

## THE FAITHFUL FOLLOWERS OF CHRIST MUST EXPECT TROUBLES IN THIS WORLD.

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*And it came to pass, that as they went in the way, a certain man said unto him, Lord, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest. And Jesus said unto him, Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head. And he said unto another, Follow me. But he said, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father. Jesus said unto them, Let the dead bury their dead; but go thou and preach the kingdom of God. And another also said, Lord, I will follow thee; but let me first go bid them farewell which are at home at my house. And Jesus said unto him, No man having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.—LUKE IX. 57–62.*

HERE are three stories put together by the evangelist, to teach us in what manner we should address ourselves to follow Christ.

The first is of a scribe that came uncalled, but his heart was not right with God, having a temporal bias upon it.

The second is of one called, ver. 59. Christ saith, ‘Follow me.’ But he would first cherish, then bury, his dying father. But Christ would have no delays, but presently sets him about his ministry and service in the gospel. This, upon the authority of Clemens Alexandrinus, who received it upon ancient tradition, is supposed to be Philip.

A third offereth himself to follow Christ; but first he would take his farewell at home, and compose matters in his family. But when we set our faces Godward, there is no looking back; there must be no more consulting with flesh and blood; the divine instinct must be obeyed speedily, and wholly, and Christ followed without reserves and conditions.

Of these in their order.

I begin with the first: ‘And it came to pass, as they went on the way, a certain man said unto him, Lord, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest,’ &c.

In which words observe:—

1. The time: ‘It came to pass, as they went on the way, a certain man said to him.’

2. A resolution professed: *Lord, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest.*

3. Christ's reply: *And Jesus said unto him, Foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head.*

1. The time. In Mat. viii. 19, it is when Christ had a mind to retire, and had declared his purpose to go into the desert; in Luke, when he steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem. Both may agree; the one more immediately, the other more remotely; first to the desert, then to Jerusalem. About that time, a certain man, seeing Christ about to remove from the place where he then was, offereth himself to be one of his disciples. This certain man is by St Matthew said to be a scribe. Men of that rank and order had usually a male talent<sup>1</sup> against the gospel, and are frequently coupled with the pharisees, men covetous and of a bitter spirit. This man seeing Christ did great miracles, and hoping that he would set up a temporal kingdom, he puts in for a place betimes that he might share in the honours of it.

2. Here is a resolution professed: 'Lord, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest.' Where take notice—

[1.] Of the ready forwardness of the scribe. He was not called by Christ, but offered himself of his own accord.

[2.] Observe the largeness of the offer, and unboundedness of it, 'whithersoever;' as indeed it is our duty to follow Christ through thick and thin. In the Revelation, Christ's undefiled company are described to be such as 'follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth,' Rev. xiv. 4; that is, obeyed him, though to their great peril and loss. Well, then, here is readiness, here is largeness; it is well if all be sincere. Therefore let us see—

3. Christ's answer and reply: 'And Jesus said unto him, Foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head.' By the tenor of Christ's answer, you may know what ails him, and on what foot he limped; for this is spoken either by way of preparation to enable him to keep his resolution, or rather by way of probation, to try the truth and strength of it; whether it were sincere and sound; yea or nay: as the young man was tried, Mark x. 21, 'One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, and take up thy cross, and follow me. But he went away sad at that saying.' So here, we hear no more of this scribe; our Lord knew how to discover hypocrites. Two things were defective in this resolution:—

[1.] It was sudden and rash, not weighing the difficulties. They that rashly leap into a profession, usually fall back at the first trial. Therefore we must sit down and count the charges, Luke xiv. 28.

[2.] There was a carnal aim in it. He minded his own profit and honour; therefore Christ in effect telleth him, You had best consider what you do, for following of me will be far from advancing any temporal interest of yours. The scribe was leavened with a conceit of a worldly kingdom, and had an eye to some temporal advantage;

<sup>1</sup> See note on page 90.—Ed.

therefore Christ telleth him plainly, There was no worldly ease and riches to be expected from him; and so, *Non repulit volentem; sed fingentem prodidit*—‘He did not discourage a willing follower, but discover a worldly hypocrite,’ saith Chrysologus.

The doctrine we learn from hence is this:—

They that will sincerely follow Christ, must not look for any great matters in the world, but rather prepare themselves to run all hazards with him.

This is evident:—

1. From Christ's own example; and the same mind should be in all his followers: John xvii. 16, ‘They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.’ Our estranging of our hearts from the world is an evidence of our conformity to Christ. Christ passed through the world to sanctify it as a place of service; but his constant residence was not here, to fix it as a place of rest: and all that are Christ's are alike affected. We pass through as strangers, but are not at home as inhabitants or dwellers; and if we have little of the world's favour, it is enough if any degree of service for God.

2. From the nature of his kingdom. His kingdom is not of this world, John xviii. 3, 6. It is not a kingdom of pomp, but a kingdom of patience. Here we suffer with Christ, hereafter we reign with him. The comforts are not earthly, or the good things of this world, but heavenly—the good things of the world to come. This was the scribe's mistake.

3. From the spirit of Christ. His spirit is given us to draw us off from this world to that which is to come: 1 Cor. ii. 12, ‘Now we have not received the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God, that we may know the things which are given us of God.’ The spirit of the world is that which possesseth and governeth worldly men, and inclineth them to a worldly happiness; this is in all men naturally. Corrupt nature doth sufficiently prompt and incline men to look after the honours, and pleasures, and profits of this world. James iii. 15, the apostle, when he would describe the wisdom which is not from above, he saith, that it is ‘earthly, sensual, devilish; this wisdom cometh not from above.’ Present things are known by sense, and known easily, and known by all. But there is a divine Spirit put into Christians, which inclineth them to things to come, and worketh graces suitable: some of which give us a sight of the truth of those things, as faith; some, a taste or an esteem of them, as love; some an earnest desire, as hope. This Spirit cometh from God and Christ, Eph. i. 17, 18. And without these graces we can have no sight nor desire of heavenly things: 1 Cor. ii. 14, ‘The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.’ They think it is folly to hazard present conveniencies for future rewards, and the truest wisdom to live in ease, plenty, and honour. On the contrary, the divine Spirit convinceth us that there is no such business of importance as looking after eternal life; that all the gay things of sense are but so many May-games to heaven's happiness; the terrible things of the world are but as a flea-biting to hell torments; and the pudder and business of the world but as a little childish sport in

comparison of working out our salvation with fear and trembling. This Spirit helpeth us to overcome the world, and grow dead to the world, that we may be alive to God; to look for no great things here, but in the world to come. This Spirit is that which we should all labour after.

4. From the covenant of Christ. It is one thing implied in the gospel covenant, when our Lord Jesus sets down the terms: Mat. xvi. 24, he saith, 'If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me;' that is, we must so believe in Christ, and be persuaded of the truth of his heavenly doctrine, that we are willing to deny our wit and will, natural interests and affections, and to lose all rather than lose our souls, or miss of the happiness he offereth us. Nay, taking up the cross is so considerable a part of our resignation to Christ and trust in him, that in Luke it is said, chap. ix. 23, let him 'take up his cross daily.' How daily? There are fair days as well as foul, and the face of heaven doth not always look sad and lowering. What is the meaning, then, of that, 'Let him take up his cross *daily*'? I answer first, it must be meant of daily expectation. The first day that we begin to think of being serious Christians we must reckon of the cross, we know not how soon it may come. If God seeth fit to spare you, yet you must be prepared for it; stand ready, as porters in the streets, to take up the burden which you must carry. Daily inure your thoughts to the cross, that the grievousness and bitterness of it may be somewhat allayed. St Paul saith, Acts xxi. 13, 'I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus;' and Eph. vi. 15, one great piece of the spiritual armour is, 'the preparation of the gospel of peace;' and 1 Peter iii. 15, 'Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh a reason of the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear:' be ready in point of courage. Now this is necessary, because we are so apt to promise great things to ourselves, and indulge the security of the flesh by putting off the thoughts of the cross; but evils familiarised are the less burdensome, and by renewing our resolution daily, we are the more fortified. Secondly, to show the continuance of our conflicts, as if every day there were some new exercise for our faith and patience. We are not to prescribe to God how long he shall afflict us, nor with how much affliction he shall exercise us; no, though it were all the days of our lives, we must be content; it is but a moment to eternity. We must take up our cross till God remove it. Some promise fair to be contented with a naked Christ though they run all hazards, because they hope God will not take them at their words; but as soon as the cross cometh, wriggle, shift, and distinguish themselves out of their duty; or else, if it be long and frequently return, quite tire and are faint. So that 'Take it up daily,' is as much as 'Let patience have its perfect work,' James i. 4. If day after day we must be troubled, we must be content to be troubled. If God send it daily, we must take it up daily. Well, then, in the new covenant we undertook this; the new covenant doth comprise this as a clear branch and part of it. Christ telleth us the worst at first; the devil showeth us the bait but hideth the hook. The world useth to invite its followers with promises of honour and riches, but Christ telleth us of the cross, and that partly

to discourage hypocrites, who cheapen and taste, but will not buy, and also to prepare sound believers for the nature and temper of his kingdom, which lieth in another world. But here by the way we are to undergo several trials, and therefore we should be armed with a mind to endure them, whether they come or no. God never intended Isaac should be sacrificed, but yet he will have Abraham tried.

