

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

WORK FOR JESUS.

A Sermon

DELIVERED [1877AD] BY

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“Son, go work today in my vineyard.”—Matthew xxi. 28.

I AM not going to confine myself to the connection of these words, nor to use them strictly after the manner in which they were first spoken. I may, perhaps, explain the parable very briefly at the close; but I take leave to withdraw these words from their immediate context, and use them as a voice which, I believe, sounds often in the ears of God’s people, and sometimes sounds in vain.—“Son, go work today in my vineyard.” It is certain that God still speaks to us. He has spoken to us in his word. There are his precepts and promises; his statutes and testimonies. He that hath ears to hear let him hear these sacred oracles. But beside this open revelation there are counsels and rebukes more closely and personally addressed to the conscience; voices—soft sometimes as whispers, at other times loud as the thunders that pealed from Sinai. The Lord has a way of speaking to men when “he openeth the ears of men and sealeth their instruction,” as Elihu said. Thus he speaks when he calls them effectually by his grace in conversion. So he once called “Samuel, Samuel,” till the child answered. So he said, “Matthew, follow me.” So he called out, “Zaccheus, come down.” So he cried out, “Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?” So he bid some of us till the divine accents were clear and irresistible. In like manner we have, many of us, heard him say, “Son, give me thy heart; and we have given him our hearts: we could do no otherwise. That voice exerted such a charming spell and swayed us with such a divine power that we were subdued by it, and we yielded our hearts to the God of love. Since then you who know the Lord must often have heard a voice speaking to you and bidding you seek his face in prayer. Perhaps you have been busy with the world, but you found an impulse of a mysterious kind coming over you, and you have been fain to withdraw yourself for a few minutes to the closet that you might speak with God. You know how it has been when you have been meditat-

ing alone, and yet not alone. One whose presence you knew, whose fact you could not see, was with you. You felt as if you must pray. It has not been any effort on your part. The exercise has been as easy as to breathe and as pleasant as to partake of your daily bread. You felt the Lord drawing you to the mercy-seat and saying in your soul, “My son, ask what thou wilt and it shall be done unto thee.” You must have been conscious of such a voice as that.

And have you not at times, in the silence of your mind, heard the Lord call you to a closer communion with himself? Has not the sense, if not the words, of the spouse in the canticle been heard in your soul,— “Come, my beloved, let us see if the vines flourish. Come with me from Lebanon my spouse, with me from Lebanon.”? You have been up and away. You have gone into the secret places where Christ has shown you his love, till you sat under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit has been sweet to your taste. Our experience makes us know that there are heavenly voices that invite prayer and call to communion. And probably some of you have also been conscious of another voice which I earnestly desire we may all hear tonight, namely, the more martial and stirring call to service for the Lord Jesus Christ. Some of you have been obedient to the call these many years, and it calls louder and louder and louder still. You have been reaping, and bearing the heat and burden of the day, but you cannot throw down your sickle, your hand cleaves to it. Yea, rather do you take more gigantic strides and sweep down more of the precious corn at every stroke you take. You feel that you can never cease from it till you do

“Your body with your charge lay down,
And cease at once to work and live.”

A voice divine seems calling thee and saying, “Follow me, and I will make thee a fisher of men. Behold I have made thee a chosen vessel to bear my name unto the Gentiles.” You have heard that voice, and you are striving to obey it more and more.

Others either have never heard it, or hearing it have forgotten it. There are none so deaf as those who will not hear, and there are some who have a very deaf ear to any admonitions of this kind. They are like Issachar—a strong ass crouching down between two burdens, but yet lifting neither. I fear lest upon them should come the curse of Meroz, because they come not “to the help of the Lord—to the help of the Lord against the mighty.” Now, mayhap this evening there are some Christian men or women here that shall feel as if the hand of the Crucified were laid upon them, and they hear him say to them, “Ye are not your own. Ye are bought with a price; wherefore glorify God in your bodies and in your spirits, which are his. Awake thou that sleepest and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.”

The text, I hope, may be blest of God to be such a voice as that. Listen-

ing to it, we notice four things. First, *the character under which it calls us*, “Son”: secondly, *the service to which it calls us*, “go work”; thirdly, *the time for which it calls us*, “go work today”; and fourthly, *the place to which it directs us*, “go work today in my vineyard.”

