

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

FROM TWENTY-FIVE TO THIRTY-FIVE.

A Sermon

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, MAY 16TH, 1897,

DELIVERED BY

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“And he went out about the third hour, and saw others standing idle in the market-place, and said unto them; go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right I will give you. And they went their way.”—Matthew xx. 3, 4.

No parable teaches all sides of truth. It is wrong to attempt to make a parable run on all fours; it is intended to convey some one lesson, and if it teaches that, we must not attempt to draw everything else out of it. This parable sets forth the great God as a householder going forth to find men to work for him; but let no man imagine that God needs any of us. He was perfect—perfectly happy and perfectly glorious,—long before wing of angel moved in space, or before space and time even existed. God ever was and still is self-contained and all-sufficient; and if he chooses to make any creatures, or to preserve or use any of the creatures he has formed, that is not because he needs them, or is in the least degree dependent upon them. If God comes forth, in wondrous grace, to call any of us to work in his vineyard, it is not because he needs us, but because we need him; he does not set us to work because he needs workers, but because we need work. He calls us, not because he requires us, but because we require to be called.

Let no man, therefore, attach great importance to himself, as though God's cause or kingdom depended upon him. It may be that we fancy, sometimes, in our little sphere, that if we were gone, there would be a great gap; but the Lord did very well without us before we were born, and he will do just as well when we are dead and gone. His work never really suffers, after all. Workers die, but the work lives on. If any man, therefore, should be so boldly wicked as to suppose that God will be robbed of any of his glory if he stands out against him, or that God will suffer because he does not intend to serve him, he is greatly mistaken. The loss of glory will be your loss, sir, not God's; and the loss of benefit will be your loss, not God's. If

he were hungry, he would not tell you ; for the cattle upon a thousand hills are his, and the world with the fulness thereof. He can effect his eternal purposes without our help, and he can as easily effect them even if we choose to resist him. He is infinitely greater than we are, so that what I shall have to say to you at this time about our going to work for God in his vineyard is not to be understood as though we could do anything meritorious in the eyes of our Maker, or as if he had any need of us. He is great and glorious, whatever we may be ; and it is for our joy, our safety, our everlasting happiness, that we should become his servants. It is necessary, for the right ordering of our lives, that our hearts may be in tune to yield the music of joy, that we should be tuned by obedience to his will, and that we should learn to serve him. My prayer is that, this very hour, some who have never known our Saviour may find him making himself known to them, and engaging them in his service.

I. I shall begin by asking, first, **HOW MAY THE LORD BE SAID TO GO OUT?**

Please notice what it says in the first verse of this chapter : "The kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which went out early in the morning." Then it says in our text : "He went out about the third hour ;" in the fifth verse : "Again he went out about the sixth and ninth hour" ; and in the sixth verse : "And about the eleventh hour he went out, and found others standing idle." How may God be said to go out ?

This language is used, first, to teach us that *the impulse to serve God, always comes from God to us.* It never comes from within ourselves first of all. If any man wills to serve God, there was another will which moved his will, or else his will would never have moved towards God. Out of the various men who are mentioned here, no one went to the vineyard, either early in the morning or later in the day, and requested to be employed. The householder came out into the market-place, and engaged his men. At the third hour, the sixth hour, and the ninth hour, not one had come of his own free will ; but in every case the first overture was from the householder : "He went out to hire labourers into his vineyard." And at the eleventh hour, though the day was waning to its close, and the sun was almost down, yet even then men were not wise enough to wish to conclude the day in the right service ; but they still remained, as they had been all day, idling in the market-place until the generous employer came out, and expostulated with them, and induced them to enter the vineyard. No man ever comes to God till God first comes to him, so it is my earnest desire that the impulses of divine grace may be even now felt in many hearts. God the Holy Ghost is able to work upon the judgment, the understanding, the affections, the fears, the hopes, the will of men ; and as he works upon them, he makes men willing in the day of God's power, so that they turn to him, and enter into his service. That is, I think, the first meaning of God's going out.