*Use 1.* Is information. With what thoughts we should take up the stricter profession of Christianity—namely, with expectations of the cross. Christ will try us, and the world will hate us; therefore let us not flatter ourselves with an easy passage to heaven. Many think they may be good Christians, yet live a life of pomp, and ease, and pleasure, free from all trouble and molestation. This is all one as if a soldier going to the wars should promise himself a continual peace or truce with the enemy, or as a mariner undertaking a long voyage should only think of fair weather and a calm sea, without waves and storms; so irrational is it for a Christian to look for nothing but rest and peace here upon earth. No; a Christian had need think of this to a double end, that he may be a mortified and a resolute man. If he be not mortified and dead to the world, he can never undergo the variety of conditions which his religion will expose him unto, and say with the apostle, Phil. iv. 13, 14, 'I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me; notwithstanding, ye have well done that ye did communicate with my affliction.' And there is usually in us a propensity and inclination either to honours, riches, or pleasures, and the devil will work upon that weakness, Heb. xii. 13. That which is lame is soon turned out of the way. If we have any weak part in our souls, there the assault will be most strong and fierce. A garrison that looketh to be besieged, will take care to fortify the weak places where there is any suspicion of an attack; so should a Christian mortify every corrupt inclination lest it betray him, be it love of honour, pleasure, or profit. He had need be also a well resolved man, well shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace, or else in hard way he will soon founder and halt. If you be Christians indeed, you will soon see the necessity of it. Pure nature itself is against bearing the cross. Christ showed the innocent affections of human nature in his own person; it recoiled a little at the thought of the dreadful cup: Heb. v. 7, 'Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplication, with strong crying and tears, unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared.' And to us it is much more grievous to suffer: Heb. xii. 11, 'Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous but grievous; nevertheless, afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.' But corrupt nature will certainly draw back, unless we be armed with great resolution; for after we have launched out into the deep with Christ, we shall be ready to run ashore again upon every storm, unless we be resolved; therefore you need to think of the cross to breed this resolution. If Christians be not mortified, they trip up their own heels; if they be not resolved and prepared for all weathers, they take up religion rather as a walk for recreation than as a journey or serious passage to heaven. Therefore we must all of us prepare for sufferings in this world, looking

for no great matters here. We must expect persecutions, crosses, losses, wants, defamation, injuries; and we must get that furniture of heart and mind which may support and comfort us in such a day of trial.

2. It informeth us what fools they are that take up religion upon a carnal design of ease and plenty, and will follow Christ to grow rich in the world; as this scribe thought to make a market of the gospel, as Simon Magus did, Acts viii. 19, 20; he thought to make a gain by the power of miracles. There are conveniences which religion affordeth in peaceable times, but the very profession at other times will engage us in great troubles; and therefore men do but make way for the shame of a change and other mischiefs, that hope for temporal commodities by the profession of the gospel. There are few that are willing to follow a naked Christ upon unseen encouragements, but this must be; for they that aim to seek the world in and by their religion are disclaimed by our Lord as unfit to be his servants, and indeed sorry servants they are who cannot live without honour, ease, and plenty; therefore turn and wind to shift the cross, put many a fallacy upon their own souls: Gal. vi. 12, 'As many as desire to make a fair show in the flesh, compel you to be circumcised, only lest they should suffer persecution for the cross of Christ.' If that be their only motive, they are apt to desert or pervert Christ's cause. Again, the apostle telleth us of some 'who are enemies to the cross of Christ, whose god is their belly, who mind earthly things,' Phil. iii. 18, 19. Men that have no love to God, but only serve their fleshly appetites, and look no higher than honours, riches, pleasures, and applause with men, will never be faithful to Christ. They are such as study to save themselves not from sin, but from danger, and accordingly accommodate themselves to every interest. As the men of Keilah dealt with David,—entertained him for a while, but when Saul pursued him were resolved to betray him; they would come into no danger for David's sake. So they deal with Christ and religion. They profess Christ's name, but will suffer nothing for him. If they may enjoy him and his ways with peace, and quietness, and conveniency, and commodity to themselves, well and good; but if troubles arise for the gospel's sake, immediately they fall off; not only these summer-friends of the gospel, but the most, yea, the best, have a secret lothness and unwillingness to condescend to a condition of trouble or distress. This is a point of hard digestion, and most stomachs will not bear it.

3. It informs us what an unlikely design they have in hand who would bring the world and Christ fairly to agree, or reconcile their worldly advantages and the profession of the gospel. And when they cannot frame the world and their conveniences to the gospel, do fashion the gospel to the world, and the carnal courses of it. It is pity these men had not been of the Lord's council when he first contrived and preached the gospel, that they might have helped him to some discreet and middle courses, that might have served turn for heaven and earth too. But do they what they will or can, the way is narrow that leadeth to life, and they must take Christ's yoke upon them if they would find rest for their souls. They will find that pure and strict religion will be displeasing to the ungodly and the carnal; that the enmity between the two seeds will remain, and the flesh and the world must not always be

pleased ; that there is more danger of the world smiling than frowning. As to the church in general (in Constantine's time), *Ecclesia facta est opibus major, virtutibus minor* ; so to believers in particular, that the heart is corrupted by the love of the world, and men never grow so dull and careless of their souls as when they have most of the world at will ; and that we are more awakened, and have a more lively sense of eternal life, when under the cross, than when we live in the greatest ease and pomp ; that Christ permitteth troubles, not for want of love to his people, or want of power to secure their peace, but for holy and wise ends to promote their good.

*Use 2.* Is instruction. When you come to enter into covenant with Christ, consider—

1. Christ knoweth what motives do induce you : John ii. 25, ' He needeth not that any should testify of man, for he knoweth what is in man.' Some believed, but Jesus committed not himself unto them ; he knoweth whether there be a real bent or carnal bias upon the heart.

2. If the heart be false in making the covenant, it will never hold good. An error in the first concoction will never be mended in the second : Deut. v. 29, ' Oh that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children for ever.' So Matt. xiii. 21 ; ' The stony ground received the word with joy, ' Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth but for a while ; for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended.' Some temporal thing sitteth too near and close to the heart ; you are never upright with God till a relation to God and a right to heaven do incomparably weigh down all temporal troubles, and you can rejoice more in the testimonies of God, fatherly love, and right to eternal life, than in outward things : Ps. iv. 6, 7, ' There be many that say, Who will show us any good ? Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us. Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and their wine increased.' David speaks in his own name, and in the name of all those that were alike minded with himself. And Luke x. 20, ' Notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven.'

3. That Christ cannot but take it ill that we are so delicate and tender of our interests, and so impatient under the cross, when he endured so willingly such great things for our sakes. We cannot lose for him so much as he hath done for us ; and if he had been unwilling to suffer for us, what had been our state and condition to all eternity ? We should have suffered eternal misery. If you would not have Christ of another mind, why will you be of another mind ? 1 Peter iv. 1, ' Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind ; for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin.'

4. If you be not dead to the things of the world, you are not acquainted with the virtue and power of Christ's cross, and have not a true sense of Christianity, cannot glory in it as the most excellent profession in the world : Gal. vi. 14, ' God forbid that I should glory,

save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.' You are in a dangerous temptation to atheism.

5. We are gainers by Christ if we part with all the world for his sake, Mark x. 29, 30 ; therefore no loss should seem too great in obeying his will. Certainly a man cannot be a loser by God.

6. All worldly things were confiscated by the fall, and we can have no spiritual right to them till we receive a new grant by Jesus Christ, who is the heir of all things. *Dominium politicum fundatur in providentia, evangelicum in gratia* : 1 Cor. iii. 23, 'All things are yours, because you are Christ's, and Christ is God's;' and 1 Tim. iv. 3, 'God hath made them to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth.' So that what we enjoy is by the mere favour of the Redeemer, and should be parted with again when he calleth for it.

