

THE STRAIT GATE

by John Bunyan

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THE STRAIT GATE

OR,

GREAT DIFFICULTY OF GOING TO HEAVEN:

Plainly proving, by the Scripture, that not only the Rude and Profane, but many great Professors, will come short of that Kingdom.

“Enter ye in at the strait gate; for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.” — Matthew 7:13, 14.

TO THE READER

COURTEOUS READER,

God (I hope) hath put it into my heart to write unto thee another time, and that about matters of the greatest moment (for now we discourse not about things controverted among the godly, but directly about the saving or damning of the soul; yea, moreover, this discourse is about the fewness of them that shall be saved, and it proves that many an high professor will come short of eternal life); wherefore the matter must needs be sharp, and so disliked by some, but let it not be rejected by thee. The text calls for sharpness, so do the times, yea, the faithful discharge of my duty towards thee hath put me upon it.

I do not now pipe, but mourn; and it will be well for thee if thou canst graciously lament, Matthew 11:17. Some (say they) make the gate of heaven too wide, and some make it too narrow; for my part, I have here presented thee with as true a measure of it, as by the word of God I can. Read me, therefore, yea, read me, and compare me with the Bible; and if thou findest my doctrine and that book of God concur, embrace it, as thou wilt answer the contrary in the day of judgment. This awakening work (if God will make it so) was prepared for thee: if there be need, and it wounds, get healing by blood: if it disquiets, get peace by blood: if it takes away all thou hast, because it was naught (for this book is not prepared to take away true grace from any), then buy of Christ gold tried in the fire, that thou mayst be rich, and white raiment, that thou mayst be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness doth not appear, and anoint thine eyes with eye-salve, that thou mayst see, Revelation 3:18. Self-flatteries, self-deceivings, are easy and pleasant, but damnable. The Lord give thee an heart to judge right of thyself, right of this book, and so prepare for eternity, that thou mayst not only expect entrance, but be received into the kingdom of Christ and of God. Amen.

So prays thy Friend,

JOHN BUNYAN.

THE STRAIT GATE

OR

GREAT DIFFICULTY OF GOING TO HEAVEN.

“Strive to enter in at the strait gate; for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.” — Luke 13:24.

These are the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and are, therefore, in especial manner to be heeded; besides, the subject matter of the words is the most weighty, to wit, how we should attain salvation, and therefore also to be heeded.

The occasion of the words was a question which one that was at this time in the company of the disciples, put to Jesus Christ; the question was this, “Lord, are there few that be saved?” ver. 23. A serious question, not such as tended to the subversion of the hearers, as too many now a-days do; but such as in its own nature tended to the awakening of the company to good, and that called for such an answer that might profit the people also. This question also well pleased Jesus Christ, and he prepareth and giveth such an answer as was without the least retort, or shew of distaste; such an answer, I say, as carried in it the most full resolve to the question itself, and help to the persons questioning: “And he said unto them, Strive to enter in,” etc. The words are an answer, and an instruction also.

1. An answer, and that in the affirmative; the gate is strait, — many that seek will not be able, therefore but few shall be saved.
2. The answer is an instruction also; “strive to enter in,” etc. good counsel and instruction; pray God help me, and my reader, and all that love their own salvation, to take it.

My manner of handling the word will be, first, by way of explication, and then by way of observation.

I. BY WAY OF EXPLICATION

The words are to be considered, first, with reference to their general scope; and then with reference to their several phrases.

First, the general scope of the text is to be considered, and that is that great thing salvation; for these words do immediately look at, point to, and give directions about salvation: "Are there few that be saved? strive to enter in at the strait gate."

The words, I say, are to direct us, not only to talk of, or to wish for, but to understand how we shall, and to seek that we may be effectually saved, and therefore of the greatest importance. To be saved! what is like being saved? To be saved from sin, from hell, from the wrath of God, from eternal damnation, what is like it? To be made an heir of God, of his grace, of his kingdom and eternal glory, what is like it? and yet all this is included in this word saved, and in the answer to that question, are there few that be saved? Indeed this word saved is but of little use in the world, save to them that are heartily afraid of damning. This word lies in the Bible, as excellent salves lie in some men's houses, thrust into a hole, and not thought on for many months, because the household-people have no wounds or sores. In time of sickness, what so set by as the doctor's glasses and galley-pots full of his excellent things? but when the person is grown well, the rest is thrown to the dunghill. Oh! when men are sick of sin, and afraid of damning, what a text is that, where this word saved is found? Yea, what a word of worth, and goodness, and blessedness, it is to him that lies continually upon the wrath of a guilty conscience? "But the whole need not the physician;" he therefore, and he only, knows what saved means, that knows what hell, and death, and damnation means. "What shall I do to be saved?" is the language of the trembling sinner. "Lord save me," is the language of the sinking sinner; and none admire the glory that is in the word saved, but such as see, without being saved, all things in heaven and earth are emptiness to them. They also that believe themselves privileged in all the blessedness that is wrapped up in that word, bless and admire God that hath saved them. Wherefore, since the thing intended, both in the question and the answer, is no less than the salvation of the soul, I beseech you to give the more earnest heed, Hebrews 21.

But to come to the particular phrases in the words, and to handle them orderly, in the words I find four things.

- (1.) An intimation of the kingdom of heaven;
- (2.) A description of the entrance into it;
- (3.) An exhortation to enter into it; and,
- (4.) A motive to enforce that exhortation.

1. An intimation of the kingdom of heaven; for when he saith, “Strive to enter in;” and in such phrases there is supposed a place or state, or both, to be enjoyed. “Enter in;” enter into what, or whither, but into a state or place, or both? and therefore when you read this word, “enter in,” you must say there is certainly included in the text that good thing that yet is not expressed. “Enter in;” into heaven, that is the meaning, where the saved are, and shall be; into heaven, that place, that glorious place, where God, and Christ, and angels are, and the souls or spirits of just men made perfect. “Enter in;” that thing included, though not expressed in the words, is called in another place, the Mount Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem, the general assembly and church of the first-born which are written in heaven, Hebrews 12. And therefore the words signify unto us, that there is a state most glorious, and that when this world is ended; and that this place and state is likewise to be enjoyed, and inherited by a generation of men for ever. Besides, this word, enter in, signifieth that salvation to the full is to be enjoyed only there, and that there only is external safety; all other places and conditions are hazardous, dangerous, full of snares, imperfections, temptations, and afflictions, but there all is well; there is no devil to tempt, no desperately wicked heart to deliver us up, no deceitful lust to entangle, nor any enchanting world to bewitch us: there all shall be well to all eternity. Further, all the parts of, and circumstances that attend salvation, are only there to be enjoyed: there only is immortality and eternal life; there is the glory and fullness of joy, and the everlasting pleasures; there is God and Christ to be enjoyed by open vision, and more; there are the angels, and the saints; further, there is no death, nor sickness, nor sorrow, nor sighing, for ever: there is no pain, nor persecutor, nor darkness, to eclipse our glory. O this Mount Sion! O this heavenly Jerusalem! 2 Corinthians 5:1-5; Psalm 16:11; Luke 20:35, 36; Hebrews 12:12-14.

Behold, therefore, what a great thing the Lord Jesus hath included by this little word “in.” In this word is wrapt up an whole heaven and eternal life; even as there is also by other little words in the holy Scriptures of truth; as where he saith, “Knock and it shall be opened unto you,” and the elect have obtained it. This should teach us, not only to read, but to attend in reading; not only to read, but to lift up our hearts to God in reading; for if we be not heedful, if he gives us not light and understanding, we may easily pass over, without any great regard, such a word as may have a glorious kingdom and eternal salvation in the bowels of it: yea, sometimes, as here, a whole heaven is intimated, where it is not at all expressed. The apostles of old did use to fetch great things out of the Scriptures, even out of the very order and timing of the several things contained therein. See Romans 4:9-11; Galatians 3:16, 17; Hebrews 8:13. But,

2. As we have here an intimation of the kingdom of heaven, so we have a description of the entrance into it, and that by a double similitude:

(1.) It is called a gate;

(2.) A strait gate: “Strive to enter in at the strait gate.”

First, It is set forth by the similitude of a gate. A gate, you know, is of a double use; it is to open and shut, and so, consequently, to let in or to keep out; and to do both these at the season; as he said, “Let not the gates of Jerusalem be opened till the sun be hot;” and again,

“I commanded that the gate should be shut, and charged that they should not be opened till after the Sabbath,”
Nehemiah 7:3; 13:19, 20.

And so you find of this gate of heaven, when the five wise virgins came, the gate was opened, but afterwards came the other virgins, and the door was shut, Matthew 11. So then the entrance into heaven is called a gate, to shew there is a time when there may be entrance, and there will come a time when there shall be none; and indeed this is a chief truth contained in the text: “Strive to enter in at the strait gate; for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.” I read in the scriptures of two gates or doors, through which they that go to heaven must enter.

