

SERMONS
ON
IMPORTANT SUBJECTS,

BY THE LATE REVEREND AND PIOUS

SAMUEL DAVIES, A.M.,

Sometime President of the College in New-Jersey.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

THE FIFTH EDITION.

TO WHICH ARE NOW ADDED,

THREE OCCASIONAL SERMONS,

NOT INCLUDED IN THE FORMER EDITIONS;

MEMOIRS AND CHARACTER OF THE AUTHOR;

AND

TWO SERMONS ON OCCASION OF HIS DEATH,

By the Rev. Drs. Gibbons and Finley.

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SERMON VII.

The Nature and Danger of making light of Christ and Salvation.

MATT. xii. 5—*But they made light of it.*

THERE is not one of us in this assembly that has heard anything, but what has heard of Christ and salvation: there is not one of us but has had the rich blessings of the gospel freely and repeatedly offered to us: there is not one of us but stands in the most absolute need of these blessings, and must perish for ever without them. I wish I could add, there is not one of us but has cheerfully accepted them according to the offer of the gospel. But, alas! such an assembly is not to be expected on earth! Multitudes will make light of Christ and the invitations of the gospel, as the Jews did.

This parable represents the great God under the majestic idea of a king.

He is represented as making a marriage feast for his Son; that is, God in the gospel offers his Son Jesus Christ as a Saviour to the guilty sons of men, and, upon their acceptance of him, the most intimate and endearing union, and the tenderest mutual affection take place between Christ and them, which may properly be represented by the marriage relation. And God has provided for them a rich variety of blessings, pardon, holiness, and everlasting felicity, which may be signified by a royal nuptial feast, verse 2.

These blessings were first offered to the Jews, who were bidden to the wedding by Moses and the prophets, whose great business it was to prepare them to receive the Messiah, verse 3.

The servants that were sent to call them, that were thus bidden, were the apostles and seventy disciples, whom Christ sent out to preach that the gospel kingdom was just at hand, verse 3.

When the Jews rejected this call, he sent forth other servants, namely, the apostles, after his ascension, who were to be more urgent in their invitations, and to tell them that, in consequence of Christ's death, all things were now ready, verse 4.

It is seldom that invitations to a royal feast are rejected; but alas! the Jews rejected the invitation of the gospel, and would not accept of its important blessings. They made light of Christ and his blessings. They were careless to them, and turned their attention to other things.

These things were not peculiar to the Jews, but belong to us sinners of the Gentiles in these ends of the earth. Christ is still proposed to us; to the same blessings we are invited; and I have the honour, my dear brethren, of appearing among you as a servant of the heavenly King, sent out to urge

you to embrace the offer.

I doubt not but sundry of you have complied; and you are enriched and made for ever.

But alas! must I not entertain a godly jealousy over some of you? Have you not made light of Christ and salvation, to which you have been invited for so many years successively?

Your case is really lamentable, as I hope you will see before I have done; and I most sincerely compassionate you from my heart. I now rise up in this solemn place with the design to address you with the most awful seriousness, and the most compassionate concern: and did you know how much your happiness may depend upon it, and how anxious I am lest I should fail in the attempt, I am sure you could not but pray for me, and pity me. If ever you regarded a man in the most serious temper and address, I beg you would now regard what I am going to say to you.

You cannot receive any benefit from this, or indeed any other subject, till you apply it to yourselves. And therefore, in order to reform you of the sin of making light of Christ and the gospel, I must first inquire who are guilty of it. For this purpose let us consider,

What is it to make light of Christ and the invitations of the gospel?

I can think of no plainer way to discover this, than to inquire how we treat those things that we highly esteem; and also by way of contrast, how we treat those things which we make light of; and hence we may discover whether Christ and the gospel may be ranked among the things we esteem, or those we disregard.

I. Men are apt to remember and affectionately think of the things that they highly esteem; but as for those which they disregard, they can easily forget them, and live from day to day without a single thought about them.