Thus much for the first point.

A second doctrine or point here offered is :—

The great poverty of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Beasts and fowls have places to shelter themselves in, but Christ had no certain place of residence or dwelling wherein to rest. He doth not say kings have palaces, but I have none ; rich men have houses and lands, but I have none. But he saith, 'Foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head.'

The reasons of this are these following :—

1. To increase the value and merit of his satisfaction. Our sins did deserve this, his whole humiliation, and every degree of it ; and Christ was content to suffer it for the ransom of our souls. It is clear this, that all his condescension conduced to make up the remedy more full ; and it is evident by the apostle that it giveth us a right to a larger allowance of grace : 2 Cor. viii. 9, 'For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might become rich.'

2. Christ came to offer the kingdom of heaven, and the good things of the other world, and to draw men's minds and hearts thither. And, therefore, that he might appear a fit teacher of the world, by his own example, he taught us contempt of outward things. If he had preached up heavenly-mindedness, and lived himself in pomp and fulness, the people would not have regarded his words. 'Alexander, when his army grew sluggish, because laden with the spoils of their enemies ; to free them from this incumbrance, commanded all his own carriages to be set on fire ; that when they saw the king himself devote his rich treasures to the flame, they might not murmur if their mite and pittance were consumed also.' So if Christ had taught us contempt of the world, and had not given us an instance of it in his person, his doctrine had been less powerful and effectual.

3. To season and sanctify a mean estate and degree of life, when we are called to it by God's providence. Christ's own poverty teacheth us to bear a mean condition well : Mat. x. 25, 'It is enough for a disciple that he be as his master, and a servant as his lord.' Uriah would not give way to any softness, while Joab his general was in the



field: 2 Sam. xi. 11, 'The ark and Israel are in tents, and my lord Joab and the servants of my lord are in the open fields; shall I go into my house and eat and drink?' &c. We must be contented to fare as Christ did; we cannot be poorer than Christ, as poor as we are; for the poorest have some place of shelter, but he had none whereon to lay his head.

1. Let this, then, enforce the former lesson, and teach us contempt of the world, and the riches and greatness thereof. It is some argument that the vilest are capable thereof, as well as the most generous and best deserving, and oftener it happeneth to be so. But this is the argument of arguments,—That the Lord Jesus, when he came to instruct the world by his example, he was not one of the rich and voluptuous, but chose a mean estate, as most conducive to his ends.

2. If you be rich, yet be poor in spirit: Mat. v. 3, 'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.' Let us possess all things as if we possessed them not, 1 Cor. vii. 31. And so James i. 9, 10, 'Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted; but the rich, in that he is made low, because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away.' We should be as having nothing, sitting loose from earthly things, considering that shortly we shall be as poor as the poorest, for we can carry nothing away with us.

3. Let us prepare ourselves to entertain poverty; and if it be already come upon us, and God hath reduced us to a mean inferior life, let us have our hearts reconciled and suited to a low estate, so it may be a help to heaven, so we may have the true riches, and may learn to live by faith, though God feedeth us from hand to mouth; so we may imitate Christ and follow him into glory, it is enough for us.

## NO EXCUSE AGAINST A SPEEDY OBEYING CHRIST'S CALL.

WE have done with the first instance, of a scribe that came uncalled; we come now to another. This man offereth not himself, but is called by Christ. 'And he said unto another, Follow me,' &c. He was already a disciple at large; for in Matthew it is said, chap. viii. 21, 'Another of his disciples said unto him, Suffer me first to go and bury my father.' He was now called to a nearer and constant attendance on Christ. Clemens Alexandrinus, from an ancient tradition, telleth us this was Philip. But before he complied with this call, he desireth a little delay and respite, until his aged father were dead and buried. Whether his father were already dead, and he would do this last office to see him decently interred, or whether his father were yet living, but not likely long to continue, and he would attend him till his death and funeral, and then follow Christ, as Theophilact thinketh, it is not much material. Clear it is he putteth off the matter with an excuse. Even the elect do not at first so readily obey the heavenly calling; some of them may put off Christ, but when he intendeth to have

them, he will not be put off so, the importunity of his grace overcoming their unwillingness.

But what was Christ's answer? 'Let the dead bury their dead, but go thou and preach the kingdom of God;' that is, leave that office to others who are not designed for this divine and holy employment. It seemeth hard to many that Christ should deny him to do this little office of love to his father, and they know not the meaning of that expression, 'Let the dead bury their dead.' Therefore—

1. Let us open the expression.

2. Show you what Christ teacheth us by this refusal.

1. For the expression. It may be used either proverbially or allusively. Proverbially; let one dead man bury another—that is, let them lie unburied rather than my service be neglected; or, there will not want others that will remove the dead out of their sight: and it is our wisdom to let go things unnecessary, and mind the main. Or else it is used allusively to the law of the Nazarites and the priests of the Old Testament. The law of the Nazarites is in Num. vi. 6-8, 'All the days that he separateth himself unto the Lord, he shall come at no dead body. He shall not make himself unclean for his father or his mother, for his brother or his sister, when they die: because the consecration of his God is upon his head. All the days of his separation he is holy unto the Lord;' that is, he must rather follow his vow in honouring the Lord, than to follow natural duty in honouring his dead parents. Now, those whom Christ called especially to follow him were consecrated to that service, as the Nazarite unto the Lord during the days of his separation. And as they might not meddle even with the interment of their parents, so this excuse was frivolous. Or else the allusion might be to the high priests, of whom we read, Deut. xxxiii. 9, 'Who said to his father and his mother, I have not seen him; neither did he acknowledge his brethren, nor know his own children.' Some think this hath reference to the Levites' fact, who, being commanded by Moses, killed every man his brother, neighbour, friend, and son, that had sinned in making or worshipping the golden calf, Exod. xxxii. 26-29. Rather it is meant of the priest's continual duty, who, by the law, if his father, mother, brother, or child did die, he might not mourn for them, but carry himself as if he did not respect or know them; for God would have them more regard their function or duty in his service than any natural affection whatsoever. The law is, Lev. xxi. 11, 12, 'He shall not go in to any dead body, nor defile himself for his father or his mother; neither shall he go out of the sanctuary, nor profane the sanctuary of his God; for the crown of the anointing oil of his God is upon him.' Now Christ alludeth to the law to show the urgency of this present service and employment to which he was consecrated, and the burial of the dead might be left to persons less sacred or more at leisure.

2. The reasons of Christ's refusal. Christ would show hereby—(1.) That all human offices and duties must give place to the duty we owe to God. Duty to parents must be observed, but duty to God must be preferred before that or anything whatsoever. A truth justified by Christ's own example. He began betimes, at twelve years old, when he was dis-

putting with the doctors, and his parents sought for him: Luke ii. 49, 'He said unto them, How is it that you sought me? Wist you not that I must be about my Father's business?' So Mat. xii. 47, 48, when his mother and kindred waited for him, desiring to speak with him, 'He answered and said unto him that told him, Who is my mother, and who are my brethren?' Obedience to God, and declaring his Father's will, was dearer to him than all relations. Natural and secular respects swayed not with him in comparison of gaining proselytes to heaven; his mother's conference with him was nothing to his Father's service, and teaching the people a more acceptable work than paying a civility to his natural relations. So John ii. 4, 'Woman, what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come.' His office to which he was sent by God was a matter in which she, though his earthly parent, was not to interpose; God's work must be done in God's own way, time, and method: God hath greater authority over you than all the men in the world. (2.) He would teach us hereby that the ministry requires the whole man, even sometimes the omission of necessary works, much more superfluous: 'Give thyself wholly to these things,' 1 Tim. iv. 15.

The words are now explained; the practical notes are these two:—

First, That nothing in the world is a matter of such great weight as to be a sufficient excuse for not following of Christ.

Secondly, That those who are called to follow Christ should follow him speedily, without interposing any delays.

For the first point, that nothing in the world is a matter of such great weight as to be a sufficient excuse for not following of Christ, I will illustrate it by these considerations:—

1. There are two sorts of men. Some understand not their Lord's will, others have no mind to do it, Luke xii. 47, 48. Some understand not the terms of the gospel; they think to have Christ, and the pleasures of the flesh and the world too. But there are others who understand Christ's terms, but are loth to become Christ's disciples; they know their master's will, but they do not prepare themselves to do it; that is, they do not presently set upon the work, but make so many delays that it plainly appeareth that they are loth to yield to Christ's terms; that is, to turn their backs upon the vanities of the world, and renounce their most pleasing sins, and to take the word for their rule, the Spirit for their guide, and eternal life for their felicity and happiness: to such we now speak.