1. There is the door of faith, the door which the grace of God hath opened to the Gentiles; this door is Jesus Christ, as also himself doth testify, saying, "I am the door," etc. Acts, 14:27; John 10:9. By this door men enter into God's favor and mercy, and find forgiveness through faith in his blood, and live in hope of eternal life; and therefore himself also said, "I am the door, by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved," that is, received to mercy, and inherit eternal life. But,

2. There is another door or gate (for that which is called in the text a gate, is twice in the next verse called a door); there is, I say, another gate, and that is the passage into the very heaven itself; the entrance into the celestial mansion-house, and that is the gate mentioned in the text, and the door mentioned twice in the verse that follows. And thus Jacob called it, when he said, Bethel was the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven, that is, the entrance, for he saw the entrance into heaven. One end of Jacob's ladder stands in Bethel, God's house, and the other end reacheth up to the gate of heaven, Genesis 27:10-18. Jacob's ladder was the figure of Christ, which ladder was not the gate of heaven, but the way from the Church to that gate which he saw above at the top of the ladder, Genesis 27:12; and John, 1:51. But again, that the gate in the text is the gate or entrance into heaven, consider,

1. It is that gate that letteth men into, or shutteth men out of that place or kingdom where Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob is, which place is that paradise where Christ promised the thief, that he should be that day, that he asked to be with him in his kingdom; it is that place into which Paul said, he was caught, when he heard words unlawful or impossible for a man to utter, Luke, 13:20; 23:24; 2 Corinthians 12:1-6.

Question: But is not Christ the gate or entrance into this heavenly place?

Answer: He is he without whom no man can get thither, because by his merits men obtain that world, and also because he (as the Father) is the donor and disposer of that kingdom to whom he will. Farther, this place is called his house, and himself the master of it (when once the master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door, ver. 25). But we use to say, that the master of the house is not the door. Men enter into heaven, then, by him, not as he is the gate, or door, or entrance, into the celestial

mansion-house, but as he is the giver and disposer of that kingdom to them whom he shall count worthy, because he hath obtained it for them.

2. That this gate is the very passage into heaven, consider the text hath special reference to the day of judgment, when Christ will have laid aside his mediatory office, which before he exercised for the bringing to the faith his own elect; and will then act, not as one that justifieth the ungodly, but as one that judgeth sinners. He will now be risen up from the throne of grace, and shut up the door against all the impenitent, and will be set upon the throne of judgment, from thence to proceed with ungodly sinners.

Objection: But Christ bids strive, “Strive now to enter in at the strait gate;” but if that gate be as you say, the gate or entrance into heaven, then it should seem that we should not strive till the day of judgment, for we shall not come at that gate till then.

Answer: Christ, by this exhortation, Strive, etc. doth not at all admit of, or countenance delays, or that a man should neglect his own salvation; but putteth poor creatures upon preparing for the judgment, and counselleth them now to get those things that will then give them entrance into glory. This exhortation is much like these,

“Be ye therefore ready also, for at such an hour as you think not, the Son of Man cometh: and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage, and the door was shut,” Matthew 24:44; 25:10.

So that when he saith, “Strive to enter in,” it is as much as if he should say, Blessed are they that shall be admitted another day to enter into the kingdom of heaven; but they that shall be accounted worthy of so unspeakable a favor, must be well prepared and fitted for it before hand. Now, the time to be fitted is not the day of judgment, but the day of grace; not then, but now. Therefore, strive now for those things that will then give you entrance into the heavenly kingdom. But,

Secondly. As it is called a gate, so it is called a strait gate: “Strive to enter in at the strait gate.”

The straitness of this gate is not to be understood carnally, but mystically. You are not to understand it, as if the entrance into heaven was some little

pinching wicket; no, the straitness of this gate is quite another thing. This gate is wide enough for all them that are truly gracious and sincere lovers of Jesus Christ, but so strait, as that not one of the other can by any means enter in:

“Open to me the gates of righteousness, I will go into them, and I will praise the Lord, this gate of the Lord into which the righteous shall enter,” Psalm 118:19, 20.

By this word, therefore, Christ Jesus hath shewed unto us, that without due qualifications there is no possibility of entering into heaven; the strait gate will keep all others out. When Christ spake this parable, he had doubtless his eye upon some passage or passages of the Old Testament, with which the Jews were all acquainted. I will mention two, and so go on.

1. The place by which God turned Adam and his wife out of Paradise. Possibly our Lord might have his eye upon that; for though that was wide enough for them to come out at, yet it was too strait for them to go in at. But what should be the reason of that? Why, they had sinned; and therefore

“God set at the east of that garden cherubims, and a flaming sword, turning every way, to keep the way of the tree of life” (Genesis 3:24).

The cherubims, and this flaming sword, they made the entrance too strait for them to enter in. Souls, there are cherubims and a flaming sword at the gates of heaven to keep the way of the tree of life; therefore none but them that are duly fitted for heaven can enter in at this strait gate; the flaming sword will keep all others out.

“Know you not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God; be not deceived, neither fornicators, nor idolators, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Corinthians 6:9).

2. Perhaps our Lord might have his eye upon the gates of the temple when he spake this word unto the people; for though the gates of the temple were six cubits wide, yet they were so strait, that none that were unclean

in anything might enter in thereat (Ezekiel 40:48), because there were placed at them gates, porters, whose office was to look that none but those that had right to enter, might go in thither: And so it is written,

“Jehoidah set porters at the gates of the house of the Lord, that none that were unclean in any thing might enter in” (2 Chronicles 23:19).

Souls, God hath porters at the gates of the temple, at the gate of heaven; porters, I say, placed there by God, to look that none that are unclean in any thing may come in thither. In at the gate of the church, none may enter now that are open, profane, and scandalous to religion; no, though they plead they are beloved of God:

“What hath my beloved to do in mine house (saith the Lord), seeing she hath wrought lewdness with many?” (Jeremiah 11:15).

I say, I am very apt to believe that our Lord Jesus Christ had his thoughts upon these two texts, when he said, The gate is strait: and that which confirms me the more in the thing is this, a little below the text, he saith,

“There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of heaven, and you yourselves thrust out” (verse 28).

Thrust out, which signifieth a violent act, resisting with striving those that would (though unqualified) enter: The porters of the temple were, for this very thing, to wear arms, if need were, and to be men of courage and strength, lest the unsanctified or unprepared should by some means enter in. We read, in the book of Revelations, of the holy city, and that it had twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels; but what did they do there? Why, amongst the rest of their service, this was one thing, that there might in nowise enter in any thing that defileth, or worketh abomination, and that maketh a lie, Revelation 21:12, 21.

But more particularly, to shew what it is that maketh this gate so strait: There are three things that maketh it strait.

- (1.) There is sin.
- (2.) There is the word of the law.

(3.) There are the angels of God.

First, There is sin; the sin of the profane, and the sin of the professor.

1. The sin of the profane. But this needs not be enlarged upon, because it is concluded upon at all hands, where there is the common belief of the being of God, and the judgment to come, that

“the wicked shall be turned into hell,
and all the nations that forget God,” Psalm 9:17.

2. But there is the sin of professors; or take it rather thus, there is a profession that will stand with an unsanctified heart and life. The sin of such will overpoise the salvation of their souls, the sin-end being the heaviest end of the scale; I say, that being the heaviest and which hath sin in it, they tilt over, and so are, notwithstanding their glorious profession, drowned in perdition and destruction; “for none such hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God; therefore let no man deceive you with vain words, for because of these things comes the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience;” neither will a profession be able to excuse them, Ephesians 5:3-6. The gate will be too strait for such as these to enter in thereat. A man may partake of salvation in part, but not of salvation in whole. God saved the children of Israel out of Egypt, but overthrew them in the wilderness: — “I will therefore put you in remembrance, though you once knew this, how that the Lord having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterwards destroyed them that believed not.” So we see that (notwithstanding their beginning) “they could not enter in, because of unbelief,” Jude 5; Hebrews 3:19.

Secondly, There is the word of the law, and that will make the gate strait also. None must go in thereat but those that can go in by the leave of the law; for though no man be, or can be, justified by the works of the law, yet unless the righteousness and holiness by which they attempt to enter into this kingdom be justified by the law, it is in vain once to think of entering in at this strait gate. Now the law justifieth not, but upon the account of Christ's righteousness; if therefore thou be not indeed found in that righteousness, thou wilt find the law lie just in the passage into heaven to keep thee out. Every man's work must be tried by fire, that it may be manifest of what sort it is. There are two errors in the world about the

law; one is, when men think to enter in at the strait gate by the righteousness of the law; the other is, when men think they may enter into heaven without the leave of the law. Both these, I say, are errors; for as by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified; so without the consent of the law, no flesh shall be saved. “heaven and earth shall pass away, before one jot or tittle of the law shall fail, till all be fulfilled.” He therefore must be damned that cannot be saved by the consent of the law. And, indeed, this law is the flaming sword that turneth every way; yea, that lieth to this day in the way to heaven, for a bar to all unbelievers and unsanctified professors; for it is taken out of the way for the truly gracious only. It will be found as a roaring lion to devour all others. Because of the law, therefore, the gate will be found too strait for the unsanctified to enter in. When the apostle had told the Corinthians that the unrighteous should not inherit the kingdom of God, and that such were some of them, he adds,

“But yet are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God,”
1 Corinthians 6:9-11;

closely concluding, that had they not been washed, and sanctified, and justified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, the law, for their transgressions, would have kept them out; it would have made the gate too strait for them to enter in.