I. First, then, THE CHARACTER UNDER WHICH IT CALLS US.

It appears to me to be a very powerful selection of terms. “Son, go work today in my vineyard.” It puts work on a very gracious footing, when we are bidden to work for the Lord, not as slaves, nor as mere servants, but as sons. Moses speaks to us, and he says, “Servant, go and work for thy wages.” But the Father in Christ speaks to us, and he says, “Son, go work today in my vineyard.” No more as a servant, but as a son, shalt thou serve the Lord. The returning prodigal said “Make me as one of thy hired servants.” That was not an evangelical prayer, and was not answered. The father said, “This my son was dead, and is alive again,” and so he received him, not as a hired servant at all, but as a son. Oh, dear people of God, I trust you always draw the distinction very clearly between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace. When you work for God you do not work *for* life but *from* life. You do not try to serve Christ in order that you may be saved, but because you are saved. You do not obey his commands that you may become his children, but because you are his children, and therefore are imitators of God as dear children. You say “Abba, Father,” because you feel the spirit of adoption within you, and you endeavour to obey the commands of your Father for the selfsame reason. I do not, therefore, say to anyone here, “Go and work for God that you may be saved.” I would not venture to put it on that footing. “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.” But turning to those who are saved, the gospel exhortation is put after a gospel sort—“Son, go work today in my vineyard.”

And it has all the more strength on this account, because, in addressing us as sons, it reminds us of the great love which has made us what we are. We were by nature heirs of wrath even as others, but, beloved, “Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God.” Think of the love which chose us when we were still aliens and enemies; the love which adopted us, and put us into the family, itself wondering while it did it, for the Lord is represented as saying, “How shall I put thee among the children?”—as if it were a strange thing that such as we are should ever be numbered among the children of God. The love which adopted us did not stay there, but having given us the rights of children, it gave us the nature of children, wherefore we were regenerated—“Begotten again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead; born, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God which liveth and abideth for ever.” Now, just think of election, adoption, regeneration, and when the Lord addresses you by that term of “son,” think of all that and say, “I owe to God an immeasurable debt of

gratitude for having enabled me to become his son: giving me power and privilege to become a child of God. Therefore do I feel the claims of obligation, and I would endeavour to work in the vineyard because I am his child, his son, his daughter, made so by his grace.”

This you see, dear friends, engages us to work in the vineyard all the more cogently, because we may reflect not only on the grace which has made us sons, but on the privileges which that same grace bestowed upon us in making us sons; for, if children of God, the Lord will provide for us, will clothe us, will heal us, will protect us, will guide us, will educate us, will make us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light. Remember, too, that precious passage, “If children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.” If heirs of God, how large is our inheritance, and if joint heirs with Christ how sure that inheritance is; and. we have been brought now, beloved, to such an estate as this that the angels themselves might envy us, for I venture to apply a passage of Scripture to this case—I hope without wresting it—“Unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son?” But he speaks thus to us poor worms of the dust, and when he is bidding us serve him he comes to us under this character, and addresses us in this relationship, and he says, “Son, daughter, go work today in my vineyard. I have given thee privileges boundless in making thee my child. I have given thee this world and worlds to come. Earth is thy lodge, and heaven thy home. And therefore, because I have done all this for thee —and what could I have done more for thee than have made thee my child?—therefore I say, Go, work today in my vineyard.”

In appealing thus to us under the name of son, it is supposed that we have some feelings within us correspondent to the condition to which our heavenly Father has called us. He says, “son.” If any of you, being a son, hath a father, and if that father wished you to do something for him, and he addressed you as “my son,” you would feel at once that whatever you could do you were bound to do because you were a son. It would awaken in you the filial feeling which is swift at once to yield obedience and love. And when the Lord looks upon thee, my brother, and says to thee “Son,” it is supposed that there is in thy heart a child’s nature given by his grace, and that this filial instinct prompts the quick response, ^ My Father, what dost thou say to me? Speak, Lord, speak, Father, for thy son heareth thee. I long to do thy will. I delight in it, for to me it is the greatest joy I know that thou art my Father and my God. Therefore, Lord, my heart stands ready now to listen to whatever thou hast to say, and my hand is ready to do it, as thy grace shall enable me, only strengthen me in thy ways. Son, daughter, go work today in my vineyard.

