

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

UNPROFITABLE SERVANTS.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, JUNE 6TH, 1880, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

“And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”—Matthew xxv. 30.

“So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do.”—Luke xvii. 10.

“His lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant.”—Matthew xxv. 21.

THERE is a narrow path between indifference and morbid sensibility. Some men seem to feel no holy anxiety: they place their Master's talent in the earth, leave it there, and take their pleasure and their ease without a moment's compunction. Others profess to be so anxious to be right that they come to the conclusion that they can never be so, and fall under a horror of God, viewing his service as a drudgery, and himself as a hard master—though probably they never say so. Between these two lines there is a path, narrow as a razor's edge, which only the grace of God can enable us to trace; it is free alike from carelessness and from bondage, and consists in a sense of responsibility bravely borne by the help of the Holy Spirit. The right way usually lies between two extremes: it is the narrow channel between the rock and the whirlpool. There is a sacred way which runs between self-congratulation and despondency, a very difficult track to find, and very hard to keep. There are great perils in the consciousness that you have done well, and that you are serving God with all your might; for you may come to think that you are a deserving person, worthy to rank among the princes of Israel. The danger of being puffed up can hardly be overestimated: a dizzy head soon brings a fall. But perhaps equally to be dreaded on the other side is that sense of unworthiness which paralyzes all exertion, making you feel that you are incapable of anything that is great or good. Under this impulse have men fled from the service of God into a life of sol-

itude; they felt that they could not behave valiantly in the battle of life, and therefore they fled from the field before the fight began, to become hermits or monks; as if it were possible to do the Lord's perfect will by doing nothing at all, and to discharge the duties to which they were born by an unnatural mode of existence. Blessed is that man who finds the strait and narrow way between high thoughts of self and hard thoughts of God, between self-esteem and a timid shrinking from all effort. My desire is that the Spirit of God may guide our minds into the golden mean where holy graces blend, and the contending vices, equally natural to our evil hearts, are all excluded. May the Spirit of God bless our three texts and the three subjects suggested by them, so that we may be put right, and then by infinite mercy may be kept right until the great day of account.

Let us read Matthew xxv. 30.

“And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

In this our first text we have THE VERDICT OF JUSTICE upon the man who did not use his talent. The man is here styled an “unprofitable servant” because he was slothful, useless, worthless. He did not bring his master interest for his money nor render him any sincere service. He did not faithfully discharge the trust reposed in him as his fellow servants did.

Notice, first, that *this unprofitable person was a servant*. He never denied that he was a servant; in fact, it was by his position as a servant that he became possessed of his one talent, and to that possession he never demurred. If he had been capable of receiving more, there is no reason why he should not have had two talents, or five; for the Scripture tells us that the master gave to every man according to his several ability. He owned the rule of his master even in the act of burying the talent, and in appearing before him to give an account;. This makes the subject the more heart-searching for you and for me; for we, too, profess to be servants—servants of the Lord our God. Judgment must begin at the house of God; that is, with those who are in the house of the Lord as children and servants: let us, therefore, look well to our goings. If judgment first begin at us, “what shall be the end of them that obey not the gospel of God?” “If the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?” If this in our text be judgment upon servants, what will be the judgment upon enemies? This man acknowledged that he was a servant even to the last; and though he was impertinent and impudent enough to express a most wicked and slanderous opinion about his master, yet he neither denied his own position as a servant, nor the fact that his talent was his lord's, for he said, “Lo, there thou hast that is thine.” In thus speaking he went rather further than some professing Christians do, for they live as if Christianity were all

eating the fat and drinking the sweet and not serving at all; as if religion had many privileges but no precepts, and as if, when men were saved, they became licensed loiterers to whom it is a matter of honour to magnify free grace by standing all the day idle in the market-place. Alas, I know some who never do a hand's turn for Christ, and yet call him Master and Lord. Ill will it fare with them at his coming. Many of us acknowledge that we are servants, that everything we have belongs to our Master, and that we are bound to live for him. So far, so good; but we may get as far as that, and yet in the end we may be found unprofitable servants, and so be cast into outer darkness, where shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Let us take heed of this.