Now do you often affectionately remember the Lord Jesus Christ, and do your thoughts affectionately go after him? do they pay him early visits in the morning? do they make frequent excursions to him through the day? and do you lie down with him in your hearts at night? Is not the contrary evident as to many of you? Can you not live from day to day thoughtless of Jesus, and your everlasting salvation? Recollect now, how many affectionate thoughts have you had of these things through the week past, or in this sacred morning. And can you indeed highly esteem those things which you hardly ever think of? Follow your own hearts, Sirs, observe which way they most naturally and freely run, and then judge whether you make light of the gospel or not. Alas! we cannot persuade men to one hour's serious consideration what they should do for an interest in Christ; we cannot persuade them so much as to afford him only their thoughts, which are such cheap things; and yet they will not be convinced that they make light of Christ. And here lies the infatuation of sin: it blinds and befools men, so

that they do not know what they think of, what they love, or what they intend, much less do they know the habitual bent of their souls. They often imagine themselves free from those sins to which they are most enslaved, and particularly they think themselves innocent of the crime of making light of the gospel, when this is the very crime that is likely to destroy them for ever.

II. The things that men value, if of such a nature as to admit of publication, will be the frequent subjects of their discourse. The thoughts will command the tongue, and furnish materials for conversation. But those things that they forget and disregard they will not talk of.

Do not they therefore make light of Christ and salvation, who have no delight in conversing about them, and hardly ever mention the name of Christ but in a trifling or profane manner? They do not like the company where divine things are discoursed of, but think it precise and troublesome. They had much rather be entertained with humorous tales and idle stories, or talk about the affairs of the world. *They are of the world, says St. John, therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them, 1 John iv. 5.* They are in their element in such conversation. Or others may talk about religion; but it is only about the circumstances of it, as, "How such a man preached; it was a very good or a bad sermon," &c., but they care not to enter into the spirit and substance of divine things; and if they speak of Christ and experimental religion, it is in a heartless and insipid manner. And do not such make light of the gospel? and is not this the character of many of you?

III. Men make light of those things, if they are of a practical nature, which they only talk about, but do not reduce into practice.

Christianity was intended not to furnish matter for empty talkers, but to govern the heart and practice. But are there not some that only employ their tongues about it, especially when their spirits are raised with liquor, and then a torrent of noisy religion breaks from them. Watch their lives, and you will see little appearance of Christianity there. And do not these evidently make light of Christ, who make him the theme of their drunken conversation, or who seem to think that God sent his Son from heaven just to set the world a talking about him? There is nothing in nature that seems to me more abominable than this.

IV. We take the utmost pains and labour to secure the things we value, and cannot be easy while our property in them is uncertain; but those things that we think lightly of we care but little whether they be ours or not.

Therefore, have not such of you made light of Christ and salvation, who have lived twenty or thirty years uncertain whether you have interest in him, and yet have been easy and contented, and take no method to be resolved? Are all that hear me this day determined in this important question,

“What shall become of me when I die?” Are you all certain upon good grounds, and after a thorough trial, that you shall be saved? Oh that you were! but, alas! you are not. And do you think you would bear this uncertainty about it, if you did not make light of salvation? No; you would carefully examine yourselves; you would diligently peruse the scriptures to find out the marks of those that shall be saved; you would anxiously consult those that could direct you, and particularly pious ministers, who would think it the greatest favour you could do them to devolve such an office upon them. But now ministers may sit in their studies for a whole year, and not ten persons perhaps in five hundred agreeably intrude upon them on this important business.

O, Sirs, if the gospel should pierce your hearts indeed, you would but cry out with the convicted Jews, *Men and brethren what shall we do to be saved?* Acts ii. 37. Paul, when awakened, cries out, in a trembling consternation, *Lord! what wilt thou have me to do?* But when shall we hear such questions now-a-days?

V. The things that men highly esteem, deeply and tenderly affect them, and excite some motions in their hearts: but what they make light of, makes no impression upon them.

