God? These things are a feast to the minds of all wise and rational men. And partly because of their profit; they are things that nearly concern us. Needless speculations we may well spare, or other men's matters; but surely we should

mind our own things. What doth more nearly concern us than to have God for our God, and Christ for our saviour and redeemer, and the Spirit for our sanctifier and comforter? 'This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent,' John xvii. 3. And partly their necessity. We are undone for ever if ignorant of these things: Acts iv. 12, 'Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we can be saved;' and condemned by the gospel if we make light of them: John iii. 19, 'This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil.' Not to think that worthy of a serious thought which was brought about with so much ado: Mat. xxii. 5, 'And they made light of it.' This is not only vile ingratitude, but obstinate contempt of grace, which will cost us dear.

[2.] Our profiting by the gospel requireth it; for otherwise—

(1.) How can we have a sufficient understanding of those mysteries if we content ourselves with a few cursory and careless thoughts? 2 Tim. ii. 7, 'Consider what I say, and the Lord give thee understanding in all things.' Lay this to thy heart, and God give thee a right use of it, or a judgment to do all things which belong to thee.

(2.) That we may feel the force and power of it: Acts xvi. 14, 'And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us, whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken by Paul.' Without attendancy the truth is lost, and doth us no good. There must be attention and intention before there can be choice or pursuit; for the gospel doth not work like a charm; as if we could find the efficacy of it whether sleeping or waking.

(3.) To move the soul to obedience; for, 'Take heed what you hear,' is as much as, See you practise what you have heard; that you bring forth the fruit accordingly: 'He that heareth my sayings, and doeth them, I will liken him to a wise builder,' Mat. vii. 24. Hearing tendeth to practice, knowledge to practice, faith to practice, affection to practice; without which our hearing is but a bodily task, our knowledge but an empty speculation, faith a dead opinion, affection but a vanishing impression. These things do not attain their consummate and proper effect.

(4.) This diligent attention consisteth in three things—sound belief, serious consideration, and close application. Sound belief: 1 Thes. ii. 13, 'For this cause we thank God without ceasing, because when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.' Serious consideration: Deut. xxxii. 46, 'And he said unto them, Set your hearts unto all the words which I testify among you this day, which you shall command your children to observe to do, all the words of this law;' Luke ix. 44, 'Let these sayings sink down into your ears.' Close application: Rom. viii. 31, 'What shall we then say to these things? if God be for us, who can be against us?' Job v. 27, 'Lo! thus we have searched it, so it is; hear it, and know thou it for thy good.' And therefore, as things are duly thought on, so they must be closely applied. These three acts of

the soul have each of them a distinct and proper work. Sound belief worketh on the clearness and certainty of the things asserted; serious consideration on the greatness and importance of them; close application on their pertinency and suitableness to us. See all in one place: 1 Tim. i. 15, 'This is a true saying, worthy of all acceptation, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.' These are all necessary to make any truth operative. Sound belief, for we are not affected with what we believe not: Heb. iv. 2, 'For unto us was the gospel preached as well as unto them; but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it.' Therefore to awaken diligence the truth of things is pleaded: 2 Peter i. 5, 10, 16, 'Give all diligence to add to your faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge. Give diligence to make your calling and election sure, for we have not followed cunningly-devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eye-witnesses of his majesty;' Heb. ii. 3, 4, 'For if the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation? which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him.' The first rousing question when men heard any sermon about any truth or doctrine of the gospel was, Is this true? For consideration: Heb. iii. 1, 'Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the apostle and high priest of our profession, Christ Jesus our Lord.' Without consideration the weightiest things lie by as if they were not. Sleepy reason is as none. The most important truths have no force upon us till consideration awakeneth us. Then for application, what concerneth us not is passed over. Unless we hear things with a care to apply them, we shall never make use of them: Eph. i. 13, 'In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of our salvation; in whom also, after that ye believed, ye were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise.' It is not enough to know the gospel to be a doctrine of salvation to others, but we must look upon it as a doctrine that bringeth salvation to our own doors, and leaveth it upon our choice. A plaster doth not heal at a distance till it be applied to the sore. Truths are too remote till we set the edge and point of them to our own hearts. Well, then, by this way we preach to ourselves day and night, by exciting our faith in God, and Christ, and glory to come, and by serious consideration stirring up all God's graces in ourselves, and reproving ourselves for all our sins, and calling a backward heart to all the duties required of us. This is the work of close application.