Thirdly, There are also the angels of God, and by reason of them the gate is strait. The Lord Jesus calleth the end of the world his harvest; and saith, moreover, that the angels are his reapers. These angels are therefore to gather his wheat into his barn, but to gather the ungodly into bundles to burn them, Matthew 13:39, 41, 49. Unless, therefore, the man that is unsanctified can master the law, and conquer angels; unless he can, as I may say, pull them out of the gate-way of heaven, himself is not to come thither for ever. No man goeth to heaven but by the help of the angels — I mean at the day of judgment: “For the Son of man shall send forth his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.” If those that shall enter in at the strait gate shall only enter in thither by the conduct of the holy angels, pray when do you think those men will enter in thither, concerning whom the angels are commanded to gather them, to

bind them in bundles, to burn them? This, therefore, is a third difficulty: The angels will make this entrance strait; yea, too strait for the unjustified and unsanctified to enter in thither.

3. I come now to the exhortation, which is, to strive to enter in: “Strive to enter in at the strait gate.” These words are fitly added; for since the gate is strait, it follows that they who will enter in must strive.

“Strive.” This word strive supposeth,

- (1.) That great idleness is natural to professors; they think to get to heaven by lying, as it were, on their elbows.
- (2.) It also suggesteth, that many will be the difficulties that professors will meet with before they get to heaven.
- (3.) It also concludeth, that only the laboring Christian, man or woman, will get in thither. “Strive,” etc.

Three questions I will propound upon the word, answer to which may give us light into the meaning of it:

- (1.) What doth the word strive import?
- (2.) How should we strive?
- (3.) Why should we strive?

First, What doth this word strive import?

Answer: When he saith, Strive, it is as much as to say, bend yourselves to the work with all your might:

“Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with all thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave, whither thou goest,” Ecclesiastes 9:10.

Thus Samson did when he set himself to destroy the Philistines, he bowed himself with all his might, Judges, 16:30. Thus David did also, when he made provision for the building and beautifying of the temple of God, 1 Chronicles 29:2. And thus must thou do, if ever thou enterest into heaven.

Secondly, When he saith, Strive, he calleth for the mind and will, that they should be on side, and on the side of the things of his kingdom; for

none strive indeed, but such as have given the son of God their heart, of which their mind and will are a principal part; for saving conversion lieth more in the turning of the mind and will to Christ, and to the love of his heavenly things, than in all knowledge and judgment. And this the apostle confirmeth, when he saith,

“Stand fast in one spirit, with one mind, striving,” etc.
Philippians 1:27.

3. And, more particularly, this word strive is expressed by several other terms; as, 1. It is expressed by that word, “So run that you may obtain,” 1 Corinthians 9:24, 25. 2. It is expressed by that word,

“Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold of eternal life,”
1 Timothy 6:12. 3.

It is expressed by that word,

“Labor not for the meat that perisheth,
but for that meat that endureth to everlasting life,” John 6:27.

4. It is expressed by that word,

“We wrestle with principalities and powers,
and the rulers of the darkness of this world,” Ephesians 6:12.

Therefore, when he saith, Strive, it is as much as to say, Run for heaven, Fight for heaven, Labor for heaven, Wrestle for heaven, or you are like to go without it.

The second question is, How should we strive?

Answer: The answer in general is, Thou must strive lawfully:

“And if a man also strive for the mastery,
yet is he not crowned, except he strive lawfully,” 2 Timothy 2:5.

But you will say, What is it to strive lawfully?

Answer:

1. To strive against the things which are abhorred by the Lord Jesus; yea, to resist to the spilling of your blood, striving against sin, Hebrews 12:4.

To have all those things that are condemned by the word; yea, though they be thine own right hand, right eye, or right foot, in abomination; and to seek by all godly means the utter suppressing of them, Mark, 9:43, 45, 47.

2. To strive lawfully, is to strive for those things that are commanded in the word. But thou, O man of God, fly the world, and follow after (that is, strive for) righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness, fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, etc., 1 Timothy 6:11, 12.

3. He that striveth lawfully, must be therefore very temperate in all the good and lawful things of this life. And every one that striveth for the mastery, is temperate in all things; now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we in incorruptible, 1 Corinthians 9:25. Most professors give leave to the world, and the vanity of their hearts, to close with them, and to hang about their necks, and make their striving to stand rather in an outcry of words, than a hearty labor against the lusts and love of the world, and their own corruptions; but this kind of striving is but a beating of the air, and will come to just nothing at last, 1 Corinthians 9:26.

4. He that striveth lawfully, must take God and Christ along with him to the work, otherwise he will certainly be undone:

“Whereunto (said Paul) I also labor, striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily,” Colossians 1:29.

And for the right performing of this, he must observe these following particulars: —

(1.) He must take heed that he doth not strive about things, or words, to no profit; for God will not then be with him.

“Of these things (saith the apostle) put them in remembrance; charging them before the Lord, that they strive not about words to no profit, but to the subverting of the hearers,” 1 Timothy 2:14.

But, alas! how many professors in our days are guilty of this transgression, whose religion stands chiefly, if not only, in a few unprofitable questions, and vain wranglings, about words and things to no profit, but to the destruction of the hearers!

- (2.) He must take heed that whilst he strives against one sin, he does not harbor and shelter another; or that whilst he cries out against other men's sins, he does not countenance his own.
- (3.) In the striving, strive to believe, strive for the faith of the gospel; for the more we believe the gospel, and the reality of the things of the world to come, with the more stomach and courage shall be labor to possess the blessedness, Philippians 1:27; Hebrews 4. Let us labor therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief.
- (4.) As we should strive for, and by faith, so we should strive by prayer (Romans 15:30), by fervent and effectual prayers. O the swarms of our prayerless professors! What do they think of themselves? Surely the gate of heaven was heretofore as wide as in these our days; but what striving by prayer was there then among Christians for the thing that gives admittance into this kingdom, over what there is in these latter days!
- (5.) We should also strive by mortifying our members that are upon the earth:

“I therefore so run (said Paul), so fight I, not as one that beats the air; but I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection, lest that by any means, when I have preached the gospel to others, I myself should be a cast-away,” 1 Corinthians 9:27.

But all this is spoken principally to professors; so I would be understood.

I come now to the third question, namely, But why should we strive?

Answer:

1. Because the thing for which you are here exhorted to strive, is worth the striving for; it is for no less than for a whole heaven, and an eternity of felicity there. How will men that have before them a little honor, a little profit, a little pleasure, strive? I say again, how will they strive for this? Now, they do it for a corruptible crown, but we an incorruptible. Methinks this word heaven, and this eternal life, ought verily to make us

strive, for what is there again either in heaven or earth like them to provoke a man to strive?

2. Strive, because otherwise the devil and hell will assuredly have thee:

“He goes about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour,”
1 Peter 5:8.

These fallen angels, they are always watchful, diligent, unwearied; they are also mighty, subtle, and malicious, seeking nothing more than the damnation of thy soul. Oh, thou that art like the heartless dove, strive!

3. Strive, because every lust strives and wars against thy soul. The flesh lusteth against the spirit:

“Dearly beloved, I beseech you (said Peter), as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul,”
Galatians 5:17.

It is a rare thing to see or find out a Christian that indeed can bridle his lusts; but no strange thing to see such professors that are not only bridled, but saddled too, yea, and ridden from lust to sin, from one vanity to another, by the very devil himself, and the corruptions of their hearts.

4. Strive, because thou hast a whole world against thee. The world hateth thee if thou be a Christian; the men of the world hate thee; the things of the world are snares for thee, even thy bed and table, thy wife and husband, yea, thy most lawful enjoyments, have that in them that will certainly sink thy soul to hell, if thou dost not strive against the snares that are in them, Romans 11:9.

The world will seek to keep thee out of heaven with mocks, flouts, taunts, threatenings, gaols, gibbets, halters, burnings, and a thousand deaths; therefore strive. Again, if it cannot overcome thee with these, it will flatter, promise, allure, entice, entreat, and use a thousand tricks on this hand to destroy thee; and observe, many that have been stout against the threats of the world, have yet been overcome with the bewitching flatteries of the same. There ever was enmity between the devil and the church, and betwixt his seed and her seed too; Michael and his angels, and the dragon and his angels, these make war continually, Genesis 3; Revelation 12. There hath been great desires and endeavors among men to reconcile these

two in one, to wit, the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman; but it could never yet be accomplished. The world says, they will never come over to us; and we again say, by God's grace, we will never come over to them. But the business hath not ended in words; both they and we have also added our endeavors to make each other submit; but endeavors have proved ineffectual too. They, for their part, have devised all manner of cruel torments to make us submit; as, slaying with the sword, stoning, sawing asunder, flames, wild beasts, banishments, hunger, and a thousand miseries. We again, on the other side, have labored by prayers and tears, by patience and long-suffering, by gentleness and love, by sound doctrine, and faithful witness-bearing against their enormities, to bring them over to us; but yet the enmity remains: so that they must conquer us, or we must conquer them. One side must be overcome; but the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God.

5. Strive, because there is nothing of Christianity got by idleness:

“Idleness clothes a man with rags, and the vineyard of the slothful is grown over with nettles,” Proverbs 23:21; 24:30-32.

Profession that is not attended with spiritual labor cannot bring the soul to heaven. The fathers before us were not slothful in business, but fervent in spirit, serving the Lord:

“Therefore be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises,” Romans 12:11; Hebrews 6:12.

“Strive to enter in.” Methinks the words, at the first reading, do intimate to us, that the Christian, in all that ever he does in this world, should carefully heed and regard his soul, — I say, in all that ever he does. Many are for their souls by fits and starts; but a Christian indeed, in all his doing and designs which he contriveth and manageth in this world, should have a special eye to his own future and everlasting good; in all his labors he should strive to enter in:

“Wisdom (Christ) is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom, and in all thy gettings get understanding.” Proverbs 4:7.