But, next, it means that *there are times and seasons when God seems especially to display his grace.* There are such seasons, I believe, whenever the gospel is preached. In this one church, and under one ministry for nearly thirty-two years, we have almost continually

enjoyed the converting power of God's grace. There has been a greater increase sometimes, or a little diminution now and then; but, for the most part, the unbroken stream of blessing has run on at much the same rate all the while; it never was deeper, nor was the current more strong, than now, for which we praise the Lord with all our hearts. But it has usually happened with churches that there are certain seasons when men are brought to Christ in large numbers; the Word comes home with unusual power, there is a sudden flight of the arrows of conviction, and the wounded cry out, "What must we do to be saved?" There is a great outpouring of the healing balm, and the wounds of sin are cured, the bleeding of the pierced conscience is stanch'd. When God comes out, as it were, from his hiding-place, to deal thus with the souls of men, it is a time of revival.

Personally, *to most men, there is a time of God's going forth, when they are specially moved to holy things.* It happens to some in childhood; while they are yet young, God speaks with them as he did with Samuel. Perhaps, even on their little bed at night he appears to them, and says, "Samuel, Samuel," and then helps them to answer, "Here am I, for thou didst call me." To others, God comes a little farther on, when it is the second hour of the day, while yet they are in the hey-day of their youth. It was the great privilege of some of us for the Lord to call us while we were yet young men; and it is a great blessing when God comes to us at that important period of our history. To others, he appears when they are advanced in life; and, blessed be God, he comes also to some when the day is well-nigh closed, when the furrows of care are on their brows, and the snows of age are on their heads. He comes with power, by the effectual calling of the Holy Ghost, and he speaks to them, and they yield to his speaking, and give themselves up to be his servants for the rest of life. Pray, dear children of God, that the Divine Householder may come into this market-place even now, and may speak to young and old effectually by his grace. If the householder in the parable had sent his servants to call these men, it is possible that none of them would have gone into the vineyard; but inasmuch as he came himself, and spoke personally to them, they went at his bidding. And this I know, that I, poor creature that I am, may stand and speak with all my might, but I have no keys of human hearts at my girdle; I may speak to the ear, but I can get no farther. But if my Lord shall come in all the splendour of his omnipotent grace, he shall not call in vain, for he has the keys of human hearts, "he openeth, and no man shutteth;" and when he speaks effectually, men fly to him like doves to their dovecots. Oh, that it might be so with many here!

Thus I have answered the first question,—How may the Lord be said to go out?

II. The second one is,—WHAT IS THE HOUR HERE MENTIONED? "He went out about the third hour, and saw others standing idle in the market-place."

I have heard or read a good many sermons to the young, or I have heard of them, sermons to those who are called by God early in the morning; and I know there have been a great many sermons to those who have reached the eleventh hour; so I thought that, in this

discourse, I would specially address those who have come to the third hour. What kind of people are those who are at the third hour? What is the third hour? Let us calculate a little. To the Jews, there were always twelve hours in the day, whether it was summer-time or winter, so that the hour altered every day,—a very difficult way of computing time, for, as the day lengthened or shortened, they still divided the day-light into twelve hours. Well, dear friends, think of human life as a period of twelve hours, and then form a calculation of what each hour must be. Take the whole of life roughly at 70, 72, 73, 74, or 75, as you like. Then you have to leave out the very earliest hours,—that period of life in which God does not call children to intelligent faith because they have not yet understanding enough to be capable of intelligent faith. Strike off a little for that; and I should give the first three hours of life to be over at about 20, 21, 22, 23, or 24, if you please; and I should say that the third hour of life would range from twenty-five to thirty-five. That is the period in which the man has come to perfection, and in which the woman has reached the fulness of her strength. There will be little growing after this; if not the zenith of life, yet certainly a considerably-developed period of life has now been reached. Very earnestly do I pray the Master to come out to you who have come to the third hour of your day, and to say to you in the language of the text, “Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right I will give you.”