2. They that have no mind to follow Christ put off the matter with dilatory shifts and excuses. To refuse altogether is more heinous, and therefore they shift it off for a time. *Non vacat* is the pretence—I am not at leisure. *Non placet*, I like it not, is the real interpretation, disposition, and inclination of their hearts, for excuses are always a sign of an unwilling and backward heart. When they should serve God there is still something in the way, some danger, or some difficulty which they are loth to encounter with. As Prov. xxvi. 13, 'The slothful man saith, There is a lion in the way, there is a lion in the streets.' Palestine was a land infested with lions, because of the many deserts and thickets that were in it, but being well peopled, they did rarely appear. Now the sluggard taketh this pretence from

thence. If his business lay in the fields, there was a lion in the way ; if his business lay in the towns and cities, there is a lion in the streets, as sometimes, though but rarely, they came into places inhabited and of great resort. Now, if he should go about his business too early, he might meet with a lion in his range and walk before they were retired into their dens. Thus do men alarm themselves with their own foolish fears to excuse their idleness and negligence. So again Prov. xv. 19, 'The way of the slothful is as an hedge of thorns, but the way of the righteous is made plain.' They imagine difficulties and intolerable hardships in a course of godliness : but it is their cowardice and pusillanimous negligence which maketh the ways of God seem hard : they are all comfortable, plain, and easy to the pure and upright heart and willing mind. Come we to the New Testament : Luke xiv. 18-20, 'They all with one consent began to make excuse. The first said, I have bought me a piece of ground, and I must go to see it ; I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them ; I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I have married a wife, and cannot come.' The meaning is, many were invited to everlasting happiness, but they preferred their designs of worldly advantages. Mark, they do not absolutely deny, but make excuse. Excuses are the fruit of the quarrel between conviction and corruption. They are convinced of better things, but being prepossessed and biassed with worldly inclinations, they dare not fully yield nor flatly deny, therefore they choose a middle course, to make excuses. Doing is safe, or preparing ourselves to do, but excusing is but a patch upon a filthy sore, or a poor covering of fig-leaves for a naughty heart.

3. The usual excuses which sinners may, and usually do allege, are these four :—The difficulty of religion, the danger that attendeth it, want of time, and that they have no power or strength to do good.

[1.] For the first. It is troublesome and tedious to flesh and blood to be held to so much duty, and to wean our hearts from things we so dearly love ; and the world thinketh that we are too nice and precise to urge men to such a strict and holy and heavenly life, and less ado will serve the turn.

To this I answer :—

(1.) Diligence is certainly necessary to all that will be saved : Phil. ii. 12, 'Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling ;' 2 Peter iii. 14, 'Be diligent, that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot and blameless.' And, therefore, if you cannot deny the ease and sloth of the flesh, you are wholly unfit for the work of godliness.

(2.) This diligence is no more than needeth, whatever the carnal world thinketh, who leave the boat to the stream, and hope to be accepted with God for a few cold and drowsy devotions, or some superficial righteousness. A painter-stainer will think a painter-limner too curious, because his own work is but a little daubing. The broad way pleaseth the world best, but the narrow way leadeth to life.

(3.) This diligence may be well afforded, considering that eternal life and death is in the case. Life! will you stop a journey for your lives because it is a little tedious, or there is dirt in the way, or the wind bloweth on you, and the like? Since it is for God and heaven, we

should not grudge at a little labour : 1 Cor. xv. 58, 'Therefore be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord ; forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.' There is also death in the case. Now, which is better, to take a little profitable pains in godliness, or to endure everlasting torments ? To save a little labour or diligence in the holy life, and run the hazard of being miserable for ever. Which is worst ? The trouble of physic, or the danger of a mortal disease ?

[2.] Another excuse is the danger which attendeth it. It may expose you to great troubles to own God and religion heartily ; and if there be peace abroad, and magistrates countenance religion, yet many times at home a man's greatest foes may be those of his own household, Mat. x. 36. But for the pleasing or displeasing of your relations you must not neglect your duty to God ; as Jerom to Heliodorus, *per calcatum perge patrem*—if thy father lie in the way, tread upon his bowels rather than not come unto Christ. Our Lord hath expressly told us, Mat. x. 37, 'He that loveth father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me.' Neither favour nor disfavour of our friends is a just let or impediment to our duty. The advantages we can or are likely to receive from parents are not worthy to be compared with those we expect from God, nor is their authority over us so great as God's is : Luke xiv. 26, 'If any man come to me, and hate not his father or mother, and wife, and children, and brethren and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.' Though Christianity doth not discharge us from obedience to parents, yet the higher duty must be preferred, namely, obedience to Christ, and loving less is hating.

[3.] Another excuse is, I have no time to mind soul affairs. My distractions in the world are so great, and my course of life is such, that I have no leisure. I answer—Will you neglect God and salvation because you have worldly things to mind ? Whatever your business be, you have a time to eat, and drink, and sleep ; and have you no time to be saved ? Better encroach upon other things than that religion should be cast to the walls or jostled out of your thoughts. David was a king, and he had more distracting cares than most of us have or can have, yet he saith, Ps. cxix. 147, 148, 'I prevented the dawning of the morning ; and cried ; I hoped in thy word. Mine eyes prevent the night-watches, that I may meditate in thy word ;' and ver. 164, 'Seven times a day do I praise thee, because of thy righteous judgments.' Do you spend no time in idleness, vain talking, and carnal sports ? and might not this be better employed about heavenly things ? Eph. v. 15, 16, 'See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil.' *Vitam non accepimus brevem, sed fecimus, nec inopes temporis, sed prodigi sumus*. God hath not set you about work that he alloweth you no time for, but we waste our time, and then God is straitened. Many poorer than you have time, because they have a heart and will to improve it.

[4.] I have no power or strength to do good. And what will you have us do ? This is the excuse of the idle and naughty servant : Mat. xxv. 24, 'I knew that thou wert a hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed.' God sets you about work, but giveth you no strength, is your excuse ; but certainly

you can do more than you do, but you will not make trial. God may be more ready with the assistances of his grace than you can imagine. The tired man may complain of the length of the way, but not the lazy, who will not stir a foot. If you did make trial, you would not complain of God, but yourselves, and beg grace more feelingly. In short, you are not able, because you are not willing. And your impotency is increased by evil habits contracted, and long custom in sin.

I now proceed to the fourth consideration.

4. None of these excuses are sufficient for not following of Christ. And that—

[1.] Because of his authority. Who requireth this duty from us, or imposeth it on us? It is the Lord Jesus Christ, to whose sentence we must stand or fall. When he biddeth us follow him, and follow him speedily, to excuse ourselves is to countermand and contradict his authority: it is flat disobedience, though we do not deny the duty, but only shift off and excuse our present compliance; for he is as peremptory for the time and season as for the duty. ‘Now while it is called to-day, harden not your hearts,’ Heb. iii. 7, 8. God standeth upon his authority, and will have a present answer. If he say, *To-day*, it is flat disobedience for us to say, *To-morrow*; or Suffer me first to do this and that business.

[2.] It appeareth from his charge to his messengers. Nothing can take off a minister of the gospel from seeking the conversion and salvation of souls. We cannot plead anything to exempt us from this work. To plead that the people’s hearts are hard, and that the work is difficult and full of danger, will not serve the turn. No; ‘Their blood will I require at thy hands.’ Therefore, all excuses set aside, we must address ourselves to our work. Acts xx. 23, 24: Paul went bound in the spirit, and the Holy Ghost had told him that in every city bonds and afflictions did abide and wait for him; but, saith he, ‘None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear to myself, so as I may finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of my Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God.’ He was willing and ready to endure what should befall him at Jerusalem, and reckoned nothing of it, nor of loss of life, if he might successfully preach the gospel, and serve Christ faithfully in the office of the ministry. If nothing be an excuse to us, can anything be an excuse to you? Should your souls be nearer and dearer to us than to yourselves?

[3.] It appeareth from the matter of the duty imposed on you, if you consider the excellency and the necessity of it.