Get nothing, if thou canst not get Christ and grace, and further hopes of heaven in that getting; get nothing with a bad conscience, with the hazard

of thy peace with God, and that in getting it thou weakenest thy graces which God hath given thee; for this is not to strive to enter in. Add grace to grace, both by religious and worldly duties; for so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, 2 Peter 1:8-12. Religious duties are not the only striving times; he that thinks so is out. Thou mayest help thy faith and thy hope, in the godly management of thy calling, and mayest get father footing in eternal life, by studying the glory of God in all thy worldly employment. I am speaking now to Christians that are justified freely by grace; and am encouraging, or rather counselling them to strive to enter in; for there is an entering in by faith and good conscience now, as well as our entering in body and soul hereafter; and I must add, that the more common it is to thy soul to enter in now by faith, the more steadfast hope shalt thou have of entering in hereafter in body and soul.

“Strive to enter in.” By these words also the Lord Jesus giveth sharp rebuke to those professors that have not eternal glory, but other temporal things in their eye, by all the bustle that they make in the world about religion. Some there be, what a stir they make, what a noise and clamor, with their notions and forms, and yet perhaps all is for the loaves; because they have eaten of the loaves, and are filled, John 6:26. They strive indeed to enter, but it is not into heaven: they find religion hath a good trade at the end of it; or they find that it is the way to credit, repute, preferment, and the like; and therefore they strive to enter into these. But these have not the strait gate in their eye, nor yet in themselves have they love to their poor and perishing souls; wherefore this exhortation nippeth such, by predicting of their damnation.

“Strive to enter in.” These words also sharply rebuke them who content themselves as the angel of the church of Sardis did, to wit, “To have a name to live, and be dead,” Revelation 3:1, or as they of the Laodiceans, who took their religion upon trust, and was content with a poor, wretched, lukewarm profession: for such as these do altogether unlike to the exhortation in the text, that says, Strive; and they sit and sleep; that says, Strive to enter in, and they content themselves with a profession that is never like to bring them thither.

“Strive to enter in.” Further, these words put us upon proving the truth of them now; for if the strait gate be the gate of heaven, and yet we are to strive to enter into it now, even while we live, and before we come thither, then, doubtless, Christ means by this exhortation, that we should use all lawful means to prove our graces in this world, whether they will stand in the judgment or no. Strive to enter in; get those graces now that will prove true graces then; and therefore try them you have; and if, upon trial, they prove not right, cast them away, and cry for better, lest they cast thee away, when better are not to be had.” “But of me gold tried in the fire:” mark that, Revelation 3:18. Buy of me faith and grace that will stand in the judgment; strive for that faith; buy of me that grace, and also white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, that the shame of thy wickedness doth not appear, and anoint thine eyes with eye-salve, that thou mayest see. mind you this advice; this is right striving to enter in.

But you will say, How should we try our graces? Would you have us run into temptation to try if they be sound or rotten?

Answer: You need not run into trials; God hath ordained that enough of them shall overtake thee to prove thy graces either rotten or sound before the day of thy death: sufficient to the day is the evil thereof, if thou hast but a sufficiency of grace to withstand. I say, thou shalt have trials enough overtake thee, to prove thy graces sound or rotten. Thou mayest, therefore, if God shall help thee, see how it is like to go with thee before thou goest out of this world; to wit, whether thy graces be such as will carry thee in at the gates of heaven or no.

But how should we try our graces now?

Answer: How dost thou find them in outward trials? See Hebrews 11:15, 16. How dost thou find thyself in the inward workings of sin? Romans 7:24. How dost thou find thyself under the most high enjoyment of grace in this world? Philippians 2:14.

But what do you mean by these three questions?

Answer: I mean graces shew themselves at these their seasons, whether they be rotten or sound.

How do they shew themselves to be true under the first of these?

Answer: By mistrusting our own sufficiency, by crying to God for help, by desiring rather to die than to bring any dishonor to the name of God, and by counting, that if God be honored in the trial, thou hast gained more than all the world could give thee, 2 Chronicles 20:12; 14:11; Acts 4.; 20:22; 2 Corinthians 4:17, 18; Hebrews 11:24, 25.

How do they shew themselves to be true under the second?

Answer: By mourning, and confessing, and striving, and praying, against them; by not being content, shouldst thou have heaven, if they live, and defile thee; and by counting of holiness the greatest beauty in the world; and by flying to Jesus Christ for life, Zechariah 12:10; John 19; Hebrews 12:4; Psalm 19:12.

How do they shew themselves to be true under the third?

Answer: By prizing the true graces above all the world, — by praying heartily that God will give thee more, — by not being content with all the grace thou canst be capable of enjoying on this side heaven and glory, Psalm 84:10; Luke, 17:5; Philippians 3.

“Strive to enter in.” The reason why Christ addeth these words, to enter in, is obvious, to wit, because there is no true and lasting happiness on this side heaven; I say, none that is both true and lasting, I mean as to our sense and feeling, as there shall; for here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come, Hebrews 13:14. The heaven is within; strive therefore to enter in: the glory is within; strive therefore to enter in: the Mount Sion is within; strive therefore to enter in: the heavenly Jerusalem is within; strive therefore to enter in: angels and saints are within; strive therefore to enter in: and to make up all, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and that glorious Redeemer, is within; strive therefore to enter in.

“Strive to enter in.” For without are dogs, sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie. Without are also the devils, and hell, and death, and all damned souls; without is howling, weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth; yea, without are all the miseries, sorrows, and plagues that an infinite God can in justice and power inflict upon an evil and wicked generation: “Strive therefore to

enter in at the strait gate,” Revelation 22:15; Matthew 25:41; Revelation 12:9; Isaiah 65:13, 14; Matthew 22:13; Deuteronomy 29:18-20.

“Strive to enter in at the strait gate; for many,
I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.”

4. We are now come to the motive which our Lord urges to enforce his exhortation.

He told us before, that the gate was strait; he also exhorted us to strive to enter in thereat, or to get those things now that will further our entrance then, and to set ourselves against those things that will hinder our entering in.

In this motive there are five things to be minded.

- (1.) That there will be a disappointment to some at the day of judgment, — they will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.
- (2.) That not a few, but many, will meet with this disappointment; “for many will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.”
- (3.) This doctrine of the miscarriage of many then, it standeth upon the validity of the word of Christ: “For many, I say, will see to enter in, and shall not be able.”
- (4.) Professors shall make a great heap among the many that shall fall short of heaven. “For many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.”
- (5.) Where grace and striving are wanting now, seeking and contending to enter in will be unprofitable then: “For many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.”

But I will proceed in my former method; to wit, to open the words unto you.

“For many,” etc. If he had said, For some will fall short; it had been a sentence to be minded; if he had said, For some that seek will fall short, it had been very awakening; but when he saith, Many, many will fall short, yea, many among professors will fall short; this is not only awakening, but dreadful.

“For many,” etc. I find this word many variously applied in Scripture.

1. Sometimes it intendeth the openly profane, the wicked and ungodly world, as where Christ saith,

“Wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be that go in thereat,” Matthew 7:13.

I say, by the many here, he intends those chiefly that go on in the broad way of sin and profaneness, bearing the tokens of their damnation in their foreheads, — those whose daily practice proclaims, “that their feet go down to death, and their steps take hold of hell,” Job 21:29, 30; Isaiah 3:9; Proverbs 4.

2. Sometimes this word many intendeth those that cleave to the people of God deceitfully, and in hypocrisy, or, as Daniel hath it,

“Many shall cleave unto the church with flatteries,” Daniel 11:34.

The word many in this text includeth all those who feign themselves better than they are in religion; it includeth, I say, those that have religion only, for an holy-day suit to set them out at certain times, and when they come among suitable company.

3. Sometimes this word many intendeth them that apostatize from Christ; such as for awhile believe, and in time of temptation fall away, as John saith of some of Christ's disciples:

“From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him,” John 6:65.

4. Sometimes this word many intendeth them that make a great noise, and do many great things in the church, and yet want saving grace: “Many (saith Christ) will say unto me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name, and in thy name cast out devils, and in thy name done many wonderful works?” Mark, there will be many of these.

5. Sometimes this word many intendeth those poor ignorant deluded souls that are led away with every wind of doctrine; those who are caught with the cunning and crafty deceiver, who lieth in wait to beguile unstable souls:

“And many shall follow their pernicious ways, by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of,” 2 Peter 2:2.

6. Sometimes this word many includeth all the world, good and bad:

“And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to everlasting shame and contempt,” Daniel 12:2;

compare with John, 5:28, 29.

7. Lastly, Sometimes this word many intendeth the good only: “Even them that shall be saved,” Luke 1:10; 2:34.

Since then that the word is so variously applied, let us inquire how it must be taken in the text. And,

- (1.) It must not be applied to the sincerely godly, for they shall never perish, John 10:27, 28.
- (2.) It cannot be applied to all the world, for then no flesh should be saved.
- (3.) Neither is it to be applied to the open profane only, for then the hypocrite is by it excluded.
- (4.) But by the word many in the text our Lord intendeth in special the professor; the professor, I say, how high soever he seems to be now, that shall be found without saving grace in the day of judgment.