Now, my friend,—between twenty and forty years of age,—I want *you* to become the servant of my Lord and Master; first, *because already you have wasted some of the best hours of the day*. There are no hours of the day like the early morning, when the dew is upon everything, and the smoke of care and trouble has not yet dimmed the landscape. Give me for enjoyment the earliest hours of a summer's morning, when the birds are singing at their sweetest, and all nature seems to be begemmed with her wedding jewels, her most delightful ornaments. There is no time for work like the first hours of the day; and there is no time for serving the Lord like the very earliest days of youth. I recollect the joy I had in the little service I was able to render to God when first I knew him. I was engaged in a school all the week; but there was Saturday afternoon, and that Saturday afternoon, though I might rightly have used it for rest, and though I was but a boy myself, was given to a tract-district, and to visiting the very poor within my reach, and the Sabbath-day was devoted to teaching a class, and later on, addressing the Sunday-school. Oh, but how earnestly I did it all! I often think that I spoke better then than I did in later years, for I spoke so tremblingly, but my heart went with it all. And when I began to talk a little in the villages on the Sunday, and afterwards every night in the week, I know that I used to speak then what came fresh from my heart. There was little time for gathering much from books; my chief library was the Word of God and my own experience, but I spoke out from my very soul,—no doubt with much blundering, and much weakness, and much youthful folly, but oh, with such an intense desire to bring men to Christ! I remember how I felt that I could cheerfully lay down my life if I might but save a poor old man, or bring

a boy of my own age to the Saviour's feet. There is nothing in after life quite like those early morning works. Yet, my friend, you have let that period pass away; you are five-and-twenty, you are thirty, are you even five-and-thirty, and still unsaved? Then, do not waste any more precious time; go at once to the Crucified, my adorable Lord and Master. There he stands, with a thorn-crown about his brow. Give him, at least, the rest of your days; and beg him to pardon you for having lived so long without loving and serving him.

Besides, I must plead with you at this age that you come to Christ, *because already habits of idleness are forming upon you.* "Nay," you say, "it is not so." I mean, spiritual idleness. You have not done anything yet for Christ, you have not even looked to see what you could do, you have not meditated upon what place in the vineyard you could occupy,—whether you could trim the vines, or water them, or gather the grapes, or tread the winefat. No, you have done nothing as yet; and what I am afraid of is that soon you will get settled down into this do-nothing style, and you will go back to the dust from whence you sprang, having achieved nothing for him who gave himself that he might save us from our sins. Do not stay in that condition a moment longer. The wax is not very soft now, it is beginning to harden; ere yet it has quite set, let the stamp of sovereign grace be pressed upon it that your life may yet bear the impress of Christ.

Moreover, *Satan is very ready with his temptations*; and, you know, he always—

"Finds some mischief still,
For idle hands to do."

You have not gone into any gross open sin, I hope. Peradventure, you have been kept, like the young man in the narrative we read, quite pure and clean outwardly. Well, but, do you not see that—so good a fellow as you are in your own estimation,—you are extremely likely to be assailed by Satan; and if he can get you to indulge the lusts of the flesh, or some other vain and sinful pleasure, he will take great delight in ruining you? Oh, how I wish that I could get you enlisted into my Lord's army! Here, take the shilling. I mean, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and accept him as your Saviour, and become his faithful servant. I wish I could put a hoe into your hands, or a pruning-knife, or something with which you should be induced to go into the vineyard of my Master, to serve him. You who have reached five-and-twenty, or thirty, or five-and-thirty, I want you to come to Christ, *because your sun may go down at noon.* Such things do happen. This morning, as I looked over this congregation, I recollected an old friend who used to sit not far from here, and who went to heaven a few weeks ago; and there used to sit another child of God, a dear friend who went home but a very little while ago. I will not now go in thought round the whole place, but I look upon it often with the remembrance of where they used to sit who are now with God. One after another has gone,—some very old people, but among those who have been called away there have been many who were quite young. I should have expected that they would have been here at my funeral and yours; but instead thereof, they have been carried to an early

grave,—with good hope, thank God, the most of them whom I remember,—carried with gladness to their tomb because we knew that, through the grace of God, they were ripe for glory. But what if the call should come for you, dear friend, before you have begun to serve your God? Nay, it must not be so, must it? Is there not something in your heart that seems to say, “By the grace of God, it shall not be so. I will seek Jesus even now, and give myself to him who gave himself for me.”