This man, though a servant, *thought ill of his master*, and disliked his service: he said, "I knew thee that thou art a hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed." Certain professors who have stolen into the church are of the same mind: they dare not say that they regret their having joined the church, and yet they so act that all may conclude that if it could be undone they would not do the like again. They do not find pleasure in the service of God, but continue to pursue its routine as a matter of habit or a hard obligation. They get into the spirit of the elder brother, and they say, "Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandments, and yet thou never gavest me a kid that I might make merry with my friends." They sit down on the shady side of godliness, and never bask in the sun which shines full upon it. They forget that the father said to the elder son, "Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine." He might have had as many feastings, as many lambs and kids as he desired, he would have been denied no good thing. The presence of his father ought to have been his joy and his delight; and better than all merry-makings with his friends; and it would have been so if he had been in a proper state of heart. The man who hid his talent had carried the evil and petulant spirit much further than that elder brother; but the germs are the same, and we must mind that we crush them at the beginning.

This unprofitable servant looked upon his master as one that reaped where he never sowed, and used the rake to gather together what he had never scattered: he meant that he was a hard, exacting, and unjust person, whom it was difficult to please. He judged his lord to be one who expected more of his servants than he had any right to look for, and he had such a hatred of his unjust conduct that he resolved to tell him to his face what he thought of him. This spirit may readily creep over the minds of professors. I fear it is brooding over many even now, for they are not content with Christ. If they want pleasure they go outside the church to get it: their joys are not within the circle of which Christ is the centre. Their religion is their

labour, not their delight; their God is their dread, not their joy. They do not delight themselves in the Lord, and therefore he does not give them the desire of their hearts, and so they grow more and more discontented. They could not call him “God, mine exceeding joy,” and so he is a terror to them. Devotion is a dreary engagement to them; they wish that they could escape from it with an easy conscience. They do not say as much to their secret selves: but you can read between the lines these words—“What a weariness it is.” It is no wonder when things come to this pass that a professor becomes an unprofitable servant; for who can do a work well which he hates to do? Forced service is not desirable. God wants not slaves to grace his throne. A servant who is not pleased with his situation had better leave. If he is not content with his Master he had better find another, for their mutual relationship will be unpleasant and unprofitable. When it comes to this, that you and I are discontented with our God, and dissatisfied with his work, we had better look out for another lord, if any such will have us, for we shall certainly be unprofitable to the Lord Jesus from our want of love to him.

Note next, that, albeit this man was doing nothing for his master, *he did not think himself an unprofitable servant*. He exhibited no self-depreciation, no humbling, no contrition. He was as bold as brass, and said unblushingly, “Lo, there thou hast that is thine.” He came before his master with no apologies or excuses. He did not join with those who have done all, and then say, “We are unprofitable servants”; for he felt that he had dealt with his Lord as the justice of the case deserved; indeed, instead of acknowledging any fault he turned to accusing his lord. It is even so with false professors. They have no idea that they are hypocrites, the thought does not cross their minds. They have no notion that they are unfaithful. Hint at it, and see how they will defend themselves. If they are not living as they ought to do, they claim to be pitied rather than blamed; the blame lies with Providence; it is the fault of circumstances: it is the fault of anybody but themselves. They have done nothing, and yet they feel more at ease than those who have done everything. They have taken the trouble to dig in the earth and hide their talent, and they as good as ask—what more do you want? Is God so exacting as to expect me to bring more to him than he gave me? I am as grateful and prayerful as God makes me—what more will he require? There is, you see, no bowing in the dust with a sense of imperfection, but an arrogant casting upon God of all blame; and this, too, under the pretence of honouring his sovereign grace! Ah me! that men should be able to torture truth into such presumptuous falsehood.

Mark well, that the verdict of justice at last may turn out to be the very opposite of that which we pronounce upon ourselves. He who proudly thinks himself profitable shall be found unprofitable, and he who modestly judges himself to be unprofitable may in the end come to hear his Master

say, “Well done, good and faithful servant.” So little are we able, through the defects of our conscience, to form a right estimate of ourselves, that we frequently reckon ourselves to be rich and increased in goods, and having need of nothing, when, indeed, we are naked, and poor, and miserable. Such was the case with this unfaithful servant: he wrapped himself up in the conceit that he was even more just than his lord, and had an argument to plead which he thought would exonerate him from all blame.