By the use of that term “son,” also, it is supposed that you have something of the qualification that will fit you to do what he bids you. A man

who has a vineyard naturally supposes that his son knows something about vineyards. The boy will have learned something through his sire, and you that know the Lord are the only people that can serve him in his vineyard—that is to say, in winning souls for Christ none can do this but those who are won themselves. If there be a lost child to be reclaimed, he shall be brought in by one of the children who has himself been found. Unto the wicked God saith, “What hast thou to do to declare my statutes?” but to you who are his sons and daughters he entrusts the gospel, putting you in trust with it that you may bear it to others and bring others to know and love his name. Oh, dear friends, it must be a dreadful thing to be trying to save the souls of others while you yourselves are lost; and what an unhappy mortal must he be who has to preach the gospel that he never knew—to tell of promises that he has never believed, and to preach a Christ in whom his soul has never trusted! But when the Lord speaks to you as his son and his daughter, the very fact that you stand in that relationship to him proves that you have some qualification for the service; and, therefore, dear brother or sister, you must not back out of it. You must not wrap your talent in a napkin, for you have got some talent in the very fact of being a child of God—a son or daughter of the Most High.

Thus have I tried to open up the character to whom the Lord speaks, but I cannot do it so as to interest those who are not his people. But I do say this to those of you who are a people near unto him, to whom he stands as a Father, that this fact has strong claims upon you. If I be a Father, where is my honour? If ye be my children, where is your fear? If indeed the Lord has put you into his family, do you not owe to him the obedience and the love of children, and what can be more natural that if there be a household work to do—vineyard work to do—your Father should look to you to do it, and turn to you whom he has loved so long and loved so well, and say, “Son, daughter, go work today in my vineyard ”?

II. Well, now, secondly, let us turn to the next point, and that is, THE SERVICE TO WHICH THE LORD CALLS US—“Go Work.”

I know some Christians who do not like the name of work, and they look very black in the face if you say anything about duty. As for the matter of that, I do not mind how black they look, because there are some people who very much expose their own disposition by black looks and sullen moods; and when they turn sour they only manifest what is in their own nature. He that quarrels with the precept quarrels with God. Let him mind that. And he that does not like the practical part of Christianity may do what he likes with the doctrinal part of it, for he has neither part nor lot in this matter. The language of the true child of God is, “I delight myself in thy precepts”; and, as David put it, “Thy precepts have been my song in the house of my pilgrimage.” He would even sing about the precepts of the gospel. And now the text says, “Go work.” That is something practical,

something real. Go work. He does not say, "My son, go and think and speculate, and make curious experiments, and fetch out some new doctrines and astonish all thy fellow creatures with whims and oddities of thine own." "My son, go work." And he does not here say, "My son, go and attend conferences one after another all the year round and live in a perpetual maze of hearing different opinions and going from one public meeting and one religious engagement to another, and so feed thyself on the fat things full of marrow." All this is to be attended to in its proper proportion, but here it is "Go work: go work." How many Christians there are that seem to read, "Go plan;" and they always figure in a way with some wonderful plan for the conversion of all the world, but they are never found labouring to convert a baby—never having a good word to say to the tiniest child in the Sunday-school. They are always scheming, and yet never effecting anything. But the text says, "My son, go work." Oh, yes, but those who do not like to work themselves display the greatness of their talents in finding fault with those who do work, and a very clear perception they have of the mistakes and the crotchets of the very best of workers, whose zeal and industry are alike unflagging. Howbeit the text does not say, "My son, go and criticize;" what it distinctly says, is, "Go and work." I remember that when Andrew Fuller had a very severe lecture from some Scotch Baptist brethren about the discipline of the church, he made the reply, "You say that your discipline is so much better than ours. Very well, but discipline is meant to make good soldiers. Now, my soldiers fight better than yours, and I think therefore that you ought not to say much about my discipline." So the real thing is not to be for ever calculating about modes of church government, and methods of management and plans to be adopted and rules to be laid down, which it shall be accounted a serious breach to violate. All well in their place, for order is good in its way. But come now, let us go to work. Let us have something done. I believe the very best working for God is often done in a very irregular manner. I get more and more to feel like the old soldier of Waterloo when he was examined about the best garment that could be worn by a soldier. The Duke of Wellington said to him, "If you had to fight Waterloo over again how would you like to be dressed?" The answer was, "Please, sir, I should like to be in my shirtsleeves." I think that is about the best. Get rid of everything superfluous, and get at it and hack away. I would to God that some Christians could do that, just strip to it, get rid of the superfluities of orderliness and propriety, and everything else which hampers them in trying to get back poor souls. There they are, going down to hell, and we are stickling about this mode and that, and considering the best way not to do it, and appointing committees to consider and debate, to adjourn and to postpone, and to leave the work, in abeyance. The best way is to arise and do it, and let the committee sit afterwards. God grant we may. My son, go *work* today. Let it be something practical, some-

thing real, something actually done.