And if you did not make light of the gospel, what workings would there be in your hearts about it? what solemn, tender, and vigorous passion would it raise in you to hear such things about the world to come? what fear and astonishment would seize you at the consideration of your misery; what transports of joy and gratitude would you feel at the glad tidings of salvation by the blood of Christ! what strong efficacious purposes would be raised in you at the discovery of your duty! O what hearers should we have, were it not for this one sin, the making light of the gospel! whereas now we are in danger of wearying them, or preaching them asleep with our most solemn discourses about this momentous affair? We talk to them of Christ and salvation till they grow quite tired of this dull old tale, and this foolishness of preaching. Alas! little would one think from the air of carelessness, levity, and inattention that appears among them, that they were hearing such weighty truths, or have any concern in them.

VI. Our estimate of things may be discovered by the diligence and earnestness of our endeavours about them Those things which we highly value, we think no pains too great to obtain; but what we think lightly of we use no endeavours about, or we use them in a languid, careless manner.

And do not they make light of Christ and salvation, who do not exert themselves in earnest to obtain them, and think a great deal of every little thing they do in religion? they are still ready to cry out, “What need of so much pains? we hope to be saved without so much trouble.” And, though these may not be so honest as to speak it out, it is plain from their temper

and practice, they grudge all the service they do for Christ as done to a master they do not love. They love and esteem the world, and therefore for the world they will labour and toil all day, and seem never to think they can do too much; but for the God that made them; for the Lord that bought them, and for their everlasting salvation, they seem afraid of taking too much pains. Let us preach to them as long as we will, we cannot bring them in earnest to desire and pursue after holiness. Follow them to their houses, and you will hardly ever find them reading a chapter in their Bibles, or calling upon God with their families, so much as once a day. Follow them into their retirements, and you will hear no penitent confessions of sin, no earnest cries for mercy. They will not allow to God that one day in seven which he has appropriated to his own immediate service, but they will steal and prostitute some even of those sacred hours for idleness, for worldly conversation, or business. And many of them are so malignant in wickedness, that they will reproach and ridicule others that are not so made as themselves in these respects. And is not Christ worth seeking? Is not eternal salvation worth so much trouble? Does not that man make light of these things that thinks his ease or carnal pleasure of greater importance? Let common sense judge.

VII. That which we highly value we think we cannot buy too dear; and we are ready to part with everything that comes in competition with it. The merchant that found one pearl of great price, sold all that he had to purchase it, Matt. xiii. 46, but those things that we make light of, we will not part with things of value for them.

Now, when Christ and the blessings of the gospel come in competition with the world and sinful pleasures, you may know which you most highly esteem, by considering which you are most ready to part with. You are called to part with everything that is inconsistent with an interest in Christ, and yet many of you will not do it. You are called but to give God his own, to resign all to his will, to let go all those profits and pleasures which you must either part with, or part with Christ, and yet your hearts cling to these things; you grasp them eagerly, and nothing can tear them from you. You must have your pleasures, you must keep your credit in the world, you must look to your estates, whatever becomes of Christ and salvation; as if you could live and die better without Christ than without these things; or as if Christ could not make you happy without them. And does not this bring the matter to an issue, and plainly show that you make light of Christ in comparison with these things? Christ himself has assured you, over and over, that unless you are willing to part with all for his sake, you cannot be his disciples; and yet, while you have the quite contrary disposition, you will pretend to be his disciples; as if you knew better what it is that constituted his disciples than he.

VIII. Those things which we highly value, we shall be for helping our friends to obtain.

Do not those, then, make light of Christ, who do not take half so much pains to help their children to an interest in him, as to set them up in credit in the world, and leave them large fortunes? They supply the outward wants of their families, but they take little or no care about their everlasting salvation—Alas! Sirs, the neglected, ignorant, and vicious children and servants of such of you can witness against you, that you make very light of Christ and salvation, and their immortal souls.

IX. That which men highly esteem they will so diligently pursue, that you may see their regard for it in their endeavours after it, if it be a matter within their reach.