It should give rise to much searching of heart when we notice *what this unprofitable servant did, or, rather, what he did not do*. He carefully deposited his capital where no one was able to find it and steal it; and there was an end of his service. We ought to observe that he did not spend that talent upon himself, or use it in business for his own benefit. He was not a thief, nor in any way a misappropriator of moneys placed under his charge. In this he excels many who profess to be the servants of God, and yet live to themselves only. What little talent they have is used in their own business, and never upon their Lord’s concerns. They have the power of getting money, but their money is not made for Christ; such an idea never occurs to them. Their efforts are all for themselves, or—to use other words to express the same thing—*for* their families. Yonder is a man who has the gift of eloquent speech, and he uses it, not for Christ, but for himself, that he may win popularity, that he might arrive at a respectable position: the one end and object of his most earnest speech is to bring grist to his own mill, and gain to his own estate. Everywhere this is to be seen amongst professors, that they are living to themselves: they are not adulterers or drunkards, far from it; neither are they thieves or spendthrifts; they are decent, orderly, quiet sort of people; but still, they begin and end with self. What is this but to be an unprofitable servant? What is a servant to me if he works hard for himself and does nothing for me? A professing Christian may toil till he becomes a rich man, an alderman in the City, a Lord Mayor, a member of Parliament, a millionaire; but what does that prove? Why, that he could work and did work well for himself; and if all this while he has done little or nothing for Christ, he is all the more condemned by his own success: if he had worked for his Lord as he worked for himself, what might he not have accomplished? The unprofitable servant in the parable was not so bad as that: and yet he was cast into outer darkness. What then will become of some of you?

Furthermore, the wicked servant did not go and mis-spend his talent: he did not waste it in self-indulgence and wickedness as the prodigal son did, who spent his substance in riotous living. Oh, no; he was a much better man than that. He would not waste a halfpenny; he was all for saving and running no risks. The talent was as he received it, only wrapped up in a napkin and hidden in the earth—put into a bank, in fact, but a bank which

gave no interest. He never touched a penny of it for a feast or a revel, and therefore could not be accused of being a spendthrift with his lord's money; in all which he was superior to those who yield their strength to sin, and use their abilities to gratify the guilty passions of themselves and others.

I grieve to add that some who call themselves servants of Christ lay out their strength to undermine the gospel they profess to teach; they speak against the holy name by which they are named, and thus they use their talent against their Master. This man did not do so; he was bad enough in heart for anything, but he had never openly become so base a traitor. He never employed learning in order to raise needless doubts, or to resist the plain doctrines of the word of God; this has been reserved for divines of these latter days—days which produce monsters unknown to less educated times.

This man's talent had not been wasted under his hand, it was as he had received it, and he therefore reckoned he had been faithful. Ah! but this is not what Christ calls faithfulness—just to keep where we are. If you think you have grace and only keep what you have, without obtaining more, it will be hiding your talent in the earth and keeping it a barren thing. It is not enough to retain; you must advance. The capital may be there, but where is the interest? To be living without aim or purpose beyond that of keeping up your position is to be a wicked and slothful servant, condemned already. While meditating upon this subject may we each one say to himself, "Lord, is it I?"

His lord called this servant "wicked." Is it, then, a wicked thing to be unprofitable? Surely wickedness must mean some positive action. No. Not to do right is to be wicked; not to live for Christ is to be wicked; not to be of use in the world is to be wicked; not to bring glory to the name of the Lord is to be wicked; to be slothful is to be wicked. It is clear that there are many wicked people in the world who would not like to be called so. "Wicked and slothful;" these are the two words which are riveted together by the Lord Jesus, whose speech is always wise. A schoolboy was asked by his master "What are you doing, John?" He was called up; and thought to be quite clear by saying, "I was doing nothing, sir;" but his master answered, "That is the very thing for which I called you out, for you ought to have been doing the lesson which I set you." It will be no excuse at the last for you to cry, "I was doing nothing, sir!" Were not those on the left hand made to depart with a curse upon them because they did nothing? Is it not written: "Curse ye Meroz, said the angel of the Lord, curse ye bitterly the inhabitants thereof; because they came not to the help of the Lord, to the help of the Lord against the mighty." He who does nothing is a "wicked and slothful servant."