(5) They prosper best in grace that most faithfully and diligently use the means. Here I shall prove two things—

(1st.) That we are to use the means; for wherefore hath Christ appointed them but that we should use them? His church is not like a statuary shop, where the image or statue doth nothing, but the carver or artificer doth all; but it is compared to a school, where Christ is the teacher to teach us our duty, and we are disciples to learn it; and to a kingdom, where Christ is the monarch and sovereign, and we are subjects engaged by covenant to obey him; and

the manner of his government, it is not merely natural ruling us, as he doth the other creatures, by a rod of iron, or in a way of absolute power, as they cannot do otherwise, but moral, by laws, promises, threatenings, working faith by preaching; and love, hope, and obedience are the ends of faith. Certainly he governeth man as man; not by physical motions only, but by moral motives, to which we must attend, consider, and improve: Hosea xi. 4, 'I drew them with the cords of a man, with bands of love.' Christ hath not to deal with stones, or brick, or timber, but with men. God hath fitted the means to do their work, and for these ends we must use them. If he did ordinarily work without them, he would never have appointed them to this end. He could have done it with one powerful fiat, one creating word or beck of his will; but he hath set another train and order of causes, and therefore he will work by them, because he worketh on all things according to their nature, and this is suitable to the nature of man. We never knew of any man that came to knowledge, faith, or love without means; therefore it is presumption for us to expect it. And the greatest neglecters and despisers of means are everywhere the most graceless and the worst of men; therefore it concerneth us to use them with the greater diligence and care. We may learn from our adversary the devil: he showeth his malice to souls in opposing the means, either by depriving men of them: 2 Thes. ii. 18, 'Wherefore we would have come unto you, even I Paul, once and again, but Satan hindered us;' or keeping them from them by negligence, or filling them with prejudice: John viii. 41; 'Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do: he was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him;' 2 Cor. iv. 4, 'In whom the god of this world hath blinded the eyes of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine upon them.' Or from the faithful using of them: Mat. xiii. 19, 'When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart.' He watcheth them in all their postures. As soon as men begin to be serious, and to take heed what they hear, he disturbeth the work. Well, then, the means have an aptitude and subservient efficacy, which we ought to regard.

(2*d.*) They prosper best that do most faithfully and diligently use the means. I shall prove that by the double reason of the text.

First, 'With what measure you mete it shall be measured to you again.' In the allegation of this proverbial speech I shall observe two things—

1. That there is a law of commerce between God and his creatures, or else how shall we know what to expect? And the ordinary rule of his dispensations is, that as we abound to him in the careful use of means, so he will abound to us in the influences of his grace; because then we are in God's way, or stand in grace's road. Surely the wisdom and goodness of God is such that he will not set men about unprofitable work; and therefore, when we are serious and diligent in the use of means, we may be confident we shall not lose our labour.

2. That God delighteth to reward grace with grace, and to crown

his own gifts; therefore, when by his preventing grace he hath put us upon the earnest use of means, he delighteth to give out more grace; when we hearken to him, and respectively comport with his Spirit in his preventing and lower motions, he doth advance his presence and operations in men to a higher and nobler rate.

Secondly, The other maxim is, *Habenti dabitur*, 'To him that hath shall be given.' Upon which our Lord groundeth this encouragement, 'To you that hear shall more be given.' This I shall therefore open to you.

1. That diligence is the means, and God's blessing is the prime cause, of all increase; and therefore both must be regarded, or else we profit nothing. We cannot expect God's blessing while we sit idle; and it is a wrong to grace to trust merely to our endeavours without looking up to God. It is said, Prov. x. 4, 'He becometh poor that dealeth with a slack hand, but the diligent hand maketh rich;' that is, the means to become rich; for it is said again, ver. 22, 'The blessing of the Lord maketh rich.' God hath ordered it so, in the course of his providence, that diligence shall be always fruitful and profitable, both in a way of nature and grace; that the joy of the harvest should recompense the pains and the patience of the diligent husbandman, and that the field of the sluggard should be overgrown with thorns. Iron by handling and wearing waxeth brighter, but by being let alone contracteth rust, by which it is eaten out. Take away use and exercise, and wisdom turneth into folly, and learning into ignorance, health into sickness, riches into poverty. Strength of body and mind are both gotten by use. He that useth his talent with fidelity and sedulity, shall increase it, but such as are idle and negligent still grow worse and worse. So God doth plentifully recompense the diligence and faithfulness of his servants. He that maketh use of any degree of grace or knowledge shall have more given him. By exercising what he hath he still increaseth his stock; whereas, on the contrary, remiss acts weaken habits, as well as contrary acts. This is a common truth, evident by daily experience. But then God's blessing must not be excluded. He would have us labour rather to keep us doing, than that he needeth our help. He that made the world without us can preserve it without us; as he that planted the garden of Eden could have preserved it without man's dressing; yet we read, when he had furnished the garden of Eden with all manner of delights, 'God took the man, and put him to dress it;' Gen. ii. 15; that is, to use husbandry about it, that by sowing, setting, pruning, and watering, he might preserve those plants wherewith God had furnished that pleasant garden, and so bestow his pains upon that whereof he was to receive the benefit, and that by busying himself about the creatures he might the better observe God's various works in and by them. And indeed nothing was such a means to convince him of his dependence upon God as this labour of dressing and keeping the garden to which God appointed him; for he could produce no new plant, but only dress and cherish those which God had planted there already; yea, all his keeping and planting was nothing without dews, and showers, and sunshine from heaven, and the continual interposing of God's providence. And still in every calling, he that is sedulous in it seeth