Now that the professor is in special intended in this text, consider, so soon as the Lord had said, “Many will seek to enter in, and shall not be able,” he pointeth, as with his finger, at the many that then he in special intendeth; to wit, then among whom he had taught; them that had eat and drunken in his presence; them that had prophesied, and cast out devils in his name, and in his name had done many wonderful works, Luke 23:26; Matthew 7:27. These are the many intended by the Lord in this text, though others also are included under the sentence of damnation by his word in other places. “For many,” etc. Matthew saith concerning this strait gate, That there are but few that find it. But it seems the cast-aways in my text did find it; for you read, that they knocked at it, and cried,

“Lord, open unto us.” So then, the meaning may seem to be this, — many of the few that find it will seek to enter in, and shall not be able. I find, at the day of judgment, some will be crying to the rocks to cover them, and some at the gates of heaven for entrance. Suppose that those that cry to the rocks to cover them, are they whose conscience will not suffer them once to look God in the face, because they are fallen under present guilt, and the dreadful fears of the wrath of the Lamb, Revelation 6:16; and that those that stand crying at the gate of heaven, are those whose confidence holds out to the last, — even those whose boldness will enable them to contend even with Jesus Christ for entrance; them, I say, that will have profession, casting out of devils, and many wonderful works, to plead: of this sort are the many in my text: “For many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.” “For many,” etc. Could we compare the professors of times with the everlasting word of God, this doctrine would more easily appear to the children of men. How few among the many, yea, among the swarms of professors, have heart to make conscience of walking before God in this world, and to study his glory among the children of men! How few, I say, have his name lie nearer their hearts than their own carnal concerns! Nay, do not many make his word, and his name, and his ways, a stalking-horse to their own worldly advantages! God calls for faith, good conscience, moderation, self-denial, humility, heavenly-mindedness, love to saints, to enemies, and for conformity in heart, in word, and life, to his will: but where is it? Mark 11:22; 1 Peter 3:16; Hebrews 13:5; Philippians 4:5; Matthew 10:37-39; Colossians 3:1-4; Micah 6:8; Revelation 2:10; John 15:17; 1 John 4:21; Matthew 5:44; Proverbs 23:26; Colossians 4:6.

“For many, I say unto you.” These latter words carry I them a double argument to prove the truth asserted before: First, in that he directly pointeth at his followers: “I say unto you:” Many, I say unto you, even to you that are my disciples, to you that have eat and drank in my presence. I know that sometimes Christ hath directed his speech to his disciples, not so much upon their accounts, as upon the accounts of others: but here it is not so; the I say unto you, in this place, shows it immediately concerned some of themselves: “I say unto you, ye shall begin to stand without, and to knock, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us, and he shall answer and say unto you, I know you not whence you are; then

shall ye begin to say, We have eat and drank in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets: But he shall say, I tell you, I know you not whence you are; depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity;" it is you, you, YOU, that I mean. "I say unto you." It is common with a professing people, when they hear a smart and a thundering sermon, to say, Now has the preacher paid off the drunkard, the swearer, the liar, the covetous, and adulterer; forgetting that these sins may be committed in a spiritual and mystical way. There is spiritual drunkenness, spiritual adultery, and a man may be a liar that calls God his Father when he is not, or that calls himself a Christian, and is not. Wherefore, perhaps all these thunders and lightnings in this terrible sermons may more concern thee than thou art aware of: "I say unto you;" unto you, professors, may be the application of all this thunder, Revelation 2:9; 3:9. "I say unto you."

Had not the Lord Jesus designed by these words to shew what an overthrow will one day be made among professors, he needed not have you'd it at this rate, as in the text, and afterwards he has done; the sentence had run intelligible enough without it; I say, without his saying, "I say unto you." But the truth is, the professor is in danger; the preacher and the hearer, the workers or miracles, and workers of wonders, may be all in danger of damning, notwithstanding all their attainments. And to awaken us all about this truth, therefore, the text must run thus: "For many, I say unto you, shall seek to enter in, and shall not be able."

See you not yet that the professor is in danger, and that those words, "I say unto you," are a prophesy of the everlasting perdition of some that are famous in the congregation of saints? I say, if you do not see it, pray God your eyes may be opened, and beware that thy portion be not as the portion of one of those that are wrapped up in the 28th verse of the chapter: "There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of heaven, and you yourselves thrust out."

"For many, I say unto you." These words, I told you, carry in them a double argument for confirmation of the truth asserted before: First, That professors are here particularly pointed at; and, secondly, It is the saying of the truth himself: For these words I say, are words full of authority; I say it, I say unto you, says Christ, as he saith in another place, It is I that

speak; behold, it is I. The person whose words we have now under consideration was no blundering raw-headed preacher, but the very Wisdom of God, his Son, and him that hath lain in his bosom from everlasting, and consequently had the most perfect knowledge of his Father's will, and how it would fare with professors at the end of this world. And now hearken what himself doth say of the words which he hath spoken:

“Heaven and earth shall pass away,
but my word shall not pass away,” Matthew 24:35.

“I say unto you.”

The prophet used not to speak after this manner, nor yet the holy apostles; for thus to speak, is to press things to be received upon their own authority. They used to say, Thus saith the Lord, or Paul, or Peter, an apostle, or a servant of God. But now we are dealing with the words of the Son of God; it is he that hath said it; wherefore we find the truth of the perishing of many professors asserted, and confirmed by Christ's own mouth. This consideration carrieth great awakening in it; but into such a fast sleep are many now-a-days fallen, that nothing will awaken them but that shrill and terrible cry, “Behold, the Bridegroom comes; go ye out to meet him.” “I say unto you.”

There are two things upon which this assertion may be grounded.

1. There is in the world a thing like grace, that is not.
2. There is a sin called the sin against the Holy Ghost, from which there is no redemption. And both these things befall professors.

First, There is in the world a thing like grace, that is not. That is evident, because we read that there are some that not only make a fair shew in the flesh, that glory in appearance, that appear beautiful outwardly, that do as God's people, but have not the grace of God's people, Galatians 6:12; 2 Corinthians 5:12; Matthew 23:27; Isaiah 57:2, 3. It is evident also from those frequent cautions that are everywhere in the Scriptures given us about this thing: “Be not deceived: Let a man examine himself: Examine yourselves whether you be in the faith,” Galatians 6:7; 1 Corinthians

11:28; 2 Corinthians 13:3. All these expressions intimate to us, that there may be a shew of, or a thing like grace, where there is no grace indeed.

3. This is evident from the conclusion made by the Holy Ghost upon this very thing:

“For if a man thinketh himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself,” Galatians 6:3.

The Holy Ghost here concludeth, that a man may think himself to be something, may think he hath grace, when he hath none, may think himself something for heaven and another world, when indeed he is just nothing at all with reference thereto. The Holy Ghost also determines upon this point, to wit, that they that do so deceive themselves: “For if a man thinketh himself to be something when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself;” he deceiveth his own soul, he deceiveth himself of heaven and salvation. So again:

“Let no man beguile you of your reward,” Colossians 2:18.

4. It is manifest from the text, “For many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.” Alas! Great light, great parts, great works, and great confidence of heaven, may be where there is no faith of God's elect, no love of the Spirit, and so consequently, no saving grace. But,

Secondly, As there is a thing like grace, which is not, so there is a sin, called the sin against the Holy Ghost, from which there is no redemption; and this sin doth more than ordinarily befall professors.

There is a sin called the sin against the Holy Ghost, from which there is no redemption. This is evident both from Matthew and Mark; “But whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, nor in the world to come. But he that shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost, hath never forgiveness, but is in danger of eternal damnation,” Matthew 12:32; Mark 3:29. Wherefore, when we know that a man hath sinned this sin, we are not to pray for him, or to have compassion on him, 1 John 15:16; Judges 22.

This sin doth most ordinarily befall professors; for there are few, if any, that are not professors, that are at present capable of sinning this sin.

“They which were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, that were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the power of the world to come,”
Hebrews 6:4, 5,

of this sort are they that commit this sin. Peter also describes them to be such, that sin the unpardonable sin:

“For if after they have escaped the pollution of the world, through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning,” 2 Peter 2:2.

The other passage in the 10th of Hebrews holdeth forth the same thing:

“For if we sin wilfully, after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sin, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment, and fiery indignation, that shall devour the adversaries,” Hebrews 10:26, 27.

These, therefore, are the persons that are the prey for this sin: this sin feedeth upon professors, and they that are such, do very often fall into the mouth of this eater. Some fall into the mouth of this sin, by delusions and doctrines of devils; and some fall into the mouth of it, by returning with the dog to his own vomit again, and with the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire, 1 Peter 2:22. I shall not here give you a particular description of this sin — that I have done elsewhere; but such a sin there is, and they that commit it shall never have forgiveness. And I say again, there be professors that commit this unpardonable sin, yea, more than most are aware of. Let all therefore look about them. The Lord awaken them that they may so do; for what with a profession without grace, and by the venom of the sin against the Holy Ghost, many will seek to enter in, and shall not be able. Will seek to enter in.

This kingdom, at the gate of which the reprobate will be stopped, will be at the last judgment the desire of all the world; and they, especially they in my text, will seek to enter in; for then they will see that the blessedness is to those that shall get into this kingdom, according to that which is written, “Blessed are they that do his commandments, they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city,

Revelation 21:14. To prove that they will seek, although I have done it already, yet read these texts at your leisure, Matthew 25:11; 7:22; Luke 13:28. And, in a word, to give you the reason why they will seek to enter in.