This man was condemned to outer darkness. Notice this: he was con-

demned to be *as he was*, for hell, in one light, may be described as the great Captain's saying, "As you were." "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still; and he that is filthy, let him be filthy still." In another world there is permanence of character: enduring holiness is heaven, continual evil is hell. This man was outside of the family of his lord. He thought his lord a hard master, and so proved that he had no love to him, and that he was not really one of his household. He was outside in heart, and so his lord said to him, "Remain outside." Besides that, he was in the dark: he had wrong notions of his master; for his lord was not an austere and hard man, he did not gather where he had not strawed, nor reap where he had not sown. Therefore his lord said, "You are wilfully in the dark: abide there in the darkness which is outside." This man was envious: he could not endure his master's prosperity; he gnashed his teeth at the thought of it. He was sentenced to continue in that mind, and so to gnash his teeth for ever. This is a dreadful idea of eternal punishment, this permanence of character in an immortal spirit:—"He that is unjust, let him be unjust still." While the character of the ungodly will be permanent, it will also be more and more developed along its own lines: the bad points will become worse, and, with nothing to restrain it, evil will become viler still. In the next world, where there are no hindrances from the existence of a church and a gospel, the man will ripen to a more hideous maturity of enmity against God, and a more horrible degree of consequent misery. Sorrow is bound up with sin: abiding in sinfulness, a man must necessarily abide in wretchedness; for the wicked is like the troubled sea which cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. What must it be to be for ever outside the family of God! Never to be God's child! For ever in the dark! Never to see the light of holy knowledge, and purity, and hope! For ever to gnash one's teeth with painful contempt and abhorrence of God, whom to hate is hell! O for grace to be made to love him, whom to love is heaven. The unprofitable servant had a dreadful wage to take when his master reckoned with him, but who can say that he had not well earned it? He had the due reward of his deeds, O our God! grant that such may not be the lot of any one of us!

I must now call your attention to the second text:—

"So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do."—Luke xvii. 10.

This is THE VERDICT OF SELF-ABASEMENT, given forth from the heart of servants who had laboriously discharged the full work of the day. This is a part of a parable intended to rebuke all notions of self-importance and human merit. When a servant has been ploughing or feeding cattle, his master does not say to him, "Sit down, and I will wait upon you, for I am deeply in

your debt.” No, his master bids him prepare the evening meal and wait upon him. His services are due, and therefore his master does not praise him as if he were a wonder and a hero. He is only doing his duty if he perseveres from morning light to set of sun, and he by no means expects to have his work held up to admiration or rewarded with extra pay and humble thanks. Neither are we to boast of our services, but think little of them, confessing that we are unprofitable servants.

Whatever of pain may have been caused by the first part of the discourse, I trust it will only prepare us the more deeply to enter into the spirit of our second text. Both these texts are graven on my heart as with an iron pen, by a merciless wound, inflicted when I was too feeble to bear it. When I was exceedingly ill in the South of France, and deeply depressed in spirit—so deeply depressed and so sick and ill that I scarce knew how to live,—one of those malicious persons who commonly haunt all public men, and especially ministers, sent me anonymously a letter, openly directed to “*That unprofitable servant C. H. Spurgeon.*” This letter contained tracts directed to the enemies of the Lord Jesus, with passages marked and underlined, with notes applying them to myself. How many Rabshekahs have in their day written to me! Ordinarily I read them with the patience which comes of use, and they go to light the fire. I do not look for exemption from this annoyance, nor do I usually feel it hard to bear, but in the hour when my spirits were depressed, and I was in terrible pain, this reviling letter cut me to the quick. I turned upon my bed and asked—Am I, then, an unprofitable servant? I grieved exceedingly, and could not lift up my head, or find rest. I reviewed my life, and saw its infirmities and imperfections, but knew not how to put my case till this second text came to my relief, and answered as the verdict of my bruised heart. I said to myself, “I hope I am not an unprofitable servant in the sense in which this person intends to call me so; but I am assuredly so in the other sense.” I cast myself upon my Lord and Master once again with a deeper sense of the meaning of the text than I had felt before: his atoning sacrifice revived me, and in humble faith I found rest. By the way, I wonder that any human being should find pleasure in trying to inflict pain upon those who are sick and depressed; yet are there persons who delight to do so. Surely, if there are no evil spirits down below, there are some up above, and the servants of the Lord Jesus receive painful proofs of their activity. Let me, then, if you have felt any pain from the first text lead you to the point at which I personally arrived when at last I could thank God for that letter, and feel that it was salutary medicine to my spirit.