And by good work is meant something that will involve effort, toil, earnestness, self-denial, perhaps something that will want perseverance. In right earnest you will need to stick to it. You will have heartily to yield yourself up to it, and give up a good deal else that might hinder you in doing it. Oh, Christian men and women, you will not glorify God much unless you really put your strength into the ways of the Lord, and throw your body, soul, and spirit—your entire manhood and womanhood—into the work of the Lord Jesus Christ. To do this you need not leave your families, or your shops, or your secular engagements. You can serve God in these things. They will often be vantage grounds of opportunity for you, but you must throw yourself into it. A man does not win souls to Christ while he is himself half asleep. The battle that is to be fought for the Lord Jesus must be fought by men who are wide awake and quickened by the Spirit of God. “My son, go work today.” Do not go and play at teaching in Sunday-schools. Do not go and play the preacher. Do not go and play at exhorting people at the corners of streets, or even play at giving away tracts. “My son, go work.” Throw thy soul into it. If it is worth doing it is worth doing well; and if it is worth doing well, it is worth doing better than you have ever done it yet; and even then it will be worth doing better still, for when you have done your best you have still to reach forward to a something far beyond; for the best of the best is all too little for such a God and for such a service. “My son, go work.”

Well, now, such a claim as this may, perhaps, you think, sound rather hard; but I could tell you of many who would be very glad indeed if the Lord would say that to them. I might tell you of some who seldom leave their couches, some who can seldom sit upright through their weakness, to whom the nights are often full of pain, and the days are spent in weariness. They have learned, by God's teaching, to be content to suffer; but sometimes they cannot stifle an ardent wish; they wish the Lord would let them serve him. They do not envy, but yet there sometimes crosses over their mind the shadow of something like envy when they recollect what opportunities some of you have, who are full of health and strength. I have seen my brother minister laid aside, the voice perhaps gone, the lungs feeble, the heart prone to palpitate, and, oh, how he has wished that he could preach. With what fervour has he said, “Oh, if I had but those opportunities over again, how I would try to use them better than when I was favoured with them! I tell you there are thousands of God's servants who would kiss the dust of his feet if he would only say to them, “Go work.” I remember reading of a minister who had been labouring in America till he had fairly broken down. He had to take a tour for his health. He had not been away many days before he wrote in his diary, “There may be some ministers who count it a pleasure to be relieved from the duty of preaching, but I count it a mis-

ery. I would sooner preach as I have done in my own pulpit continually than I would see all the kingdoms of the world." And, indeed, there is no pleasure in the world like that of serving God. You will soon get tired if you have a vacation, but you will never get tired of a divine vocation, though you may sometimes grow tired in it. Now, think that the Lord might have said to you, "Now, go and lie on that bed for ten years. Go and pine away in consumption. I have nothing much for you to do. You have got to bear my will." Are you not very glad that you are full of strength, or that you have some share of it, and that now your heavenly Father says, "Son, go work. I have given you strength: go work"? Lord, we thank thee for so kind and gentle a command.

Besides, there is a great deal of honour in this work. You know how much your little boy wants to be a man. All boys do. When he first wears stick-up collars he congratulates himself upon the sign of anything like being a man. How proud he is of it! And if you, being a father, were to say to your boy, "My son; you are now of such an age that I can trust you to do some work for me"; see how the little man would begin to lift himself up: he is glad of it. And I am sure that if we look at it rightly, we who are the children of God ought to feel honoured by our heavenly Father saying to us, "You may do something for me." We must be very humble, for, after all, we cannot do anything except as he worketh in us to will and to do. But it is really very gratifying and ennobling to a poor mortal spirit to be allowed to do anything for God, ay, and to do what perfect saints above and holy angels cannot do; for oh, dear brother, there is no glorified spirit that can go down that back street and up that blind alley, and up those staircases that seem as if they would tumble down under your feet. Go and talk to that dying woman about Christ. You have a privilege which honoured Gabriel has not got: be thankful that you have it. There is no angel that can take that little child in the Sunday-school class and tell it of "Gentle Jesus, meek and mild," and carry the little lamb for the Good Shepherd. The Lord sends you to do it. And it should be a point of thankfulness with us all that he has counted us worthy, and put us into the ministry—into any part or parcel of that ministry—to do something for his name's sake. Well, we are always receiving—always receiving, and it is very blessed; but still in this, as in other things, it is more blessed to give than to receive; and when we can give back to God some little trifle of service, stained with our tears because it is no better than it is, oh, it is a happy and a blessed thing. How grateful you ought to be that the Lord does say to you, "Son, go work today."