For, once again, it seems to me that if God will spare you, *there is a fair opportunity of work yet before you*. As I look all round here at men and women in the prime of life, and know that many of them are not yet converted to God, I feel, dear friends, that Satan must not have you, and the world must not have you, and sin must not have you, but Christ *must* have you. He is such a glorious Saviour and Lord that I would fain have all the world at his feet. He deserves so much that, if all kings fell down before him, and all princes called him blessed, he deserves it well; and, if you will do so, it shall be but right. What a life you may yet lead! What usefulness, what happiness, what blessedness, may yet be your portion! If you could look through a telescope that could reveal what you might be if your heart were consecrated to God, what a heaven below and what a heaven above awaits you, I feel sure that you would now yield to the calling of the Great Householder, and enter his vineyard before you quit this building.

III. Now let me try to answer a third question. **WHAT WERE THESE MEN DOING TO WHOM THE HOUSEHOLDER SPOKE?** “Standing idle in the market-place.”

I shall not enlarge upon this point, but I must say a little about some who are standing idle. *In a literal sense, many are altogether idling*. There are, still, many Christian men and Christian women—no, I do not mean Christian men and Christian women, but those who ought to be Christians, who are really idle. Sometimes, when I have been by the seaside, at Mentone and elsewhere, I have seen a great many well-to-do folk who had nothing the matter with them, they were perfectly well, yet they were idling their time away day after day; and I have almost thought to myself, “If they were thrown into the Mediterranean, who would lose anything by them?” Are there not plenty of people just like that even among those who come to our places of worship? They consume so much bread and meat, and if they do not mind they will get consumed one of these days, for they do no good to anybody. What a pity it is that a man who stands nearly six feet in his shoes should be doing nothing, and that a woman who is made for love and kindness should not be scattering that love and kindness on all sides, and serving the Lord! To those of you who are of the ages from thirty to forty, who yet are idle, I do wish to say, with all earnestness, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, “Come to him by faith, confess your idleness and all your other sins, seek his grace and mercy, and then enter his vineyard, and serve him while you may.”

There are also *others who are laboriously idle*, wearied with toils which accomplish nothing of real worth. The man who is spending all his

life in his business, living simply to get money, has but trifling aims, for temporary objects engross him. He who lives for God, for Christ, for the good of men, lives for an object worthy of an immortal being; but he who lives only for his own aggrandisement, lives for such a temporary and trifling object that he may be said to be idle though he wears himself to death with his labour. Ah, sir, if this be all you do, the Master thinks you idle! You are doing nothing for him, nothing worth the doing, nothing that can be written in the roll and record of history as a great feat done by a soul redeemed with the blood of Christ. O ye laborious idlers, I pray that you may be made to go and work in the Master's vineyard!

There are *some who are idling because of their constant indecision*. They are not altogether bad, but they are not good. They do not serve the devil except it be by neglecting to serve God. Though they are idle, they are full of good intentions; but so they have long been. If they were now what they resolved to be ten years ago, there would be a great change in them. But no; and, apparently, in ten years' time they will be as they are now; that is to say, if God spares them. They will get no farther, for they are of the sort that "resolve, and re-resolve," and yet remain the same. I almost wish that they would say that they would be lost, sooner than say that they will be saved and yet not mean it; for, if they said that they would be lost, they would recoil from it with horror after having said it. But now they play with God, and with eternity, and heaven, and hell, and say, "I will, I will, I will;" and always it is, "I will," yet they never will to make that "I will" a thing of the present moment. Sirs, if a house were on fire, and you were in the upper story, it would be a pity to say, "I will escape by-and-by when the flames have reached another story; but I must wait a little while." No; you would be eager to escape at once, I am sure that you would; and wisdom dictates that a man should not always parley, and say, "I will," and yet never come up to the mark. Wisdom dictates that, by the grace of God, we should say, "I have reached the end of my indecision; I will begin to live for God, if he will give me spiritual life. I will cast off the works of darkness if God will give me spiritual light. I will lay myself at Jesu's feet, and cry, 'Save me, O Lord, for I long to escape from my sin, and to be an idler no longer.'"

IV. I will not say more upon that point, but go on to the next question,—WHAT WORK WOULD THE LORD HAVE THESE IDLERS DO? "Go ye also into the vineyard."