This which is put into our mouths as a confession that we are unprofitable servants is meant to rebuke us when we think we are somebody, and have done somewhat worthy of praise. Our text is meant to rebuke us if we

think that we have done enough, that we have borne the burden and heat of the day a long time, and have been kept at our post beyond our own watch. If we conclude that we have achieved a fine day's work of harvesting, and ought to be invited home to rest, the text upbraids us. If we feel an inordinate covetousness after comfort, and wish the Lord would give us some present and striking reward for what we have done, the text shames us. This is a proud, unchildlike, unservantlike spirit, and it must be put down with a firm hand.

In the first place, *in what way can we have profited God?* Eliphaz has well said, "Can a man be profitable unto God, as he that is wise may be profitable unto himself? Is it any pleasure to the Almighty, that thou art righteous? or is it gain to him, that thou makest thy ways perfect? "If we have given to God of our substance, is he our debtor? In what way have we enriched him to whom all the silver and gold belongs? If we have laid our lives out with the devotion of martyrs and missionaries for his sake, what is that to him, whose glory fills the heavens and the earth? How can we dream of putting the Eternal in debt to us? The right spirit is to say with David, "O my soul, thou hast said unto the Lord, Thou art my Lord: my goodness extendeth not to thee; but to the saints that are in the earth, and to the excellent, in whom is all my delight." How can a man place his Maker under an obligation to him? Let us not dote so blasphemously.

Dear brethren, we ought to recollect that *whatever service we have been able to render has been a matter of debt*. I hope our morality is not fallen so low that we take credit to ourselves for paying our debts. I do not find men in business priding themselves and saying, "I paid a thousand pounds this morning to such an one." "Well, did you give it to him?" " "Oh no; it was all owing to him." Is that any great thing? Have we come to such a low state of spiritual morals that we think we have done a great deal when we give to God his due? "It is he that made us, and not we ourselves." Jesus Christ has bought us: "we are not our own," for we are "bought with a price." We have also entered into covenant with him, and given ourselves over to him voluntarily. Were we not baptized into his name and into his death? Whatever we may do is only what he has a right to claim at our hands from our creation, redemption, and professed surrender to him. When we have persevered in the hard work of ploughing till no field is left untilled, when we have done the pleasanter work of feeding the sheep and when we have finished by spreading the table of communion for our Lord: when we have done all we have done no more than was our duty to have done. Why boast we, then, or cry for a discharge, or look for thanks?

Over and above this there is the sad reflection that, alas, *in all we have done we have been unprofitable through being imperfect*. In the ploughing there have been baulks, in the feeding of the cattle there have been harsh-

ness and forgetfulness, in the spreading of the table the viands have been unworthy of such a Lord as we serve. How must our service appear to him of whom we read, "Behold, he put no trust in his servants, and his angels he charged with folly." Can any of you look back upon your service of your Lord with satisfaction? If you can, I cannot say I envy you, for I do not sympathise with you in the least degree, but tremble for your safety. As for myself, I am compelled to say with solemn truthfulness that I am not content with anything I have ever done. I have half wished to live my life over again, but now I regret that my proud heart allowed me so to wish, since the probabilities are that I should do worse the second time. Whatever grace has done for me I acknowledge with deep gratitude; but so far as I have done anything myself I beg pardon for it. I pray God to forgive my prayers, for they have been full of fault; I beseech him to forgive even this confession, for it is not as humble as it ought to be; I beseech him to wash my tears and purge my devotions, and to baptize me into a true burial with my Saviour, that I may be quite forgotten in myself, and only remembered in him. Ah, Lord, thou knowest how far we fall short of the humility we ought to feel. Pardon us in this thing. We are all of us unprofitable servants, and if thou shouldst judge us by the law we must be cast away.