To begin first: The excellency. All excuses against obedience to God’s call are drawn from the world and the things that are in the world. Now there is no comparison between the things of the world and following Christ’s counsel, that we may be everlastingly happy. The question will soon be reduced to this, Which is most to be regarded, God or the creature, the body or the soul, eternity or time? The excuses are for the body, for time, for the creature; but the injunctions of duty are for God, for the soul, and for eternity. Sense saith, Favour the flesh: faith saith, Save thy soul; the one is of everlasting consequence, and conduceth to a happiness that hath no end;

the other only for a time: 2 Cor. iv. 18, 'While we look not at the things which are seen. but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.' One turn of the hand of God separateth the neglected soul from the pampered body, and then whose are all these things?

The necessity: that we may please God and enjoy him for ever. We can never plead for a necessity of sinning; for a man is never driven to those straits, whether he shall sin more or less; but sometimes duties come in competition—duty to a father, and a special injunction of Christ's to follow him; one must be subordinated to the other, and the most necessary must take place; the less give place to the greater. Now, this is much more true of those things which are usually pleaded by way of hesitancy, or as a bar to our duty, as our worldly and carnal satisfactions. But you will say, we must avoid poverty and shame. But it is more necessary to avoid damnation; not to preserve our temporal interests, but to seek after eternal life: Luke x. 42, 'One thing is necessary.'

[4.] It appeareth from the nature of the work. To follow Christ is not to give to him as much as the flesh can spare, but wholly to devote yourselves to his service, to sell all for the pearl of great price, Mat. xiii. 46. And you are obliged to walk so, that all may give way to the glory of God, and the service of your redeemer. If He will employ us thus and thus, we must not contradict it, or plead anything by way of excuse.

*Use.* Do not neglect your duty for vain excuses. The excusing humour is very rife and very prejudicial to us, for the sluggard hath a high conceit of his own allegations: Prov. xxvi. 16, 'The sluggard is wiser in his own conceit than seven men that can render a reason.' In the Eastern countries their council usually consisted of seven, as we read of the seven princes of Media and Persia, Esther i. 14. Therefore let us a little disprove this vain conceit. The sluggard thinketh himself so wise that all others are but giddy and crazy-brained people, that are too nice and scrupulous, and make more ado with religion than needeth. But can a man do too much for God and heaven? 1 Thes. ii. 12. The sluggard thinketh it is a venture, and he may venture on one side as well as the other; but it is a thousand to one against him in the eye of reason, put aside faith: in doubtful cases, the surest way is to be taken. But to draw it to a more certain determination.

1. Nothing is a reasonable excuse which God's word disproveth, for the scriptures were penned to discover the vain sophisms which are in the hearts of men: Heb. iv. 12, 'For the word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart;' to discover the affections of a sensual heart, however palliated with the pretences of a crafty understanding. Certainly, our private conceits must not be lifted up against the wisdom of God, nor can a creature be justified in going against his maker's will. Nothing can be reason which the God of wisdom contradicts and calleth folly: Jer. viii. 9, 'Lo, they have rejected the word of the Lord, and what wisdom is in them?'

2. Nothing can be pleaded as a reasonable excuse which your consciences are not satisfied is reason. Men consult with their affections rather than with their consciences. Conscience would draw other conclusions, therefore our excuses are usually our aggravations: Luke xix. 22, 'Out of thy own mouth will I judge thee, thou wicked servant.' The master expected increase, therefore he should have done what he could: Job xv. 6, 'Thine own mouth condemneth thee; yea, thine own lips testify against thee.' That is the strongest conviction which ariseth from a man's own bosom; that is the reason why there are so many appeals to conscience in scripture: 1 Cor. x. 15, 'I speak as to wise men; judge ye what I say.' Your own hearts tell you ye ought to be better, to mind God more, and the world less, to be more serious in preparing for your eternal estate.

3. Nothing can be a reasonable excuse which reflects upon God, as if he had made a hard law which none can keep, especially if urged against the law of grace; this is to say, the ways of God are not equal, therefore there can be no excuse for the total omission of necessary duties.

4. No excuse can be reasonable, but what you dare plead at the bar of Christ; for that is reason which will go for reason at last. Then the weight of all pleas will be considered, and all negligent persons that have not improved the light of nature, or have not obeyed the gospel, will be left without excuse. What doth it avail prisoners to set up a mock sessions among themselves to acquit one and condemn another? He is in a good condition that shall be excused in the last judgment, and in a bad condition that shall be condemned then.

I now proceed to the second point.

Secondly, That those who are called to follow Christ, should follow him speedily, without interposing any delays.

Consider—

1. Ready obedience is a good evidence of a sound impression of grace left upon our hearts. There is a slighter conviction which breedeth a sense of our duty, but doth not so strongly urge us to the performance of it. And there is a more sound conviction, which is accompanied with a prevailing efficacy, and then all excuses and delays are laid aside, and men kindly comply with God's call: Cant. i. 4, 'Draw me, I will run after thee.' *Run*; it noteth an earnest and speedy motion; the fruit of the powerful attraction of the Spirit: Mat. iv. 20, 'They straightway left their nets and followed him.' The scoffing atheistical world thinketh it easiness and fond credulity, but it argueth a sound impression. The impulsions of the Holy Spirit work in an instant, for they carry their own evidence with them: Gal. i. 16, 'Immediately I consulted not with flesh and blood.' *In divinis, non est deliberandum*. When our call is clear, there needeth no debate or demurring upon the matter.

2. The work goeth on the more kindly when we speedily obey the sanctifying motions of the Spirit, and the present influence and impulsion of his grace. You have not such an advantage of a warm conviction afterward: when the waters are stirred then we must put in for a cure, John v. 4. To adjourn and put it off, as Felix did, Acts xxiv. 25, doth damp and cool the work—you quench this holy fire; or



to stand hucking with God, as Pharaoh did, the work dieth on your hand.

3. There is hazard in delaying and putting off such a business of concernment as conversion to God. Certainly this is a business of the greatest concernment, and the greatest work should be first thought of : Mat. vi. 33, ' Seek first the kingdom of God, and the righteousness thereof ; ' and most thought of : ' Ps. xxvii. 4, ' One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord.' Now, if we delay, it is left upon great hazards. Life is uncertain, for you know not what a day may bring forth : Prov. xxvii. 1, ' Boast not thyself of to-morrow ; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.' If God had given leave (as princes sometimes in a proclamation, for all to come in within a certain day) ; so if God had said, Whosoever doth not repent till thirty or forty years be out, there were no great hazard till the time were expired, we might entertain sin a little while longer. But we know not the day of our death, therefore we should get God to bless us ere we die. A new call is uncertain, 2 Cor. vi. 1, 2. It may be he will treat with us no more in such a warm and affectionate manner. If he call, yet not vouchsafe such assistances of his grace, ' if, peradventure, God will give them repentance unto life,' 2 Tim. ii. 25. It is a hazard or uncertain if the Spirit of God will put another thought of turning into your hearts, when former grace is despised : Isa. lv. 6, ' Call upon the Lord while he is near, and seek him while he may be found.'

4. Consider the mischiefs of delaying. Every day we contract a greater indisposition of embracing God's call. We complain now it is hard ; if it be hard to-day, it will be harder to-morrow, when God is more provoked, and sin more strengthened, Jer. xiii. 23. Yea, it may be, our natural faculties are decayed, the vigour of our youth exhausted. When the tackling is spoiled and the ship rotten, it is an ill time to put to sea : Eccles. xii. 1, ' Remember now thy creator in the days of thy youth.' And besides, consider the suspicion that is upon a late repentance. The most profane would have God for their portion at last.

5. The reasons for delay are inconsiderable. Suppose it be our satisfaction in our present estate. The pleasures of sin are sweet, and we are loth to forego them ; but those pleasures must one day be renounced, or you are for ever miserable. Why not now ? Sin will be as sweet to the carnal appetite hereafter as now it is ; and salvation is dispensed upon the same terms. You cannot be saved hereafter with less ado, or bring down Christ and heaven to a lower rate. If this be a reason now, it will for ever lie as a reason against Christ, and against conversion. The laws of Christianity are unalterable, always the same, and your hearts not like to be better. Or is it that you are willing now, but you have no leisure ? when such encumbrances are over, you shall get your hearts into better posture. Oh no ; it is hypocrisy to think you are willing when you delay. Nothing now hindereth but a want of will ; and when God treateth with thee about thine eternal peace, it is the best time ; but God always cometh to the sinner unseasonably in his own account. But consider, it was the devil that said, Mat. viii. 29, ' Art thou come hither to torment us before the time ? '

The use is, to reprove that dallying with God in the work of conversion, which is so common and so natural to us.