One would think, from what you hear from some men, that the service of God was a very difficult, dreary, dismal, hard, toilsome business; but it is not so. *The work which the Lord would have us do is very proper and fit for us*. He would have us recognize that we are sinners, and he therefore would have us come and be washed; and when we are washed, he would have us realize that it is our joy, our duty, our privilege, our delight, to show forth the praises of him who has thus saved us. The service of God is the most fit employment for a man to be engaged in; it never degrades him, it never wearies him, for in the service of God we gain fresh strength; and the more we serve him, the more we can serve him.

Beloved friends, the Lord invites you to *a service in which he will give you all the tools and all the strength you need.* When he sends you to his vineyard, he does not expect you to go home to fetch a basket of tools. God does not expect sinners to find their own Saviour, and he never sends his soldiers on a warfare at their own charges. He who yields himself up to be a servant of God shall find himself singularly prepared and specially helped to do all that God asks him to do.

More than that, if you will come into God's vineyard, dear friend, *you shall work with God, and so be ennobled.* That seems to me the most wonderful thing about our service, that we are "workers together with God." To bend the tendril of that vine, and find a hand almighty softly working with our own;—to take the sharp pruning-knife, and cut off the too-luxuriant bough, and feel that there is a knife sharper than ours cutting as we cut;—to take a spade, and dig about the vine, and all the while to feel and know that there is a secret Worker digging deeper than we are digging, and so making what we do effectual;—happy men who thus have their God working with them! Beloved, if you are building for God, and you lift the trowel, or the hammer, and feel that there is another hand lifting another trowel, and another hammer, building with you and building by you, you are divinely honoured. You are of the nobility of heaven if God works with you; and it is to that position he invites you when he says, "Go ye also into the vineyard."

Young men of five-and-twenty, or thirty, let me tell you that, *if you engage in this work, it shall be growingly pleasant to you.* The little difficulties at the commencement shall soon be gone. The service of God may seem, at first, like swimming against the stream; but afterwards you shall discover that there is a pleasure even in the opposing element, for the live fish always prefers to swim up the stream. You shall find a delight in your difficulties, a sacred joy in that which seems at first so arduous to you; and as you live and labour for your Lord, it shall become joy upon joy to serve him and glorify his holy name.

And, dear friends, *this work shall be graciously rewarded at the last.* The Lord will give you, according to his grace, a reward here, and a reward hereafter; not of debt, mark you; I am preaching no legal sermon, asking the young man to work that he may win heaven thereby; but I ask you first to believe in Jesus, and so to become the servants of the living God, and then out of gratitude to spend yourselves and to be spent for him. If you do so, verily, I say unto you, you shall not lack a reward either here or hereafter.

I will close when I have reminded you that, though I have been speaking to men who have reached the third hour,—from twenty-five to thirty-five,—we must remember that the householder went out again at the sixth hour; say, thirty-five to forty-five. He called those whom he found then, and when he called them, they went into the vineyard. You men who are between thirty-five and fifty, in the very strength of your days, Christ will not refuse to employ you if you will come at his call.

Then the householder went out again at the ninth hour; say, fifty,

fifty-five, sixty,—or, farther on, sixty-five. It was getting late, but still they could do a good stroke of work if they threw all their energies into it. No man needs despair of doing a life-work even now; if you cannot do long work, you can do strong work. There are some men who begin work very late, but they go at it with such vigour and earnestness that they get through a good deal. I do not see why you should not; at any rate, come in now. Old men have done great things in the past; if they have not the vivacity of youth, they have more wisdom; if they have not all the strength, they have more prudence. There is a place for you to fill, my good brother, though so many years have flown over your head. If you come to Christ even now, he will use you in his vineyard.