And remember, once more, on this point, that the work to which the Lord calls us is very varied, therefore there is a great deal of change in it; and, besides that, it suits the different temperaments, constitutions, dispositions, and abilities of his people. He says, "My son, go work today in my vineyard." But he does not give you to do my work, and he does not give

me to do your work. Dear sister, you would like to do the work of such and such an excellent Christian woman, would not you? Yes, but that is naughtiness of you. Be satisfied to do your own. Suppose your housemaid always wanted to do the cook's work, the house would soon be in bad order. Better keep to your own place, dear sister. Ah, there is a brother here who says, "I think I could preach if I only had such and such a congregation." Very likely, brother, but you had better preach to your own and do what good you can there. Very likely I should do better with my own congregation, and you will do better with yours than I should. Every man had better keep to his own work in his own place. And how thankful we ought to be that if one can preach a sermon, yet another can offer a prayer,—that if one can go and speak to thousands, yet another can speak to ones and twos. There is work in the school; there is work in the family; there is work in the street; there is work in the workshop; there is work everywhere for Jesus if thou wilt but stretch out thy hand to find it and follow Solomon's good advice, "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might."

III. Now, THE TIME is the next thing. "My son, go work *today*." That means directly—now.

Brother, sister, I will not say a word about what it is your duty to do tomorrow. Let the morrow take care of itself. I will have nothing to say about what it will be right for you to do in ten years' time. If you are alive, grace will be given to you for that. But what I have to say to you in God's name is, "Go work today," and as the sun has gone down, let it be, "Go work tonight in my vineyard," if there be opportunity, even tonight, ere another day's sun has dawned upon the world. "And why today?" Because, brother, thy Father wants thee to be at it at once. "Why stand ye here all the day idle?" If thou hast done nothing for Christ thou hast wasted enough time. Do not rest today, but be at it now. He wants thee to do it now, because the vines are in a certain condition that just now require work. There is somebody in the world who is in a tender state of mind, to whom thou mayest speak successfully. There is a mourner here who wants comfort tonight. There is one struggling against his conscience, who wants urging on tonight in the right way. If the case be neglected tonight it will be like neglecting to trim the vines just at the proper time for taking away the superfluous wood. Now canst thou do it. Thou canst not do it on any other day. Therefore, "go work today."

"Today," because there are certain dangers to which those whom thou art about to bless are just now exposed. The devil is tempting them: it is needful that thou go and help them against that temptation. They are just now in despair; it is needful that thou step in with the word of comfort from thy Master's mouth. They are, perhaps, this very night, before they go to their rest, about to commit a great sin. Mayhap the Lord means thee to interpose just now, ere that sin be done. Son, go work today; thou art wanted.

There are very few labourers just now: many of them have gone. Son, do thou go today, while the others have gone out for their recreation—while the others are asleep and grown idle. There is a gap just now: it is at this moment. Many a brave deed of valour owed its success to being done at once. If Horatius had not kept the bridge just in that same moment when the enemy endeavoured to pass over, we should never have heard of him, nor of the brave deeds of old. There is a time of dearth—of want: there is an urgency. Son, God saith to thee, “Haste thee now, even now, and go work today in my vineyard.” “Today:” mark that.

It means work all the day: work as long as ever you live. Son, if once thou get into that vineyard do not come home again until the day is done. I am always sorry when I hear of Christian people beginning to give up some of their work before the infirmities of old age come on; although I think that many a minister, when he gets old, had better give up a charge for which he is not equal and take one smaller for which his strength would avail. But I know that some give up this work and that, and they say, “Let the young people come and take their turn.” Yes, yes, but suppose the sun were to stop shining and say, “There is a star over there; let him have a turn and shine instead of me.” Suppose the moon were for ever to give up shining in the night watches, and say that she has had enough of being out at night; and suppose the earth were to say it has had enough of yielding harvests. “Why should I yield any more? Let the sea take its turn and grow corn.” And so, dear Christian friends, keep on as long as you can. Who can blame dear old John Newton? When he got too feeble to get up the pulpit stairs of St. Mary Woolnoth, he was helped up, and then, leaning on his pulpit Bible he poured out his soul. A friend of his said to him, “Dear Mr. Newton, don’t you think you ought to give up preaching?” “What!” said he, “shall the old African blasphemer ever give up praising the grace of God as long as there is breath in his body? Never.” And so he went to his work again. Oh, for more of that spirit to persevere in the Master’s service.