a need of God's concurrence more than those that are idle ; for they that have done their utmost, by experience find that the success of their endeavours dependeth on his power and goodness, or the effect succeedeth not. I am sure it holdeth good in the work of grace, where man hath much to do about his own heart ; and none are so practically convinced of this necessity of divine assistance as they that do their utmost ; for they see plainly that all will not do if God withhold his blessing ; and their often disappointments, when they lean upon their own strength, teacheth them this lesson, that all is of God.

2. If this increase be understood of the same talent, and not of another kind, all is easy. I confess it always holdeth not that he that useth his talent in one kind shall thrive in another ; for what a man soweth, that shall he reap ; therefore the principal meaning is, that what he soweth is still increased. It is not intended that by employing his talent in riches he should increase in learning ; that by improving his learning he shall grow in strength and beauty of body. No ; it holdeth good *eodem genere*, in the same kind. Use common helps well, and you shall increase as far as common helps will carry you. The exercise of moral virtue will make you increase in moral virtue. Use that measure of saving grace which you have well, and you shall have a greater measure given you by God.

Set a-work thy knowledge, faith, zeal, and love, and all these graces shall be increased in thee ; as wells are the sweeter for draining : ' Wait on the Lord, and strengthen thy heart, and be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thy heart,' Ps. xxvii. 14 ; Isa. lviii. 13, 14, ' If thou turn away thy foot from the sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day, and call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honourable, and shalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words, then shalt thou delight thyself in the Lord ; I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father ; for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.' God, that punisheth sin with sin, doth reward grace with grace. They that abuse the light of nature are given up to a reprobate sense, but they that improve the grace received, they are more strong. The habit is increased by acts, and they that are more in faith and love are more rich in knowledge.

3. If we faithfully and diligently use the means and common helps, it is very likely God will give special grace. Certain it is that we have means and duty appointed to us for the seeking of grace which may convert us, and these means we may and must use to this end. God is very angry with those that do not improve common gifts and graces, such as the use of reason, good education, the example of others, the powerful preaching of the gospel, and common illumination, and the knowledge of the truth gained thereby ; if they despise all these, and abandon themselves to their own brutish passions and affections, as we see many by resisting common preparing grace do so harden their hearts and increase their incapacity, that the same degree of grace will not change them that will change others not so self-hardened : Jer. xiii. 23, ' Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots ? then may ye also do good that are accustomed to do evil.' And those that are unwilling to use the means that they are able, that will not hear, or

consider what they hear, that it may affect them, they provoke God, not only to suspend the influence of his Spirit, but to take away the means: Prov. i. 23, 24, 'Turn you at my reproof: behold, I will pour out my Spirit unto you, and I will make known my words unto you. Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded,' &c. Much more when they run the contrary way, and turn their thoughts and affections more eagerly after vanity, and oppose God's help and grace, because it is against their lusts: Ezek. xxiv. 13, 'Because I have purged thee, and thou wast not purged, thou shalt not be purged from thy filthiness any more.' Well, then, they that have common grace ought and are bound to use it for the obtaining of more grace. It is charged as a great crime on them that have eyes and see not, ears and hear not; that will not frame their doings to turn unto the Lord, so much as put themselves into a posture. They are threatened that it shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah than those that have abundance of means and use them not; that they that were lifted up to heaven in ordinances shall be cast down to hell for the neglect of them, Mat. xi. 23; that the Ninevites 'shall rise up in judgment against them, and condemn them, because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and behold a greater than Jonas is here,' Mat. xii. 41. They that have received so much grace from God, and yet do not understand, nor seek after him, their condemnation is aggravated, their destruction is of themselves; they shut themselves out of the kingdom of God, reject the counsel of God against themselves, and judge themselves unworthy of eternal life. The scripture everywhere speaketh at this rate concerning the folly and negligence of men.