The causes of it are:—

1. Unbelief, or want of a due sense and sight of things to come. If men were persuaded of eternal life and eternal death, they would not stand hovering between heaven and hell, but presently engage their hearts to draw nigh to God. But we cannot see afar off: 2 Peter i. 9, ‘He that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off.’

2. Another cause is security. They do not take these things into their serious thoughts. Faith sheweth it is sure, and consideration bringeth it near: Amos vi. 3, ‘Ye put far away the evil day.’ Things at a distance do not move us. We should pray, and preach, and practise as if death were at our backs, and remember that all our security dependeth upon the slender thread of a frail life.

3. Another cause is averseness of heart; they have no mind to these things: Rom. viii. 7, ‘The carnal mind is enmity against God.’ The heart is inclined to worldly vanities, set against God and godliness. Now let us consider the heinousness of this sin. It is ingratitude and unthankfulness for God’s eternal love: Ps. ciii. 17, ‘The mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him.’ It is also disingenuity; we would be heard presently: Ps. cii. 2, ‘Lord, hear me speedily.’ To-day is the season of mercy, to-morrow of duty. We are always in haste, would have the Lord to tarry for our sinful leisure, when we will not tarry his holy leisure. It is also base self-love; we can be content to dishonour God longer, provided at length we may be saved. Lastly, it is great injustice to keep God out of his right; he hath been long enough kept out of his right already: 1 Peter iv. 3, ‘The time past of our life may suffice to have wrought the will of the Gentiles.’ Therefore, let us no longer delay, but speedily address ourselves to entertain the motions of the Holy Spirit.

## LOOKING BACK ILL BECOMES THOSE THAT HAVE SET THEIR FACE HEAVENWARD.

WE are now come to the third instance, wherein we are instructed how to avoid miscarriages in following Christ.

The first instance teaches us to beware of hasty and hypocritical profession, which is the fruit of resolution without deliberation, or sitting down and counting the charges; this was the fault of the scribe.

The second instance cautioneth us against dilatory shifts and excuses. The most necessary business must not be put off upon any pretence whatsoever.

The third instance forbiddeth all thoughts of compounding, or hopes to have Christ and the world too; as this man hoped first to secure his worldly interest, and then to follow Christ at leisure. Whether this man were called, or uncalled, it appeareth not. It is

only said in the text, 'Another also said:' the middle person was only called by Christ; the other two offered themselves. The first was forward, upon a mistaken ground, to share the honours of the kingdom of the Messiah, which he supposed to be temporal. This last offereth himself, but his heart was not sufficiently loosened from the world. From both we see that 'it is not in him that willeth, nor in him that runneth, but God that showeth mercy,' Rom. ix. 16; for neither of those that offered themselves are accepted.

In the words you may observe:—

1. His request.

2. Christ's answer.

1. His request. This third offereth himself to be a disciple of Christ, but with an exception—that he might take his farewell at home, and dispose of his estate there, and so secure his worldly interests: 'I will follow thee, but let me bid those farewell which are at home in my house.' You will say, What harm in this request? Elijah granted it to Elisha, 1 Kings xix. 21. When he had laid his mantle on him, thereby investing him in the office of a prophet, Elisha said, 'Let me, I pray thee, go and kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow thee:' which the prophet granteth, and gave way to Elisha to go home and salute his friends.

I answer—

[1.] The evangelical ministry exceedeth the prophetic, both as to excellency and necessity, and must be gone about speedily without any delay. The harvest was great, and such an extraordinary work was not to be delayed nor interrupted.

[2.] If two men do the same thing, it followeth not that they do it with the same mind. Things may be the same as to the substance or matter of the action, yet circumstances may be different. Christ knew this man's heart, and could interpret the meaning of his desire to go home first. He might make it a pretence to depart clean away from Christ. We cannot distinguish between the look of Abraham and the look of Lot. One is allowed, the other forbidden. Abraham is allowed to look towards Sodom: Gen. xix. 28, 'And Abraham got up early in the morning, and looked towards Sodom, and behold the smoke of the country went up as the smoke of a furnace.' Yet Lot and his family are forbidden to look that way: Gen. xix. 17, 'Look not behind thee.' We cannot distinguish between the laughter of Abraham and the laughter of Sarah: Gen. xvii. 17, 'And Abraham fell upon his face, and laughed, and said in his heart, Shall a child be born to him that is an hundred years old? and shall Sarah, that is ninety years old, bear?' Now compare Gen. xviii. 12; it is said, 'And Sarah laughed within herself, saying, After I am waxed old, shall I have pleasure, my lord also being old?' Yet she is reproved, 'For the Lord said, Wherefore did Sarah laugh?' The one was joy and reverence, the other unbelief and contempt. We cannot distinguish between the Virgin Mary's question, Luke i. 34, 'How can this be?' and the question of Zachary, John's father, Luke i. 18, 'How shall I know this, for I am an old man?' Mary was not reproved, but he was struck dumb for that speech. But though we cannot distinguish, God, that knoweth the secrets of all hearts, can distinguish.

[3.] Those that followed Christ on these extraordinary calls were to leave all things they had, without any further care about them : Mat. xix. 21, 'Sell all that thou hast, and follow me, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven.' So Mat. iv. 19, 20, 'He saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men : and they straightway left their nets and followed him.' So Mat. ix. 9, 'As Jesus passed forth from thence, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the receipt of custom : and he saith unto him, Follow me. And he arose, and followed him.' Therefore it was preposterous for this man to desire to go home to order and dispose of his estate and family, before he complied with his call.

[4.] In resolution, estimation, and vow, the same is required of all Christians, when Christ's work calleth for it : Luke xiv. 33, 'So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple.'

2. Christ's answer, which consists of a similitude, and its interpretation joined together.

[1.] The metaphor or similitude. Taken from ploughmen, who cannot make straight furrows if they look back. So, to look back, after we have undertaken Christ's yoke and service, rendereth us unfit for the kingdom of God. Putting our hands to the plough is to undertake Christ's work, or to resolve to be his disciples. Looking back, noteth an hankering of mind after the world, and also a return to the worldly life. For, first, we look back, and then we go back. First, we have an over-valuing of the world, and then we return to the worldly life.

*Doct.* That looking back will not become those who have set their faces heavenward.

We have an instance in the text of a man which pretended to follow Christ, which is to set our faces heavenward (for we follow Christ, first in labour and patience, and then into glory). But he would look back, and had many thoughts of what he had left at home. And he is pronounced unfit for the kingdom of God, that is, to be a disciple of Christ. And we have another instance, recommended to our observation by our Lord himself : Luke xvii. 32, 'Remember Lot's wife ;' that is, remember her sin, and remember her punishment. Both are taken notice of, Gen. xix. 26, 'But his wife looked back from behind him, and she became a pillar of salt.' There was a hankering of mind after what she had left in Sodom. She looked back, because she had left her heart behind her ; there were her kindred, her friends, and her country, and pleasant place of abode. That look was a kind of repenting that she had come out of Sodom. And what was her punishment ? She that looked back perished as well as they that never came out. Yea, she is set up as a monument or spectacle of public shame and dishonour, to warn the rest of the world to obey God, and trust themselves with his providence.

In handling this point I shall show you :—

1. Upon what occasions we may be said to look back.

2. How ill this becomes those that have put their hands to the plough.

1. Upon what occasions we may be said to look back. A double pair I shall mention.

The first sort of those :—

[1.] That pretend to follow Christ, and yet their hearts hanker after the world, the cares, pleasures, and vain pomp thereof. Certainly all that would follow Christ must renounce their worldly affections and inclinations, or else they can make no work of Christianity. I prove it from the nature of conversion, which is a turning from the creature to God, from self to Christ, and from sin to holiness. The first is proper to our case. As our degeneration was a falling from God to the creature, Jer. ii. 13, so our regeneration is a turning from the creature to God. If we leave the world unwillingly, our dedication will soon come to nothing, for then our hearts are false with God in the very making of the covenant. If we engaged ourselves to God before the fleshly mind and interest were never well conquered, as we were not well loosened from the world, so not firmly engaged to God, and therefore, when our interest requires it, we shall soon forsake God.

[2.] When men are discouraged in his service by troubles and difficulties, and so, after a forward profession, all cometh to nothing: Heb. x. 38, 'If any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him.' The former is looking back, and this is drawing back. The one ariseth out of the other: all their former zeal and courage is lost, they are affrighted and driven out of their profession, and relapse into the errors they have escaped. This is the first pair. Once more, the other pair is this :—

There is a looking back with respect to mortification, and a looking back with respect to vivification.