Only there is this thought: it is only a day. “Son, go work today.” It will only be a day. The longest life is no more, and then the shadows of death will gather: but there will be no night, for instead thereof the day shall break and the shadows shall flee away, and then life’s service here below will all be over. There will be no troublesome children to teach, no hard-hearted sinners to rebuke, no backsliding, lukewarm Christians to reprove, no deceivers to encounter, no sceptics to answer with the testimony that cannot be shaken, no scoffers to put up with, patiently bearing their contumely. It will be all over then; and then shall those who have served their Master behold him gird himself and sit down and serve them, and they shall feast at his table and enter into his joy. “My son, go work today,” for thou shalt rest tomorrow. Work on, for there is rest enough in heaven: work on, for eternity shall well repay thee for the toils of time.

IV. Then; as to THE PLACE WHERE THE LORD CALLS US TO THE WORK.
“My son, go work today in *my vineyard*.”

I like to think of this special sphere of labour, because it must be a pleasure to work in our Father’s vineyard, for there everything that we do will be done for him. I trim this vine; it is my Father’s vine. I dig this trench; but it is my Father’s ground I turn. I gather out these stones; it is my Father’s vineyard that I am engaged in clearing. I repair this fence; it is my Father’s soil that I am thus hedging about. It is all done for him. Who would not do all that he could for the dear Redeemer, dying Lamb, and for the blessed Father of our spirits? “Go work today in my vineyard.”

Then what interesting work it is, for it is our own vineyard because it is our Father’s vineyard. All that belongs to him belongs to us. We are sons working in our Father’s vineyard; so we can say, “This vine; why, I have an interest in it, for I am the heir of my Father’s property. This ground that I endeavour to dig about and manure; it is my ground, it is my Father’s. And this wall that I try to mend; it is mine, it is my Father’s.” It is always pleasant to work for ourselves, you know; and, in a blessed sense, when we are working for God we are working for ourselves. Ye are labourers, ye are God’s husbandry, ye are God’s people; and when ye are working for the Lord ye really are taking shares with him.

And what a work it is, too! “Go work today in my vineyard.” One likes working in a vineyard, because it pays. Working in a desert may be thankless toil; but working in a vineyard where there will be clusters is very different. One can think already of those juicy grapes that will be ready for the winepress, and for the festival, when the ruddy juice comes freely forth—when they make merry and joy in the vintage. And you will have the new wine, and the wine on the lees well refined. All sorts of pleasures await the man who serves the Lord.

“Go work in my vineyard.” Does it not mean that the work is plentiful? There is always something to be done in a vineyard. If you ask those who keep vines they will tell you that there is much labour required. From one part of the year right on there is something still to be done, many dangers to be averted, and many enemies to be kept off from the vine; so there is plenty to do, brother. Go work in the vineyard, where there will be need of all thy hands. It is close at hand; hard by you; for the heavenly Father did not say, “Son, take a ship and go to Tarshish, or to Ophir.” He said, “My son, go work in my vineyard”; and the vineyard was just out of the back door there. Now, your heavenly Father’s vineyard is close to you. Those streets where you live—the very house in which you dwell—perhaps the very chamber in which you sleep—is God’s vineyard, where you are to work for him. It is your heavenly Father’s own work, to be done by you in your heavenly Father’s own strength. Oh, if I might tonight set one young man on fire with love to Christ I should be glad. If I could but be the humble

means of inspiring some Christian woman with the high mission of being useful in her day and generation, how much would my soul rejoice! There came into this Tabernacle one evening a young gentleman who was well known as being a great hand with his cricket bat. He was a Christian and full of earnestness in laying hold upon the great truths of revelation; but he had never served his God. He thought it right to spend his leisure time in manly exercises, and in such pursuits he sought recreation. But while I spoke a fire kindled within him, and he went home to begin to preach the gospel in the street of the city where he lived, and now he is the pastor of a large and influential church which he has gathered together. Since then he has preached more than once in this place the gospel of Jesus Christ. Oh, that some other believer who may happen to be in that condition—some young man of ability who is spending all his strength on the world without going into anything grossly wrong, but simply wasting his talent—might hear a voice saying to him tonight, as he goes down that aisle, “My son, go work today in my vineyard.”