You may therefore see that many make light of the gospel by the little knowledge they have of it, after all the means of instruction with which they have been favoured. Alas! where is their improvement in holiness? how little do they know of their own hearts, of God and Christ, and the world to come, and what they must do to be saved! Ask them about these things, and you will find them stupidly ignorant; and yet they have so much conceited knowledge that they will not acknowledge it; or if they do, they have no better excuse than to say they are no scholars, or they have a poor memory; as if it required extensive learning, or a great genius to know the things that are necessary to salvation. O! if they had not made light of these things; if they had bestowed but half the pains upon them which they have taken to understand matters of trade and worldly business, they would not be so grossly ignorant as they are! When men that can learn the hardest trade in a few years, when men of bright parts, and perhaps considerable learning, after living so many years, are still mere novices in matters of religion, and do not so much as know the terms of life according to the gospel, is it not plain that they care but little about these things, and that they make light of the Son of God, and all his inestimable, immortal blessings?

Thus I have offered you sufficient matter of conviction in this affair. And what is the result? Does not conscience smite some of you by this time, and say, “I am the man that have made light of Christ and his gospel?” If not, upon what evidence are you acquitted? Some of you, I doubt not, can say, in the integrity of your hearts, “Alas! I am too careless about this important affair, but God knows I am often deeply concerned about it; God knows that if ever I was in earnest about anything in all my life, it has been about my everlasting state; and there is nothing in all the world that habitually lies so near my heart.” But are there not some of you whom conscience does not accuse of this crime of too much carelessness about the gospel, not because you are innocent, but because you make so very

light of it, that you will make no thorough search into it? and does not this alone prove you guilty? I beseech such to consider the folly of your conduct. Do you then think to excuse your crime, by being careless whether you are guilty of it or not? Can you avoid the precipice by shutting your eyes? If you discover your sin now, it may be of unspeakable service, but if you now shut your eyes you must see it hereafter, when it will be too late; when your conviction will be your punishment. I beseech you also to consider the dreadful evil of your conduct in making light of a Saviour. And here I shall offer such arguments to expose its aggravations as I am sure cannot fail to convince and astonish you, if you act like men of reason and understanding.

I. Consider you make light of him who did not make light of you, when you deserved his final neglect of you. You were worthy of nothing but contempt and abhorrence from him. As a man you are but a worm to God, and as a sinner you are viler than a toad or a serpent. Yet Christ was so far from making light of you, that he left his native heaven, became a man of sorrows, and died in the most exquisite agonies, that a way might be opened for the salvation of your miserable soul: and can you make light of him after all his regard to you? What miracles of love and mercy has he shown towards you! and can you neglect him after all? Angels, who are less concerned in these things than we, cannot but pry into them with delightful wonder? Peter i. 12, and shall sinners who have the most intimate personal concern in them, make light of them? This is a crime more than devilish; for the devils never had a Saviour offered to them, and consequently never could despise him. And can you live in a carelessness of Christ all your days, and yet feel no remorse?

II. Consider you make light of matters of the greatest excellency and importance in all the world. Oh, sirs, you know not what it is that you slight; had you known these things you would not have ventured to make light of them for ten thousand worlds. As Christ said to the woman of Samaria, *If thou hadst known the gift of God, and who it is that speaketh to thee, thou wouldest have asked of him living water:* John iv. 13. *Had the Jews known, they would not have crucified the Lord of Glory:* 1 Cor. ii. 8. So, had you known what Jesus is, you would not have made light of him; he would have been to you the most important being in the universe. O! had you been but one day in heaven, and seen and felt the happiness there! or had you been but one hour under the agonies of hell, you could never more have trifled with salvation.

Here I find my thoughts run so naturally into the same channel with those of the excellent Mr. Baxter, about a hundred years ago, that you will allow me to give a long quotation from him, that you may see in what light this great and good man viewed the neglected things which the gospel