- 1.** Now they will see what a kingdom it is, what glory there is in it, and now they shall also see the blessedness which they shall have that shall then be counted worthy to enter in. The reason why this kingdom is so little regarded, it is because it is not seen; the glory of it is hid from the eyes of the world: "Their eye hath not seen, nor their ear heard," etc. Ay, but then they shall hear and see too; and when this comes to pass, then, even then, he that now most seldom thinks thereof will seek to enter in.
- 2.** They will now see what hell is, and what damnation in hell is, more clear than ever. They will also see how the breath of the Lord, like a stream of brimstone, doth kindle it. O the sight of the burning fiery furnace, which is prepared for the devil and his angels! This, this will make work in the souls of cast-aways at that day of God Almighty, and then they will seek to enter in.
- 3.** Now they will see what the meaning of such words as these are, Hell-fire, Everlasting fire, Devouring fire, Fire that never shall be quenched. Now they will see what Forever means, what Eternity means; now they will see what this word means, the Bottomless Pit; now they will hear roaring of sinners in this place, howling in that, some crying to the mountains to fall upon them, and others to the rocks to cover them; now they will see blessedness is nowhere but within.
- 4.** Now they will see what glory the godly are possessed with; how they rest in Abraham's bosom, how they enjoy eternal glory, how they walk in their white robes, and unspeakable happiness that now God's people shall have! and this shall be seen by them that are shut out, by them that God hath rejected for ever; and this will make them seek to enter in, Luke 16:22, 23; 13:28, "Will seek to enter in."

Question: But some may say, How will they seek to enter in?

Answer:

1. They will put on all the confidence they can, they will trick and trim up their profession, and adorn it with what bravery they can. Thus the foolish virgins sought to enter in; they did trim up their lamps, made themselves as fine as they could. They made shift to make their lamps to shine awhile; but the Son of God discovering himself, their confidence failed, their lamps went out, the door was shut upon them, and they were kept out.

2. They will seek to enter in by crowding themselves in among the godly. Thus the man without the wedding garment sought to enter in: He goes to the wedding, gets into the wedding-chamber, sits close among the guests, and then, without doubt, concluded he should escape damnation. But you know, one black sheep is soon seen, though it be among an hundred white ones. Why, even thus it fared with this poor man: And when the King came in to see the guests, he saw there a man that had not on a wedding-garment. He spied him presently, and before one word was spoken to any of the others, he had this dreadful salutation, “Friend, how camest thou in hither, not having on a wedding garment?” And he was speechless; though he could swagger it out amongst the guests, yet the master of the feast, at first coming in, strikes him dumb; and having nothing to say for himself, the King had something to say against him: “Then said the King to the servants (the angels), bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into utter darkness, there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

3. They will seek to enter in, by pleading their profession and admittance to the Lord's ordinances when they were in the world: “Lord, we have eat and drank in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets.” we sat at thy table, and used to frequent sermons and Christian assemblies; we were well thought of by thy saints, and were admitted into thy churches; we professed the same faith as they did; Lord, Lord, open unto us.

4. They will seek to enter in, by pleading their virtues; how they subjected to his ministry, how they wrought for him, what good they did in the world, and the like, Matthew 7:22; but neither will this help them; the same answer that the two former had, the same have these, — “Depart from me, ye workers of iniquity.”

5. They will seek to enter in, by pleading excuses, when they cannot evade conviction. The slothful servant went this way to work, when he was called to account for not improving his Lord's money: "Lord (says he) I know thou wast an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sowed, and gathering where thou hast not strawed, and I was afraid," etc. (either that I should not please in laying out thy money, or that I should put it into hands out of which I should not get it again at thy need), "and I went and hid thy talent in the earth; lo, there thou hast that is thine;" as if he had said, True, Lord, I have not improved, I have not got; but consider also I have not embezzled, I have not spent nor lost thy money; lo, there thou hast what is thine, Matthew 25:24-28. There are but few will be able to say these last words at the day of judgment. The most of professors are for embezzling, misspending, and slothing away their time, their talents, their opportunities to do good in. But I say, if he that can make so good an excuse as to say, Lo, there thou hast that is thine; I say, if such an one shall be called a wicked and slothful servant, if such an one shall be put to shame at the day of judgment, yea, if such an one shall, notwithstanding this care to save his Lord's money, be cast as unprofitable into utter darkness, where shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, what will they do that have neither taken care to lay out, nor care to keep what was committed to their trust?

6. They will seek to enter in, by pleading that ignorance was the ground of their miscarrying in the things where they offended. Wherefore when Christ charges them with want of love to him, and with want of those fruits that should prove their love to be true — as, that they did not feed him, did not give him drink, did not take him in, did not clothe him, visit him, come unto him, and the like — they readily reply,

"Lord, when saw we thee an hungered, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee?"

Matthew 25:41-45.

As who should say, Lord, we are not conscious to ourselves that this charge is worthily laid at our door: God forbid that we should have been such sinners. But, Lord, give an instance; when was it, or where? True, there was a company of poor sorry people in the world, very inconsiderable, set by with nobody; but for thyself, we professed thee, we

loved thee, and hadst thou been with us in the world, wouldst thou have worn gold, wouldst thou have eaten the sweetest of the world, we would have provided it for thee; and therefore, Lord, Lord, open to us. But will this plea do? No. Then shall he answer them, “Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these my brethren, ye did it not to me.” This plea, then, though grounded upon ignorance, which is one of the strangest pleas for neglect of duty, would not give them admittance into the kingdom: “These shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal.”

I might add other things by which it will appear how they will seek to enter in. As,

- 1.** They will make a stop at this gate, this beautiful gate of heaven; they will begin to stand without at the gate, as being loath to go any further. Never did malefactor so unwillingly turn off the ladder when the rope was about his neck, as these will turn away in that day from the gates of heaven to hell.
- 2.** They will not only make a stop at the gate; but there they will knock and call. This also argueth them willing to enter. They will begin to stand without, and to knock at the gate, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. This word Lord being doubled, shews the vehemency of their desires: Lord, Lord, open to us. The devils are coming; Lord, Lord, the pit opens her mouth upon us; Lord, Lord, there is nothing but hell and damnation left us, if, Lord, Lord, thou hast not mercy upon us; Lord, Lord, open to us.
- 3.** Their last argument for entrance is their tears, when groundless confidence, pleading of virtues, excuses, and ignorance, will not do; when standing at the gate, knocking and calling, Lord, Lord, open to us, will not do, then they betake themselves to their tears. Tears are sometimes the most powerful arguments, but they are nothing worth here. Esau also sought it carefully with tears, but it helped him nothing at all, Hebrews 12:15, 16. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth; for the gate is shut for ever, mercy is gone for ever, Christ hath rejected them for ever. All their pleas, excuses, and tears, will not make them able to enter into this kingdom.

“For many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.”

I come now to the latter part of the words, which closely shew us the reason of the rejection of these many that must be damned, — “They will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.”

I come now to the latter part of the words, which closely shew us the reason of the rejection of these many that must be damned, — “They will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.”

An hypocrite, a false professor, may go a great way; they may pass through the first and second watch, to wit, may be approved of Christians and churches; but what will they do when they come at this iron gate that leadeth into the city? There the workers of iniquity will fall, be cast down, and shall not be able to rise.

“And shall not be able.” The time, as I have already hinted, which my text respecteth, it is the day of judgment, a day when all masks and vizards shall be taken off from all faces. It is a day where God

“will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the heart,” 1 Corinthians 4:5.

It is also the day of his wrath, the day in which he will pay vengeance, even a recompense to his adversaries.

At this day, those things that now these may count sound and good, will then shake like a quagmire, even all their naked knowledge, their feigned faith, pretended love, glorious shows of gravity in the face, their holiday-words, and specious carriages, will stand them in little stead. I call them holiday ones, for I perceive that some professors do with religion just as people do with their best apparel — hang it against the wall all the week, and put them on Sundays. For as some scarce ever put on a suit but when they go to a fair or a market, so little house religion will do with some; they save religion till they go to a meeting, or till they meet with a godly chapman. O poor religion! O poor professor! What wilt thou do at this day, and the day of thy trial and judgment? Cover thyself thou canst not; go for a Christian thou canst not; stand against the Judge thou canst not. What wilt thou do? “The ungodly shall not stand in judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous.”

“And shall not be able.” The ability here intended is not that which standeth in carnal power of fleshly subtlety, but in the truth and simplicity of those things for the sake of which God giveth the kingdom of heaven to his people.

There are five things, for the want of which this people will not be able to enter.

1. This kingdom belongs to the elect, to those for whom it was prepared from the foundation of the world, Matthew 25. Hence Christ saith, when he comes, he will send forth his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to another, Matthew 24. And hence he saith again, “I will bring forth a seed out of Jacob, and out of Judah an inheritor of my mountains, and mine elect shall inherit it, and my servants shall dwell there.” “They shall deceive, if it were possible, the very elect.”

“But the elect hath obtained it, and the rest were blinded,”
Romans 11:7.