(1.) With respect to mortification, which is the first part of conversion. So we must not look back, or mind anything behind us, which may turn us back, and stop us in our course. The world and the flesh are the things behind us; we turned our back upon them in conversion, when we turned to God. Grace 'teaches us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts,' Titus ii. 12. It is the world that doth call back our thoughts, and corrupt our affections—the world, that is an enemy to God, and our religion, James iv. 4. Therefore, the world must be renounced, and we must grow dead to the world, that we may be alive to God. There is no halting between both.

(2.) With respect to vivification, or progress in the duties of the holy and heavenly life. So the apostle telleth us, Phil. iii. 13, 'But this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before,' &c. Farther progress in holiness is the one thing that we should mind, and that above all other things. This is the *unum necessarium*, Luke x. 42; the *primum* or *principium*, the one thing, that is, the main thing: Ps. xxvii. 4, 'One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after.' But how should we mind it? Not looking to the things which are behind, but looking to the things which are before. The things behind are our imperfect beginnings, or so much of the race as we have overcome and got through. It is the sluggard's trick to consider how much of the journey is past, or how far the rest of the racers are behind him. But he that sets heartily to his business considers how much is before, that he may get through the remainder of his race, and so obtain the prize. The things which are before us are God and heaven, and the

remaining duties of the holy life. These we should mind, and not look back, as satisfying ourselves with what we have attained to already.

2. How ill it becometh those that have put their hands to the spiritual plough.

[1.] In respect of the covenant into which they enter, or the manner of entrance into it, which is by a fixed unbounded resignation of themselves unto God. Till this be done, we are but half Christians. As suppose we desire privileges, would have God to be our God, but neglect duties, and are loth to become his people; or suppose we see a necessity of that, and so are in some measure willing to give up ourselves to him, yet if our resolution be not fixed, or be not unbounded, without reserves, and against all reserves, the covenant is not condescended unto. We do nothing unless we do that which is further required of us.

(1.) If it be not fixed, but wavering, we do but treat; we do not conclude, and come to a full agreement with God: Acts xi. 23, 'He exhorted them all, that, with full purpose of heart, they would cleave unto the Lord.' It implieth such a resolution as carrieth the force of a principle. Agrippa was almost a Christian, had some enamouring and uncertain inclinations: Acts xxvi. 28, 'Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.' Christ is resolved to stick to his servants, and therefore he expects that they should be resolved to stick to him.

(2.) If it be not unbounded, reserving nothing, but leaving all to Christ, to be disposed of at his will. Except but one thing, and the covenant is not fully concluded; it sticketh at that article; it is but hucking with God, not agreeing with God. Resolving with reserves is no resolution at all. It is but dealing like Ananias and Sapphira, giving something, and keeping back the rest, Acts v. Christ will have no disciples which will not part with all. Nothing must be reserved, neither credit, nor life, nor estate, Luke xiv. 28. Now, none of this can be as long as you look back, or allow that that will tempt you to look back; that is, till you be thoroughly loosened from the world; for whilst the heart cleaveth to any earthly thing, your resolution is unfixed. They that only take Christ upon liking, will soon be tempted to mislike him and his ways; and your resolution is not unbounded, whilst you set upon the profession of religion, and yet keep the world, or something of the world: your heart will ever and anon be seeking occasions to withdraw; for you were false at heart at your first setting out, and treacherous in the very making of your covenant.

[2.] With respect to the duties of Christianity, or that part of the kingdom of God which concerneth your obedience to him, you are never fit for these while the heart cleaveth to earthly things, and you are still hankering after the world.

A threefold defect there will be in our duties:—

(1.) They will be unpleasant.

(2.) They will be inconstant.

(3.) Imperfect in such a degree as to want sincerity.

(1.) Your duty will be unpleasant to you, so far as you are worldly and carnal, so that you can never yield cheerful and ready obedience to God.

Certain it is that we must serve God, and serve him with delight. His commandments should be kept, and they should not be grievous to us, 1 John v. 3. Now, what is the great impediment? Worldly lusts are not thoroughly purged out of the heart; for presently he addeth this reason, 'For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world.' It is a hard heart maketh our work hard; and the heart is hard and unpersuadable when our affections are engaged elsewhere. The readiness of our obedience dependeth on the fervency of our love; the fervency of our love on our victory over the world; our victory over the world on the strength of our faith; the strength of our faith on the certainty we have of the principal object of our faith; the principal object of our faith is, that Jesus is the Son of God, whose counsel we must take, if we will be happy. And the evidence of that principle is the double testimony or attestation given to him from heaven, or in the heart of a believer. Once settle in that, that you can entirely trust yourselves and all your interests in the hands of Christ, and all duties will be easy.

(2.) You will be inconstant in it, and apt to be ensnared again, when you meet with occasions and temptations that suit with your heart's lusts. As the Israelites were drawn out of Egypt against their wills, the flesh-pots of Egypt were still in their minds, and, therefore, were ready to make themselves a captain and return again, Num. xiv. 4; and James i. 8, 'A double-minded man is unstable in his ways.' Nothing will hold an unwilling heart. Demas had not quitted this hankering mind after the world, and therefore it prevented him doing his duty: 2 Tim. iv. 10, 'Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world.' He left the work of the gospel to mind his own private affairs. The love of riches, pleasure, ease, and safety, if they be not thoroughly renounced, will tempt us to a like revolt and neglect of God. Therefore, to prevent it, when we first put our hands to the plough, we must resolve to renounce the world: Ps. xlv. 10, 'Forget also thine own people, and thy father's house.' Look back no more. As long as we are entangled in our lusts and enticements of the world, we are unmeet to serve God. Paul counted those things that were gain to him to be loss for Christ: Phil. iii. 7, 8, 'Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but dung, that I may win Christ.' Paul repented not of his choice, but sheweth his perseverance in the contempt of the world,—I have counted, and do count. He seeth no cause to recede from his choice. Many affect novelties, are transported at their first change, but repent at leisure.

(3.) We are imperfect in it; I mean, to such a degree as to want sincerity, for they bring nothing to perfection, Luke viii. 14. Their fruit never groweth ripe or sound, for religion is an underling. Some good inclinations they have to heavenly things, but their worldly affections are greater, and overtop them so, that though they do not plainly revolt from their profession, yet their duties want that life and power which is necessary, so that they bring little honour to Christ by being Christians.

[3.] In respect of the hurt that cometh from their looking back, both to themselves and to religion.

(1.) To themselves : 2 Peter ii. 20, 21, 'For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, their latter end is worse with them than their beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them.' Many have so much of the knowledge of Christ as to cleanse their external conversation; but sin and the world were never so effectually cast out but they are in secret league with them still; and, therefore, they are first entangled, and then overcome; first enticed by some pleasure or profit, and then carried away with the temptation. But what cometh of this? 'Their latter end is worse than their beginning.' Their sin is greater, since they sin against light and taste; their judgment is greater, both spiritual and eternal; as God giveth them over to brutish lusts, and to the power of Satan. And this will be a cutting thought to them to all eternity, to remember how they lost their acquaintance with, and benefit by, Christ, by looking back to the world, and deserting that good way wherein they found so much sweetness in Christ.

(2.) The mischief which is done to religion. They wonderfully dishonour God, and bring contempt upon the ways of godliness, when, after they have made trial of it, they prefer sin before it, as if God had wearied them, Micah vi. 3. Therefore it is just with God to vindicate his honour. And Satan, after he seemeth to be for a while rejected, taketh a more durable possession of them, Luke xi. 26. Oh, think of this often!—to look back after we seemed to escape doth involve us in the greater sin and misery. Better never to have yielded to God so far, than to retract at last, partly because their sins are sins against knowledge: Luke xii. 47, 'That servant which knew his Lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes.' Partly because they are unthankful for so much deliverance, by the knowledge of Christ, as they received, and that is an heinous aggravation of their offence. Partly because their sin is treachery and breach of vows, for they turned the back upon the world and all the allurements thereof, when they consented to the covenant, and resolved to follow Christ in all conditions, till he should bring them into a place of rest and safety. Partly because they sin against experience, after they have had some relish and taste of better things, Heb. vi. 4. Partly because their conversion again is the more difficult, the devil having a greater hold of them, Mat. xii. 44.