Ah! but, best of all, the householder went out even at the eleventh hour. He might have said, "It is of no use to go out now, for if I bring them in, there is only one hour left for them to work in." Still, as I have told you, it was not because he needed men, but because they needed the money, that he employed them. So, to show that, as he did not need them at the first hour, and did not need them at the third, or the sixth, or the ninth hour, much less could he need them at the eleventh hour, yet he would still go out. There they are! I see them; they are a pack of old men and old women. You would not engage them, I am sure; you would say, "They will take half their time for talking, and the other half for wiping the sweat from their brows, and doing nothing. There is not any strength left in the poor old souls, they had better have an almshouse, and a basin of gruel, and sit by the fireside." But this good householder's engagement of the men was not for his own sake, but for their sakes; he felt that he might as well engage these as he had done the rest; so he said to them, "Here, it is the eleventh hour, but go and work in my vineyard, and whatsoever is right I will give you." I feel it a great joy to have been called to work for my Lord in the early hours of my life's day; and I hope by-and-by to be able to say, "O God, thou hast taught me from my youth: and hitherto have I declared thy wondrous works. Now also when I am old and grey-headed, O God, forsake me not; until I have shewed thy strength unto this generation, and thy power to every one that is to come." I do not think my Lord will turn his old servant off; when I get old, you may become tired of me, but he will not; he will hear my prayer,—

"Dismiss me not thy service, Lord."

It is the best and the happiest thing of all, if we have served our Lord from our youth; but dear aged friend, if you have missed that privilege, to your own grief and sorrow, if you are now an old man unsaved, or an old woman unsaved, yet even now the Lord invites you; he calls you, he bids you come and welcome, and if you do but come to him, he will give you your penny, too, even as he gives it to those who have begun their working day so early.

If I remember rightly, there was a man who was converted at the age of 103. He was sitting under a hedge, I think in Virginia, and he remembered a sermon that he had heard Mr. Flavel preach at Plymouth; and recalling a striking part of it, he turned to God, and

found peace and pardon. He was spared to live three years more, and when he died, this inscription was put over his grave, "Here lies a babe in grace, aged three years, who died, according to nature, aged 106." Do you recollect that venerable friend who was baptized here about six months ago? Dear old man, I had often seen him in distress of mind, oh, so sorrowful! I must confess that I sometimes avoided going where he was, because I could not cheer him up, and he was rather inclined to pull one down to his own level, he was so sad,—a dear good soul, and a true child of God, but always doubting his evidences. One day, when I sat to see enquirers, he came; he said that he wished to be baptized that he might confess his faith in Christ. He was not sure that he was a child of God; but he knew that he had no hope but in the precious blood. He was a very old man; did I think that he was too old? No, I did not. Bless him! I was glad to see him. He was baptized at 86, and that day he was so happy; those who knew him never saw him so joyful. He was trusting in the precious blood, and he had obeyed his Master's command. He had about three months of the days of heaven upon earth in which, if you saw the old man, you must have noticed how bright he was. He walked with God, and then he went home. We had not our old member long, had we? No, but there sits in this place, if she has been able to get here to-night, a sister who joined this church when she was about sixteen, and she has been a member seventy-six years, and is still among us. Think of the difference between these two; one makes a confession of faith for seventy-six years, and another for only two or three months; yet they shall both receive their penny. I am sure we do not grudge the penny to the brother who came in at eighty-six; we are glad that he should have the full tale of blessing here and hereafter. Still, dear friends, do not stop so late as he did; and if you have stopped until now, make haste, and get to Christ at once. May his Holy Spirit lead you and guide you, for Jesus' sake! Amen.

Exposition by C. H. Spurgeon.

MATTHEW XIX. 13—30; AND XX. 1—16.

All sorts of persons are invited to come to Christ, whatever their age may be. We begin here with the children.

Chapter xix. Verses 13—15. *Then were there brought unto him little children, that he should put his hands on them, and pray: and the disciples rebuked them. But Jesus said, Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven. And he laid his hands on them, and departed thence.*

The principal difficulty of children in coming to Christ frequently lies in their friends. Their parents or their other relatives think they are too young, and discourage them. Oh, that we all had a right idea of the possibility of the conversion of little children; nay, not only of the possibility, but that we looked for it, watched for it, and encouraged young children to come to Christ! You know that, in the parable I am going to read presently, we are told that the householder "went out early in the

morning to hire labourers into his vineyard." What a privilege it is to be brought to Christ early in the morning,—that is, while we are yet children.

16. *And, behold, one came and said unto him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life ?*

This was not a child, but a young man, who had come to riper years.