2. They will not be able to enter, because they will want the birthright. The kingdom of heaven is for the heirs, — and if children, then heirs; if born again, then heirs: wherefore it is said expressly, “Except a man be born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God.” By this one word, down goes all carnal privilege of being born of flesh and blood, and of the will of man. Canst thou produce the birthright? But art thou sure thou canst? For it will little profit thee to think of the blessed kingdom of heaven, if thou wantest a birthright to give thee inheritance there. Esau did despise his birthright, saying, What good will this birthright do me? And there are many in the world of his mind to this day. Tush, say they, they talk of being born again; what good shall a man get by that? They say, no going to heaven without being born again. But God is merciful; Christ died for sinners; and we will turn when we can tend it, and doubt not but all will be well at last. But I will answer thee, thou child of Esau, that the birthright and blessing go together; miss of one, and thou shalt never have the other. Esau found this true; for having first despised the birthright, when he would afterwards have inherited the blessing, he was rejected; for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears, Genesis 25.; Hebrews 12:14-16.

3. They shall not be able to enter in who have not believed with the faith of God's operation; the faith that is most holy, even the faith of God's elect:

“He that believeth on the Son of God hath everlasting life; he that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him,” John 3.

But now, this faith is the effect of electing love, and of a new birth, John 11:12. Therefore, all the professors that have not faith which floweth from being born of God, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.

4. They shall not be able to enter in that have not gospel-holiness. Holiness that is the effect of faith is that which admits into the presence of God, and into his kingdom too: “Blessed and holy are they that have part in the first resurrection, on such the second death (which is hell and eternal damnation, Revelation 20:14) have no power,” Revelation 20:6. Blessed and holy, with the holiness that flows from faith which is in Christ; for to these the inheritance belongs: “That they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them that are sanctified by faith (saith Christ) which is in me,” Acts 26:18. This holiness which is the natural effect of faith in the Son of God, Christ Jesus the Lord will, at this day of judgment, distinguish from all other shows of holiness and sanctity, be they what they will, and will admit the soul that hath this holiness into his kingdom, when the rest will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.

5. They shall not be able to enter in that do not persevere in this blessed faith and holiness; not that they that have them indeed can finally fall away, and everlastingly perish; but it hath pleased Jesus Christ to bid them that have the right to hold fast that they have; to endure to the end; and then tells them they shall be saved — though it is as true that none is of power to keep himself; but God worketh together with his children, and they are kept by the power of God, through faith, unto salvation, which is also laid up in heaven for them, 1 Peter 1:3-5.

“The foolish shall not stand in thy sight; thou hatest the workers of iniquity.” The foolish are the unholy ones, that neither have faith, nor holiness, nor perseverance in godliness, and yet lay claim to the kingdom of heaven; but “better is a little with righteousness than great revenues

without right,” Psalm 55.; Proverbs 16:8. What is it for me to claim a house, or a farm, without right? or to say, all this is mine, but have nothing to shew for it? his estate lieth in his conceit; he hath nothing by birthright and law, and therefore shall not be able to inherit the possession: “For many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.”

Thus you see, that the non-elect shall not be able to enter, that he that is not born again shall not be able to enter, that he that hath not saving faith, with holiness and perseverance flowing therefrom, shall not be able to enter: wherefore consider of what I have said.

II. I COME NOW TO GIVE YOU SOME OBSERVATIONS FROM THE WORDS, AND THEY MAY BE THREE.

- 1.** When men have put in all the claim they can for heaven, but few will have it for their inheritance: “For many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.”
- 2.** Great, therefore, will be the disappointment that many will meet with at the day of judgment: “For many will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.”
- 3.** Going to heaven, therefore, will be no trivial business; salvation is not got by a dream; they that would then have that kingdom, must now strive lawfully to enter: “For many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.”

I shall speak chiefly, and yet but briefly, to the first of these observations, to wit,

That when men have put in all the claim they can to the kingdom of heaven, but few will have it for their inheritance. The observation standeth of two parts.

- 1.** That the time is coming, when every man will put in whatever claim they can to the kingdom of heaven.
- 2.** There will be but few of them that put in claim thereto that shall enjoy it for their inheritance.

I shall speak but a word or two to the first part of the observation, because I have prevented my enlargement thereon by my explication upon the words; but you find in the 25th of Matthew, that all they are on the left hand of the Judge did put in all the claim they could for this blessed kingdom of heaven. If you shall take them on the left hand, as most do, for all the sinners that shall be damned, then that completely proveth the first part of the observation; for it is expressly said,

“Then shall they (all of them jointly, and every one apart) also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee thus and thus, and did not minister unto thee?” Matthew 25:44.

I could here bring you in the plea of the slothful servant, the cry of the foolish virgins: I could also here enlarge upon that passage, “Lord, Lord, have we not eat and drank in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets?” But these things are handled already, in the handling of which this first part of the observation is proved; wherefore, without more words, I will, God assisting by his grace, descend to the second part thereof, to wit,

There will be but few of them that put in claim thereto that will enjoy it for their inheritance.

I shall speak distinctly to this part of the observation, and shall first confirm it by a Scripture or two.

“Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, that leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it,” Matthew 7:13, 14.

“Fear not, little flock, it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom,” Luke 12:32.

By these two texts, and by many more that will be urged anon, you may see the truth of what I have said.

To enlarge, therefore, upon the truth; and, First, more generally; Secondly, more particularly.

1. More generally, I shall prove that in all ages but few have been saved.
2. More particularly, I shall prove but few of them that profess have been saved.

First, In the old world, when it was most populous, even in the days of Noah, we read but of eight persons that were saved out of it: well, therefore, might Peter call them but few; but how few? Why, but eight souls; “wherein few, that is, eight souls, were saved by water,” 1 Peter 3:20. He touches a second time upon this truth, saying, “He spared not the old world, but saved Noah the eighth person, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly.” Mark, all the rest are called the ungodly, and there were also a world of them, 2 Peter 2:5. These are also taken notice of in Job, and go there also by the name of wicked men:

“Hast thou marked the old way, which wicked men have trodden, which were cut down out of time, whose foundation was overflown with a flood, which said unto God, Depart from us, and what can the Almighty do for them?” Job 22:15-19.

There were therefore but eight persons that escaped the wrath of God, in the day that the flood came upon the earth, the rest were ungodly; there was also a world of them, and they are to this day in the prison of hell, Hebrews 11:6; 1 Peter 3:19, 20.

Nay, I must correct my pen, there were but seven of the eight that were good; for Ham, though he escaped the judgment of the water, yet the curse of God overtook him to his damnation.

Secondly, When the world began again to be replenished, and people began to multiply therein: how few, even in all ages, do we read of that were saved from the damnation of the world?

1. One Abraham and his wife God called out of the land of the Chaldeans: “I called (said God) Abraham alone,” Isaiah 51:1, 2.
2. One Lot out of Sodom and Gomorrah, out of Admah and Zeboim; one Lot out of four cities. Indeed his wife and two daughters went out of Sodom with him; but they all three proved naught, as you may see in the 19th of Genesis. Wherefore Peter observes, that Lot only was saved:

“He turned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes, condemning them with an overthrow, making them an example unto those that after should live ungodly, and delivered just Lot, that righteous man;” 2 Peter 2:6, 7, 8.

Jude says, that in this condemnation, God overthrew, not only Sodom and Gomorrah, but the cities about them also; and yet you find none but Lot could be found that was righteous, either in Sodom or Gomorrah, or the cities about them; wherefore they, all of them, suffer the vengeance of eternal fire, verse 7.

3. Come we now to the time of the Judges, how few then were the godly, even then when the inhabitants of the villages ceased, they ceased in Israel! “the highways (of God) were the unoccupied,” Judges, 5:6, 7.

4. There were but few in the days of David:

“Help, Lord (says he), for the godly man ceaseth, for the faithful fail from among the children of men,” Psalm 12:1.

5. In Isaiah's time the saved were come to such a few, that he positively says that there were a very small number left:

“God had made them like Sodom, and they had been like unto Gomorrah,” Isaiah 1:8, 9.

6. It was cried unto them in the time of Jeremiah, that they should

“run to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem, and see, and know, and seek in the broad places thereof, if he can find a man, if there be any that executeth judgment, that seeketh the truth, and I will pardon it,” Jeremiah 5:1.

7. God shewed his servant Ezekiel how few there would be saved in his day, by the vision of a few hairs saved out of the midst of a few hairs; for the saved were a few saved out of a few, Ezekiel 5:3, 4, 5.

8. You find in the time of the prophet Micah, how the godly complain, that as to number, they then were so few, that he compares them to those that are left behind, when they had gathered the summer-fruit, Micah 7:1.

9. When Christ was come, how did he confirm this truth, that but few of them that put in claim for heaven will have it for their inheritance! But the common people could not hear it, and therefore, upon a time when he did but a little hint at this truth, the people, even all in the synagogue where he preached it,

“were filled with wrath, rose up, thrust him out of the city, and led him unto the brow of the hill (whereon their city was built), that they might cast him down headlong,” Luke 4:24-30.

10. John, who was after Christ, saith, “The whole world lies in wickedness; that all the world wondered after the beast; and that power was given to the beast over all kindreds, tongues, and nations.” Power to do what? Why, to cause all, both great and small, rich and poor, bond and free, to receive his mark, and to be branded for him, John, 5:10; Revelation 13:3; 8:16.

11. Should we come to observation and experience, the shew of the countenance of the bulk of men doth witness against them; “they declare their sin like Sodom, they hide it not,” Isaiah 3:9. Where is the man that maketh the Almighty God his delight, and that designeth his glory in the world? Do not even almost all pursue this world, their lusts and pleasures? and so, consequently, say unto God, “Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways; or, What is the Almighty that we should serve him? It is in vain to serve God,” etc.