But if it be asked, If they improve this common grace, shall they acquire special grace?

Ans. God is abundant in mercy, goodness, and truth, and doth not use to appoint means in vain. Certainly they do not merit it at God's hands, nor is he expressly bound to give it to them. No; 'It is not in him that willeth, nor in him that runneth,' Rom. ix. 16. The first grace is given by God as a free Lord; not by any certain law, but by his own pleasure. Well, but will he give it? The question is curious, and needeth no answer. He that is deadly sick doth not refuse his physic till he be made certain that it will recover him, but useth it as the only proper remedy in the case, and commits the event to God. He that is to plough, and commit his precious seed to the ground, doth not stand to have assurance that the next year will prove fruitful and the season kindly, but ventureth because usually God's blessing goeth along with man's industry. So in the business of salvation, we should not trouble ourselves about the event, but do our duty, and leave the event to God, waiting for his power and grace in the careful use of the means which he hath instituted to that end. Certainly none perish but they perish through their own folly and negligence, not for any defect in God's help. When we have done all that we can, he is not our debtor, but yet he is our gracious benefactor; and if we would labour to suppress our cavils and curiosity, we shall find God better to us than we can imagine.

4. This increase is given by degrees; we have not all at first, nor all at once; for Christ speaketh to them 'to whom it was given to know the

mysteries of the kingdom of God,' Mark iv. 11 ; 'to them that had ears to hear,' ver. 23. Now to them he saith, 'More shall be given.' As our capacities are enlarged, so is God's bounty to us : Ps. lxxxii. 10, 'Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it.' We are not straitened in God, but in ourselves. The more we improve grace received, and the more serious we grow, and have our desires and expectations enlarged, the more God will give ; for by mercy he prepareth for more mercy. It is serious diligence, and exercising ourselves to godliness maketh us see the worth of grace, and the necessity of more grace to bear our burdens, resist temptations, perform our duties ; and the more we are acquainted with God, the more will we follow on to know the Lord. Moses' first request was, 'Tell me thy name ;' and then, 'Show me thy glory.' Sensible want increaseth with enjoyment ; so doth God's supply, for his goodness is inexhaustible ; where he hath given, he will give.

Use 1. Is information, to show us the reason why so many reap so little fruit by the hearing of the word ; either they never had solid comfort and benefit by it, or else languish and grow lazy in the profession and practice of godliness. What is the reason ? They do not take heed to what they hear, seriously regard the messages sent them by God day after day ; and then, alas ! all the good seed that is sown is like corn on the house-top, that never groweth to perfection. Neither is the understanding informed nor the will engaged to practice. Why are our hearts so little affected and inflamed with the love of God ? why stand we in no more awe and fear of him ? have so small hope and weak confidence in him ? We mind nothing that is said concerning these duties in the course of the ministry. We sit under the gospel, and pass over these things, and do not deeply consider them in our hearts. Christians, we impose no hard law upon you ; many pretend they cannot invent arguments for meditation ; but when brought to your hands, will you think of them ? They have no time ; but if you will spare none of your own time, will you employ God's time well ? Let sabbath doctrines so far be considered by you as to sink into your hearts. Surely in their season all things should have their turn and place. When we are employed about the world, we are never troubled with heavenly things ; why should the world intrude upon God's portion ?

Use 2. Is direction. If you would profit by the word, take heed to what you hear ; see what you do with it ; believe it soundly. Is it a truth or a fable ? a crotchet of ministers or a genuine deduction from the word of God. Consider it seriously : How shall I mortify this sin or perform this duty ? Apply it closely : What sin have I done ? how doth it concern me ? Practise it readily : James i. 25, 'But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the word, this man shall be blessed in his deed.'

Use 3. Is to put us upon self-reflection : Is our fruit proportionable to our hearing ? The word is not only the seed of regeneration, but the means of growth : 1 Peter i. 23, 'Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever ;' with 1 Peter ii. 2, 'As new-born babes desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby.' God does not

consider what we are *de facto*, but what we ought to be ; what strength we might have ; our account is according to our means : Luke xii. 48, ' Unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required ; and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more.' Less grace will serve to the salvation of some than others ; Therefore take heed that, where more grace is bestowed, it be not neglected by you.