17—20. *And he said unto him, Why callest thou me good ? there is none good but one, that is, God : but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments. He saith unto him, Which ? Jesus said, Thou shalt do no murder, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Honour thy father and thy mother : and, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. The young man saith unto him, All these things have I kept from my youth up : what lack I yet ?*

Externally, in the letter, very likely this young man had kept these commandments, and so far he was to be commended ; yet internally, in their spirit, he had not kept one of them. Our Saviour did not tell him that he had failed, but he took him on his own ground. " You say that you love your neighbour as yourself ; I will give you a test to prove whether you do."

21, 22. *Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven : and come and follow me. But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful : for he had great possessions.*

See, then, that often with men—with young men—the great hindrance in coming to Christ may be the world. They may have riches, or they may have a great craving for riches ; and this may stand in the way of their coming to the Saviour. If any man loves riches better than he loves Christ, he cannot be saved.

23, 24. *Then said Jesus unto his disciples, Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven. And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.*

Somehow or other,—

" Gold and the gospel seldom do agree,
Religion always sides with poverty ;"

because a man's possessions are so liable to get into his heart. He is apt to turn them into idols, and to make devotion to them the great object of his life ; as long as he does so, he cannot be saved.

25—27. *When his disciples heard it, they were exceedingly amazed, saying, Who then can be saved ? But Jesus beheld them, and said unto them, With men this is impossible ; but with God all things are possible. Then answered Peter and said unto him, Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee ; what shall we have therefore ?*

Always too fast is this impetuous Peter ; ever ready to put in a good word for himself if he can.

28, 29. *And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life.*

He shall find himself a gainer by his losses for Christ's sake. If he has lost friends, he shall find better and truer friends in the Church of God. If

he has lost possessions, he shall get a spiritual wealth that shall be better to him than houses and lands.

30. *But many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first.*

Chapter xx. Verses 1, 2. *For the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which went out early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard. And when he had agreed with the labourers for a penny a day, he sent them into his vineyard.*

That was the usual wage of the time, the daily pay of a Roman soldier.

3, 4. *And he went out about the third hour, and saw others standing idle in the marketplace, and said unto them; Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right I will give you. And they went their way.*

You notice that the first labourers made a bargain with the householder, he agreed with them for a penny a day, and then sent them into his vineyard. So our Lord seemed to say to Peter, "If you are going to make a bargain concerning your service, you will not find it pay. You are saying, 'We have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore?'" That spirit will not do; Christ is not to be served by hirelings. The moment the idea comes in that we deserve to have anything at his hands, we spoil all our service; and those who might be first come to be last if they once get that notion into their heads. This parable shows that it is so.

5—9. *Again he went out about the sixth and ninth hour, and did likewise. And about the eleventh hour he went out, and found others standing idle, and saith unto them, Why stand ye here all the day idle? They say unto him, Because no man hath hired us. He saith unto them, Go ye also into the vineyard; and whatsoever is right, that shall ye receive. So when even was come, the lord of the vineyard saith unto his steward, Call the labourers, and give them their hire, beginning from the last unto the first. And when they came that were hired about the eleventh hour, they received every man a penny.*

This was the gift of grace, through the generosity of the employer.

10—12. *But when the first came, they supposed that they should have received more; and they likewise received every man a penny. And when they had received it, they murmured against the goodman of the house, saying, These last have wrought but one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us, which have borne the burden and heat of the day.*

See. They put forth their claim on the ground of deserving, so they had what they had bargained for, but they had no more. They were engaged first, but because they had the hireling spirit they were put last.

13—15. *But he answered one of them, and said, Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst not thou agree with me for a penny? Take that thine is, and go thy way: I will give unto this last, even as unto thee. Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good?*

God will have us know that, in dealing with us when we are his servants, he is under no obligation to us. If he chooses to give a reward, the reward is not of debt, but of his sovereign grace. We are bound to serve him by the fact that he is our Creator, altogether apart from any reward; and we must not talk of dealing with him on terms of reward; it is too high a style for us, poor worms, to assume in the presence of Almighty God. If we do talk so, he will soon put us down into our right place.

16. *So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen.*