[4.] With respect to the disproportion that is between the things that tempt us to look back, and those things that are set before us.

(1.) The things that tempt us to look back are the pleasures of sin and the profits of the world. Both are but a temporary enjoyment: Heb. xi. 25, 'The pleasures of sin, which are but for a season.' The pleasures of sin are base and brutish, which captivate and bring a slavery on the soul, Titus iii. 3. The enjoyments of the world cannot last long; your gust and relish of them, within a little while will be gone, 1 John ii. 17; yet these are the things that tempt you to forget and draw you off from God. And will you marry your souls again to those sins from which they were once divorced, and for such paltry vanities repent of your obedience to God, even after you have made



trial of him? Are these things grown better, or God grown worse, that you should turn your hearts from him to them?

(2.) The things that are before you are God and heaven; reconciliation with God, and the everlasting fruition of him in glory.

Reconciliation with God, with the consequent benefits; communion with God now, peace of conscience, the gift of the Spirit, and the hopes of glory. If there were no more than these, shall we look back? Can we find better things in the world? Alas! there is nothing here but fears and snares, a vexatious uncertainty, and polluting enjoyments, such as may easily make us worse, but cannot make us better. What is this but to forsake the cold flowing waters for a dirty puddle? Jer. xviii. 14, our own mercies for lying vanities, Jonah ii. 8.

The everlasting fruition of him in glory. Shall we look back that are striving for a crown of endless glory, as if we were weary of the pursuit, and give it over as a hopeless or fruitless business? If Christ will lead us to this glory, let us follow him, and go on in what is well begun without looking back. Never let us leave a crown of glory for a crown of thorns.

*Use.* Is for instruction, to teach us what to do if we would set about the strict practice of religion.

1. See that your worldly love be well mortified, for till you be dead to the world God cannot recover his interest in your souls, nor the divine nature be set up there with any life and power, 2 Peter i. 4; see also 1 John ii. 15, and 1 John v. 4. Till this be done, God and glory cannot be your ultimate end, nor the main design of your life; for the world will turn your hearts another way, and will have the principal ruling and disposing of your lives: the world will have that love, trust, care, and service that belongeth to God, and be a great hindrance to you in the way to heaven, and you will never have peace. The world doth first delude you, and then disquiet you, and if you cleave to it as your portion, you must look for no more. Well, then, mortified it must be; for how can you renounce the world as an enemy if your hearts be not weaned from it so far that it is a more indifferent thing to you to have it or want it, and that you be not so eager for it, or so careful about it?

2. Let not the world steal into your hearts again, nor seem so sweet to you, for then you are under a temptation. It is our remaining folly and backsliding nature that is ever looking to the world which we have forsaken. Now, when you find this, whenever the world hath insinuated into your affections, and chilled and cooled them to God and heaven, see that the distemper be presently expelled. Pray, as David, Ps. cxix. 36, 'Incline my heart unto thy testimonies, and not unto covetousness.' Be sure to be more fruitful in good works: Luke xi. 41, 'Give alms of such things as you have, and behold all things are clean unto you.' We renounced the world in our baptismal vow, we overcame the world in our whole after course. It is not so got out of any but that we still need an holy jealousy and watchfulness over ourselves. Now, that we may do both of these, I shall give you some directions.

[1.] Fix your end and scope, which is to be everlastingly happy in the enjoyment of God. The more you do so, the less in danger you

will be of looking back. We are often pressed to lay up treasures in heaven, Mat. vi. 20; and, as those that are 'risen with Christ,' to 'seek the things which are above,' Col. iii. 1. Our Lord himself saith to the young man, Mark x. 21, 'Go, sell all that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasures in heaven.' If your life and business be for heaven, and your mind be kept intent on the greater matters of everlasting life, nothing will divert you therefrom; you will almost be ready to forget earth, because you have higher and better things to mind. It is not barely thinking of the troubles of the world, or confessing its vanities, will cure your distempers, but the true sight of a better happiness. A little in hand is better, you will think, than uncertain hopes; but a sound belief, which is 'the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen,' that openeth heaven to you, and will soon make you of another mind.

[2.] Entirely trust yourself, and all your concerns, in the hand of God. Christ expected from all those whom he called in an extraordinary manner, that they should leave all without any thought or solicitude about it, trusting in him not only for their eternal reward, but for their provision and protection by the way during their service. And the same in effect is required of all Christians; not to leave our estates or neglect our calling, but renouncing the world, and resolving to take such a lot in good part as he shall carve out to them. All that enter into covenant with God must believe him to be 'God all-sufficient,' Gen. xvii. 1. The apostle, when he dissuadeth from worldliness, he produceth a promise of God's not forsaking us and leaving us utterly destitute: Heb. xiii. 5, 'Let your conversation be without covetousness, and be content with such things as you have. For he hath said, I will never leave thee nor forsake thee.' On the other side, certainly, it is unbelief that is the cause of apostasy, or falling back from God: Heb. iii. 12, 'Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God.' Certainly, when we have resigned up ourselves to Christ to do his work, we may trust him boldly, and serve him cheerfully; we need not look back to shift for ourselves. If you are willing to be his people, he will be your God and your Saviour, and then you may conclude that 'God, even our God, shall bless us,' Ps. lxxvii. 6. He will not be wanting to those that unreservedly yield up themselves to his obedience.

[3.] Consider that they are deluded hypocrites that will meddle no farther with religion than they can reconcile it with their worldly happiness. Whatever glorious notions they have of God, or pretences of admiring free grace, it is self-denial that Christ calleth for; and taking up our cross is the first lesson in his school. And true conversion is a turning from the creature to God, and beginneth in mortification; and baptism implieth a renunciation of the devil, the world, and the flesh. Therefore those that will save their worldly state, and launch out no further in the cause of religion than they may easily get ashore again when a storm cometh, and love and serve God no further than will stand with the contentment of the flesh, and divide their hearts between God and the world, give God but half, and the worst half; surely these were never sincere with God. It is an impossible

design they drive on, to serve two masters, Mat. vi. 24. You must let go Christ and glory, if you be so earnest after the world, and so indulgent to the flesh.

[4.] Consider how much it is your business to observe what maketh you fit or unfit for the kingdom of God. The aptitude or inaptitude of means is to be judged with respect to the end, as they help or hinder the attainment of your great end; for *finis est mensura mediorum*: Mat. vi. 22, 'The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light.' Now our great end is to enjoy God for ever. And what fitteth you for this,—looking back, or keeping the heart in heaven? Experience will show. The observant and watchful Christian will soon find where his great hindrance lieth. How much he findeth his heart down by minding the world, and how he needeth to wind it up again by faith and love: Ps. xxv. 1, 'Unto thee, O Lord, do I lift up my soul.' The world is the great impediment that keepeth him from God, and indisposeth him for his service, dampeth his love, and quencheth his zeal, and abateth his diligence; he will soon find how much more he might do for God if he could draw off his heart more from those inferior objects. This is the weight that presseth us down, and maketh us so cold and cursory in God's service.

[5.] Consider, in the text, here is the kingdom of God, which is double—the kingdom of grace, and the kingdom of glory. The one is called, 'The kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ,' Rev. i. 9; the other is called, 'His kingdom and glory,' 1 Thes. ii. 12. By the first we are prepared for the second; and the second is the great encouragement. Now they that look back are unfit for either the duties of Christians or the reward of Christians; he flincheth from his duty here, and shall be shut out of heaven at last: 2 Thes. i. 5, 'That ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer.' They are only counted worthy who constantly and patiently look for it, and venture something on it.

[6.] Consider the great loss you will incur by looking back after you have put your hand to the plough. You will lose all that you have wrought, and all that you have suffered.

What you have wrought: 2 John 8, 'Look to yourselves, that ye lose not the things which ye have wrought, but that ye receive a full reward.' You forfeit the reward of your good beginnings. A partial reward they may have in this life, while they continue their well-doing (for no man is a loser by God), but not a complete and full reward till the life to come. Some overflowings of God's temporal bounty they may have, but not the crown of life and glory. So Ezek. xviii. 24, 'All his righteousness that he hath done shall not be mentioned.' All is obliterated and forgotten and made void, as to any interest in the great reward. This was represented in the type of the Nazarite: Num. vi. 12, 'The days that were before shall be lost, because his separation was defiled.' He was to begin all anew. All that you have suffered, as a man may make some petty losses for Jesus Christ: Gal. iii. 4, 'Have ye suffered so many things in vain? if it be yet in vain.' This maketh all the cost and expense that you have been at to be to no purpose.