Once more, we cannot congratulate ourselves at all, even if we have had success in our Lord's work, since *for all that we have done we are indebted to our Lord's abundant grace*. If we had done all our duty, we should not have done anything if his grace had not enabled us to do it. If our zeal no respite knows, it is he that keeps the fire burning. If our tears of repentance flow, it is he that strikes the rock and fetches the waters from it. If there be any virtue, if there be any praise, if there be any faith, if there be any ardour, if there be any likeness to Christ, we are his workmanship, created by him, and therefore to ourselves we dare not take a particle of the praise. Of thine own have we given unto thee, great God! So far as anything has been worth thine accepting, it was thine own beforehand. Hence the best are still unprofitable servants.

If we have special cause of regret because of some evident error, we shall be wise to go in a lowly spirit and confess the fault, and then go on doing the work of each day in a plodding, hopeful spirit. Whenever you get distressed because you cannot do what you would; whenever you see the faultiness of your own service, and condemn yourself for it, the best thing is to go and do something more in the strength of the Lord. If you have not served Jesus well up to now, go and do better. If you make a blunder do not tell everybody, and say that you will never try again, but do two good things to make up for the failure. Say, "My blessed Lord and Master shall not be more a loser by me than I can help. I will not so much fret over the past as amend the present and wake up for the future." Brethren, try to be

more profitable, and ask for more grace. The servant's business is not to hide himself in a corner of the field and cry, but to go on ploughing; not to bleat with sheep, but feed them, and so prove your love to Jesus. You are not to stand at the head of the table and say, "I have not spread the table for my Master so well as I could have desired." No, go and spread it better. Have courage; you are not serving a hard Master after all; and, though you very properly call yourself an unprofitable servant, be of good cheer, for a gentler verdict shall be pronounced upon you ere long. You are not your own judge either for good or ill; another judge is at the door, and when he cometh he will think better of you than your self-abasement permits you to think of yourself: he will judge you by the rule of grace and not by law, and he will end all that dread which comes of a legal spirit and hovers over you with vampire wings.

Thus I have brought you to the third text,

"His lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant."—
Matthew xxv. 21.

I shall not try to preach upon that cheering word, but shall only say a word or two upon it. It is much too grand a text to be treated upon at the end of a sermon. We find the Lord saying to those who had used their talents industriously, "Well done, good and faithful servant." This is THE VERDICT OF GRACE. Blessed is the man who shall own himself to be an unfaithful servant; and blessed is the man to whom his Lord shall say, "Thou good and faithful servant."

Observe here that the "Well done" of the Master is *given to faithfulness*. It is not "Well done, thou good and brilliant servant;" for perhaps the man never shone at all in the eyes of those who appreciate glare and glitter. It is not, "Well done, thou great and distinguished servant;" for it is possible that he was never known beyond his native village. He conscientiously did his best with his "few things," and never wasted an opportunity for doing good, and thus he proved himself faithful.

The same praise was given to the man with two talents as to his fellow-servant with five. Their stations were very different; but their reward was the same. "Well done, good and faithful servant," was won and enjoyed by each of them. Is it not very sweet to think that though I may have only one talent I shall not thereby be debarred from my Lord's praise? It is my faithfulness on which he will fix his eye, and not upon the number of my talents. I may have made many mistakes, and have confessed my faults with great grief; but he will commend me as he did the woman of whom he said, "She hath done what she could." It is better to be faithful in the infant-school than to be unfaithful in a noble class of young men. Better to be faithful in a hamlet over two or three score of people, than to be unfaithful

in a great city parish, with thousands perishing in consequence. Better to be faithful in a cottage meeting, speaking of Christ crucified to half-a-hundred villagers, than to be unfaithful in a great building where thousands congregate. I pray you be faithful in laying out all that you are and have for God. As long as you live, whatever faults you have, be not half-hearted or double-minded, but be faithful in intent and desire. This is the point of the Judge's praise,—the servant's faithfulness.

This verdict was *given of sovereign grace*. The reward was not according to the work, for the servant had been "faithful in a few things," but he was made "ruler over many things." The verdict itself is not after the rule of works, but according to the law of grace. Our good works are evidences of grace within us; our faithfulness, therefore, as servants, will be the evidence of our having a loving spirit towards our Master,—evidence, therefore, that our heart is changed, and that we have been made to love him for whom once we had no affection. Our works are the proof of our love, and hence they stand as evidence of the grace of God. God first gives us grace, and then rewards us for it. He works in us, and then counts the fruit as our work. We work out our own salvation, because "he worketh in us to will and to do of his own good pleasure." If he shall ever say, "Well done" to you and to me it will be because of his own rich grace, and not because of our merits. And, indeed, this is where we must all come and where we must all keep; for the idea that we have any personal merit will soon make us find fault with our Master, and his service, as being austere and hard.