brings to your ears. His words are these; and I am sure to me they have been very weighty:—"O, sirs, they are no trifles or jesting matters that the gospel speaks of. I must needs profess to you, that when I have the most serious thoughts of these things, I am ready to wonder that such amazing matters do not overwhelm the souls of men: that the greatness of the subject doth not so overmatch our understandings and affections, as even to drive men beside themselves, but that God hath always somewhat allayed it by distance; much more do I wonder that men should be so blockish as to make light of such things. O Lord, that men did but know what everlasting glory and everlasting torments are! Would they then hear us as they do? would they read and think of these things as they do? I profess I have been ready to wonder when I have heard such weighty things delivered, how people can forbear crying out in the congregation, and much more do I wonder how they can rest, till they have gone to their ministers and learned what they shall do to be saved, that this great business should be put out of doubt. O that heaven and hell should work no more upon men! O that eternity should work no more! O how can you forbear when you are alone to think with yourselves what it is to be everlastingly in joy or torment. I wonder that such thoughts do not break your sleep, and that they do not crowd into your minds when you are about your labour! I wonder how you can almost do anything else! How can you have any quietness in your minds? how can you eat or drink, or rest, till you have got some ground of everlasting consolations? Is that a man or a corpse that is not affected with matters of this moment? that can be readier to sleep than to tremble, when he hears how he must stand at the bar of God? Is that a man or a clod of clay that can rise up and lie down without being deeply affected with his everlasting state? that can follow his worldly business, and make nothing of the great business of salvation or damnation, and that when he knows it is so hard at hand? Truly, sirs, when I think of the weight of the matter, I wonder at the best saints upon earth, that they are no better, and do no more in so weighty a case. I wonder at those whom the world accounts more holy than needs, and scorns for making too much ado, that they can put off Christ and their souls with so little; that they do not pour out their souls in every prayer; that they are not more taken up with God; that their thoughts are not more serious in preparation for their last account. I wonder that they are not a thousand times more strict in their lives, and more laborious and unwearied for the crown than they are. And for myself, (says that zealous, flaming, and indefatigable preacher,) as I am ashamed of my dull and careless heart, and of my slow and unprofitable course of life, so the Lord knows I am ashamed of every sermon that I preach: when I think what I am, and who sent me, and how much the salvation and damnation of men is concerned in it, I am ready to tremble, lest God should

judge me as a slighter of his truth and the souls of men, and lest, in my best sermon, I should be guilty of their blood. Methinks we should not speak a word to men in matters of such consequence without tears, or the greatest earnestness that possibly we can. Were we not too much guilty of the sin which we reprove, it would be so. Whether we are alone or in company, methinks our end, and such an end, should still be in our mind, and as before our eyes; and we should sooner forget anything, or set light by anything, or by all things, than by this.”

And now, my brethren, if such a man as this viewed these things in this light, O what shall we, we languishing careless creatures, what shall we think of ourselves? Into what a dead sleep are we fallen! O let the most active and zealous among us awake, and be a thousand times more earnest: and ye frozen-hearted, careless sinners, for God’s sake awake, and exert yourselves to good purpose in the pursuit of salvation, or you are lost to all eternity.

III. Consider whose salvation it is you make light of. It is your own. And do you not care what becomes of your own selves? Is it nothing to you whether you are saved or damned for ever? Is the natural principle of self-love extinct in you? Have you no concern for your own preservation? Are you commenced your own enemies? If you slight Christ and love sin, you virtually love death, Prov. viii. 36. You may as well say, “I will live and yet neither eat nor drink,” as say, “I will go to heaven, and yet make light of Christ.” And you may as well say this in words as by your practice.

IV. Consider your sin is aggravated by professing to believe that gospel which you make light of. For a professed infidel that does not believe the scripture-revelation concerning Christ and a future state of rewards and punishments, for such a one to be careless about these things would not be so strange; but for you that make these things your creed, and a part of your religion, for you that call yourselves Christians, and have been baptized into this faith; for you, I say, to make light of them, how astonishing! how utterly inexcusable! What! believe that you shall live for ever in the most perfect happiness or exquisite misery, and yet take no more pains to obtain the one, and escape the other? What! believe that the great and dreadful God will shortly be your judge, and yet make no more preparation for it? Either say plainly, “I am no Christian, I do not believe these things or else let your hearts be affected with your belief, and let it influence and govern your lives.