After dwelling so long upon the practical admonition, I have but little time left for that brief explanation of the parable, or more properly the parables of the vineyard with which on the outset I promised to close. The occasion on which they were spoken is memorable. Assailed “*while he was teaching,*”—rudely interrupted by the legal sanhedrim of the Jews with the high priest in the forefront, they confronted our Lord as it were with a warrant and propounded to him two questions;—one as to the authority or title by which he acted—the other as to the source from which his authority was derived. You all know how skilfully he evaded his unscrupulous antagonists. “*I also will ask you one thing,*” he said. Therewith he put to them a question that proved a poser, and left them to a ridiculous parley, for “*they reasoned among themselves*” went aside to whisper, and then drew back in sheer timidity declining an answer, for “*they feared the people,*” or as you may read it, they were afraid of the mob. The advantage our Lord thus gained he quickly followed up with a parable—in fact, with the parable we have been talking about. He opened it thus,—“*What think ye?*”—putting a query about two sons, the one forward in profession, yet utterly disobedient, the other sullen in appearance though afterwards penitent in spirit and diligent in labour. The thing was so obvious that they answer without hesitation with a reply that nailed the censure to their own breasts. “Whether of these twain did the will of his father?” They say unto him, “the first.” Read it, read the parable for yourselves. Realize the force of it if you can. The penitent harlot and the obdurate high priest are put in the scales. “*In the way of righteousness*”—according to the truthful caricature—the chief priests and elders themselves admit that “*the first*” of these twain did the will of our heavenly Father. Digest this parable, I pray you. Almost without a break the *vineyard* supplied him yet again with another parable which he

insisted on their hearing—a parable that brought out the character of the dispensation and “the signs of the times” so distinctly, that they could not fail to read it in the light of their own prophets, and at the same time it so exposed the treachery of their counsel and conspiracy that they recognized their own portrait at once and perceived that he spake of them. “The vineyard,” you are all aware, was the constant symbol of the Jewish nation as a theocracy. The men that sat in Moses’s seat were the stewards in charge of that vineyard which was Jehovah’s special property. They, like the perverse rulers of every age, sought to shelter their evil designs under cover of syndicates and conferences. But the words and warnings of Jesus, his proverbs and parables, were keen enough to probe all their subtleties, and leave them to stand abashed without an excuse for the guile of their hearts or the guilt of their conduct. Now remember that the kingdom of God was taken from them and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof. To what nation is it given? Is it not to the church which is called “a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light”? The vine is the express symbol of our Christian life, as all believers are incorporated with Christ. Well then, there is a vineyard of God’s own planting; you believe that He has let it out to husbandmen; you believe that. He will come seeking fruit of this vineyard; you believe that. You are, dear brethren, the children of the husbandmen; you believe that, or else you would not presume to sit at his table and drink of his cup. He says therefore to you, “Son, go work in my vineyard.” What answer do you give with your lips? What answer do you give with your life?

Thus far I have not been speaking to unconverted people. I have not said a word to them. To them, however, I have this word to say, and I have done. I shall not ask you to work for Christ. I cannot exhort you to do anything for him. You are not in a state of mind to do it. You must first believe in him. Oh, let it be a sorrow to you tonight that you are incapable of serving Christ. Till you get a new heart and a right spirit you have no capacity to serve him. You have first to trust Christ, and to prove in your own souls that this gospel is the power of God to your salvation. Your eyes must be opened; you must be turned from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that you may receive forgiveness of sins and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith in Jesus, before you can do anything for him. Then, not till then, will ye be meet to be made witnesses both of those things which ye shall have seen and of those things in which he will hereafter appear unto you. You must be born again yourselves before ye can travail in birth for others, till Christ be formed in them. You cannot testify, those of you by whom the testimony of Christ has not been received and in whom it is not confirmed. Your unskilled labour would be mischievous. Hands off such holy work till those hands have been washed clean by

Jesus Christ. Come ye unto him, and trust him, and believe in him, and when he has saved you, then he will say to you, “Son, go work today in my vineyard.”