I have sometimes admired how men who have denied the doctrine of salvation by grace, as a matter of theology, have, nevertheless, admitted it in their devotions. They have entered into controversy against it, and yet unconsciously they have believed it. An extreme case is that of Cardinal Bellarmine, who was one of the most inveterate enemies of the Reformation, and a renowned antagonist of the teaching of Martin Luther. I will quote from one of his works (*Inst. De Justificatione, Lib v., c. 1*). He says, in summing up, "On account of the uncertain nature of our own works and the danger of vain-glory, it is the safest course to place our whole trust in the mercy and loving-kindness of God." Thou hast well said, O Cardinal; and since the safest course is that which we would choose, we will place our whole trust in the mercy and loving-kindness of God. It is reported, and I believe on excellent authority, that this great man, who had all his life long been crying up salvation by works, when dying, breathed a prayer in Latin, the translation of which would be something like this: "I beseech God, who weighs not our merits, but graciously pardons our offences, that he would receive me among his saints and his elect." Is Saul also among the prophets? Does Bellarmine at the last pray like a Calvinist? Such a case makes one hope that many others may be saved in an apostate church.

Thank God, many are a great deal better than their creed, and in their hearts believe what, as polemical theologians, they deny. However this may be, I know that if I am saved or rewarded it must be of grace alone, for I can have no other hope. As for those who have done much for the church, we know that they will disclaim all praise, saying, "Lord, when saw we thee an hungered and gave thee meat; or thirsty and gave thee drink?" All the Lord's faithful servants will sing, "*Non nobis domine.*" Not unto us. Not unto us.

Lastly, brethren, with what infinite delight will Jesus fill our hearts if, through divine grace, we are happy enough to hear him say, "Well done, good and faithful servant." Oh, if we shall hold on to the end despite the temptations of Satan, and the weakness of our nature, and all the entanglements of the world, and keep our garments unspotted from the world, preaching Christ according to our measure of ability, and winning souls for him, what an honour it will be! What bliss for him to say, "Well done." The music of these two words will have heaven in them to us. How different it will be from the verdict of our fellow-men, who are often finding fault with this and that, though we do our best. We never could please them, but we have pleased our Lord. Men were always misinterpreting our words and misjudging our motives, but he sets all right by saying, "Well done!" Little will it matter then what all the rest have said: neither the flattering words of friends nor the harsh condemnations of enemies will have any weight with us when he says, "Well done!" Not with pride shall we receive that eulogium; for we shall reckon ourselves even then to have been unprofitable servants; but oh how we shall love him for setting such an estimate upon the cups of cold water we gave to his disciples, and the poor broken service we tried to render him. What condescension to call that well done which we feel was so ill done!

I pray God's servants here, who this morning first began with searching themselves, and then went on to confess their imperfections, now to close by rejoicing in the fact that, if we are believing in Christ Jesus, and are really consecrated to him, we shall conclude this life and begin the next with that blessed verdict of "Well done!" Mind, however, that you are those who are doing all and are faithful. I hear some people speak against self-righteousness, to whom I would say, "You need not say much about that matter, for it does not concern you, since you have no righteousness to be proud of." I hear persons speak against salvation by good works who are in no danger of falling into that error, since good works and their lives have long parted company. What I do admire is to see a man like Paul, who lived for Jesus, and was ready to die for him, yet saying at the close of his life, "But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. 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 do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith." Go on, brothers, and think not of resting till your day's work is done. Serve God with all your might. Do more than the Pharisees, who hope to be saved by their zeal. Do more than your brethren expect of you, and then, when you have done all, lay it at your Redeemer's feet with this confession, "I am an unprofitable servant." It is to those who blend faithfulness with humility and ardour with self-abasement that Jesus will say, "Well done, good and faithful servant: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Matthew xxv. 14–46.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK."—906, 670, 364.