V. Consider what those things are which engross your affections, and which tempt you to neglect Christ and your salvation. Have you found out a better friend, or a more substantial and lasting happiness than his salvation? O! what trifles and vanities, what dreams and shadows are men pursuing, while they neglect the important realities of the eternal world! If

crowns and kingdoms, if all the riches, glories, and pleasures of the world were ensured to you as a reward for making light of Christ, you would even then make the most foolish bargain possible; for what are these in the scale to eternal joy or eternal tempest? and *what shall it profit a man if he gain even the whole world, and lose his own soul?* Matt. xvi. 26. But you cannot hope for the ten thousandth part: and will you cast away your souls for this? You that think it such a great thing to live in riches, pleasures, and honours, consider, is it such a mighty happiness to die rich? to die after a life of pleasure and honour? Will it be such a great happiness to give an account for the life of a rich sensualist, rather than of a poor mortified creature? Will Dives then be so much happier than Lazarus? Alas! what does the richest, the highest, the most voluptuous sinner, what does he do, but lay up treasures of wrath against the day of wrath? O how will the unhappy creatures torture themselves for ever with the most cutting reflections for selling their Saviour and their souls for such trifles! Let your sins and earthly enjoyments save you then, if they can; let them then do that for you which Christ would have done for you if you had chosen him. Then go and cry to the gods you have chosen: let them deliver you in the day of your tribulation.

VI. Your making light of Christ and salvation is a certain evidence that you have no interest in them.—Christ will not throw himself and his blessings away upon those who do not value them. “Those that honour him he will honour; but they that despise him shall be lightly esteemed,” 1 Sam. ii. 30. There is a day coming, when you will feel you cannot do without him; when you will feel yourselves perishing for want of a Saviour; and then you may go and look for a Saviour where you will; then may you shift for yourselves as you can; he will have nothing to do with you. The Saviour of sinners will cast you off for ever. I tell you, Sirs, whatever estimate you form of all these things, God thinks very highly of the blood of his Son, and the blessings of his purchase; and if ever you obtain them, he will have you think highly of them too. If you continue to make light of them, all the world cannot save you. And can you find fault with God for denying you that which was so little in your account?

VII. And lastly, the time is hastening when you will not think so slightly of Christ and salvation. O, Sirs, when God shall commission death to tear your guilty souls out of your bodies, when devils shall drag you away to the place of torment, when you find yourselves condemned to everlasting fire by that Saviour whom you now neglect, what would you then give for a Saviour? when divine justice brings in its heavy charges against you, and you have nothing to answer, how will you then cry, “O if I had chosen Jesus for my Saviour, he would have answered all!” When you see that the

world has deserted you, that your companions in sin have deceived themselves and you, and all your merry days are over for ever, would you not then give ten thousand worlds for Christ? And will you not now think him worthy of your esteem and earnest pursuit? Why will ye judge of things now quite the reverse of what you will do then when you will be more capable of judging rightly?

And now, dear immortal souls! I have discovered the nature and danger of this common but unsuspected and unlamented sin, making light of Christ. I have delivered my message, and now I must leave it with you, imploring the blessing of God upon it. I cannot follow you home to your houses to see what effect it has upon you, or to make application of it to each of you in particular; but O may your consciences undertake this office! Whenever you spend another prayerless, thoughtless day, whenever you give yourselves up to sinful pleasures, or an over-eager pursuit of the world, may your conscience become your preacher, and sting you with this expostulation: “Alas! is this the effect of all I have heard? Do I still make light of Christ and the concerns of religion? Oh, what will be the end of such conduct!”

I cannot but fear, after all, that some of you, as usual, will continue careless and impenitent. Well, when you are suffering the punishment of this sin in hell, remember that you were warned, and acquit me from being accessory to your ruin. And when we all appear before the supreme Judge, and I am called to give an account of my ministry: when I am asked, “Did you warn these creatures of their danger? Did you lay before them their guilt in making light of these things?” you will allow me to answer, “Yes, Lord, I warned them in the best manner I could, but they would not believe me; they would not regard what I said, though enforced by the authority of thy awful name, and confirmed by thine own word.” O sirs, must I give in this accusation against any of you? No, rather have mercy upon yourselves, and have mercy upon me, that I may give an account of you with joy, and not with grief.