So that without doubt it will appear a truth in the day of God, that but few of them that shall put in their claim to heaven will have it for their inheritance.

Before I pass this head, I will shew you to what the saved are compared in the Scriptures.

1. They are compared to an handful: “There shall be an handful of corn in the earth upon the top of the mountains,” etc. Psalm 27:16; this corn is nothing else but them that shall be saved, Matthew 3:12; 13:30. But mark, “There shall be an handful:” What is an handful, when compared with the whole heap? or what is an handful out of the rest of the world?

2. As they are compared to an handful, so they are compared to a lily among the thorns, Song 2:2, which is rare, and not so commonly seen: “As the lily among thorns (saith Christ), so is my beloved among the daughters.” 1. By thorns, we understand the worst and best of men, even all that are destitute of the grace of God, “for the best of them is as a briar, and the most upright of them as a thorn-hedge,” Micah 7:4; 2 Samuel 23:6. 2. I know that she may be called a lily amongst thorns also, because she meets with the pricks of persecution, Ezekiel 2:6; 29:24. 3. She may also be thus termed, to shew the disparity that is betwixt hypocrites and the church, Luke 8:14; Hebrews 7. But this is not all; the saved are compared to a lily among thorns, to shew you that they are but few in the world; to shew you that they are but few and rare; for as Christ compares her to a lily among thorns, so she compares him to an apple-tree among the trees of the wood, which is rare and scarce, not common.

3. They that are saved are called but one of many; for though there be threescore queens, and fourscore concubines, and virgins without number, yet my love, saith Christ, is but one, my undefiled is but one, Song 6:8, 9; according to that of Jeremiah, “I will take you, one of a city,” Jeremiah 3. The saying of Paul is much like this,

“Know you not, that they which run in a race, run all,
but one receiveth the prize,” 1 Corinthians 9:24;

but one, that is, few of many, few of them that run; for he is not here comparing them that run with them that sit still, but with them that run, some run and lose, some run and win; they that run and win are few in comparison with them that run and lose: “They that run in a race, run all, but one receives the prize; let there then be threescore queens, and fourscore concubines, and virgins without number, yet the saved are but few.”

4. They that are saved, are compared to the gleaning after the vintage is in: “Woe is me (said the church), for I am as when they have gathered the summer-fruit, as the grape-gleanings after the vintage is in,” Micah 7:1. The gleanings! What is the gleanings to the whole crop? and yet you here see, to the gleanings are the saved compared: It is the devil and sin that carry away the cartloads, while Christ and his ministers come after a gleaning: But the gleaning of the grapes of Ephraim are better than the

vintage of Abiezer, Judges, 8:2. Them that Christ and his ministers glean up and bind up in the bundle of life, a better than the loads that go the other way. You know it is often the cry of the poor in harvest, Poor gleaning, poor gleaning: And the ministers of the gospel they also cry,

“Lord, who hath believed our report?

And to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?” Isaiah 53:1.

When the prophet speaks of the saved under this metaphor of gleaning, how doth he amplify the matter?

“Gleaning-grapes shall be left, says he, two or three berries in the top of the uppermost bough, four or five in the utmost fruitful branches thereof, saith the Lord,” Isaiah 17:6.

Thus you see what gleaning is left in the vineyard, after the vintage is in; two or three here, four or five there. Alas! they that shall be saved when the devil and hell have had their due, they will be but as the gleaning, they will be but few; they that go to hell, go thither in clusters, but the saved go not so to heaven, Matthew 13:30; Micah 7. Wherefore when the prophet speaketh of the saved, he saith, there is no cluster; but when he speaketh of the damned, he saith, they are gathered by clusters, Revelation 14:18, 19. O sinners! but few will be saved! O professors! but few will be saved!

5. They that shall be saved are compared to jewels:

“And they shall be mine, saith the Lord,
in the day that I make up my jewels,” Malachi 3:13.

Jewels, you know, are rare things, things that are not found in every house. Jewels will lie in little room, being few and small, though lumber takes up much. In almost every house you may find brass, and iron, and lead; and in every place you may find hypocritical professors, but the saved are not these common things; they are God's peculiar treasure, Psalm 35:4. Wherefore Paul distinguisheth betwixt the lumber and the treasure in the house: There is, saith he, in a great house, not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood, and of earth, and some to honor, and some to dishonor, 2 Timothy 2:20. Here is a word for wooden and earthy professors; the jewels and treasure are vessels to honor, they of wood and earth are vessels of dishonor, that is, vessels for destruction, Romans 9:21.

6. They that shall be saved, are compared to a remnant:

“Except the Lord had left in us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom, and should have been like unto Gomorrah,”
Isaiah 1:9.

A remnant, a small remnant, a very small remnant; O! how doth the Holy Ghost word it! and all to shew you how few shall be saved. Every one knows what a remnant is, but this is a small remnant, a very small remnant. So again,

“Sing with gladness for Jacob, and shout among the chief of the nations, publish ye, praise ye, and say, O Lord, save thy people, the remnant of Israel,” Jeremiah 31:7.

What shall I say? the saved are often in scripture called a remnant, Ezekiel 9:8, 14; Isaiah 10:20-22; 11:11, 16; Jeremiah 23:3; Joel 2:22. But what is a remnant to the whole piece? What is a remnant of people to the whole kingdom? or what is a remnant of wheat to the whole harvest?

7. The saved are compared to the tithe or tenth part; wherefore when God sendeth the prophet to make the hearts of the people fat, their ears dull, and to shut their eyes, the prophet asketh, “How long?” to which God answereth,

“Until the cities be wasted without inhabitant, and the houses without man, and the land be utterly desolate, and the Lord have removed man far away, and there be a great forsaking in the midst of the land: But yet (as God saith in another place, “I will not make a full end,”) in it shall be a tenth, so the holy seed shall be the substance thereof,” Isaiah 6:10-13.

But what is a tenth? What is one in ten? And yet so speaks the Holy Ghost, when he speaks of the holy seed, of those that were to be reserved from the judgment. And observe it, the fattening and blinding of the rest, it was to their everlasting destruction; and so both Christ and Paul expounds it often in the New Testament, Matthew 13:14, 15; Mark, 4:12; Luke, 7:10; John, 12:40; Acts 28:26; Romans 11:8. So that those that are reserved from them that perish will be very few, one in ten: “A tenth shall return, so the holy seed shall be in the substance thereof.”

I shall not add more generals at this time: I pray God that the world be not offended at these. But without doubt, but few of them that shall put in their claim for heaven will have it for their inheritance; which will yet farther appear in the reading of that which follows.

Therefore I come more particularly to shew you, that but few will be saved. I say, but few of professors themselves will be saved; for that is the truth that the text doth more directly look at and defend. Give me therefore thy hand, good reader, and let us soberly walk through the rest of what shall be said; and let us compare as we go each particular with the holy Scripture.

1. It is said, “The daughter of Zion is left as a cottage in a vineyard, as a lodge in a garden of cucumbers, as a besieged city,” Isaiah 18. The vineyard was the church of Israel, Isaiah 5:1; the cottage in that vineyard was the daughter of Zion, or the truly gracious amongst, or in that church. A cottage; God had but a cottage there, but a little habitation in the church, a very few that were truly gracious amongst the great multitude that professed; and had it not been for these, for this cottage, the rest had been ruined as Sodom: “Except the Lord of Hosts had left in us, in the church, a very few, they had been as Sodom,” ver. 9. Wherefore among the multitude of them that shall be damned, professors will make a considerable party.

2. “For though thy people Israel be as the sand of the sea, remnant shall return, a remnant shall be saved,” Isaiah 10:22; Romans 9:27. For though thy people Israel whom thou broughtest out of Egypt, to whom thou hast given church-constitution, holy laws, holy ordinances, holy prophets, and holy covenants; thy people by separation from all people, and thy people by profession; though this thy people be as the sand of the sea, a remnant shall be saved; wherefore, among the multitude of them that shall be damned, professors will make a considerable party.

3. “Reprobate silver shall men call them, because the Lord hath rejected them,” Jeremiah 6:30. The people here under consideration are called in ver. 27, God's people, his people by profession: “I have set thee for a tower and a fortress among my people, that thou mayest know, and try their way.” What follows? They are all grievous revolters, walking with slanders, reprobate silver; the Lord hath rejected them. In chap. 7. ver. 29,

they are called also the generation of his wrath: “For the Lord hath rejected and forsaken the generation of his wrath.” This, therefore, I gather out of these holy Scriptures, — that with reference to profession and church-constitution, a people may be called the people of God; but, with reference to the event and final conclusion that God will make with some of them, they may be truly the generation of his wrath.

4. In the 5th of Isaiah, you read again of the vineyard of God, and that it was planted on a very fruitful hill, planted with the choicest vines, had a wall, a tower, a winepress belonging to it, and all things that could put it into right order and good government, as a church; but this vineyard of the Lord of hosts brought forth wild grapes, fruits unbecoming her constitution and government, wherefore the Lord takes from her his hedge and wall, and lets her be trodden down. Read Christ's exposition upon it in Matthew 2:23, etc. Look to it, professors, these are the words of the text, “For many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.”

5. “Son of man,” said God to the prophet, “the house of Israel is to me become dross, all they are brass and tin, and iron and lead, in the midst of the furnace they are the dross of silver,” Ezekiel 22:18. God had silver there, some silver, but it was but little; the bulk of that people was but the dross of the church, though they were the members of it. But what doth he mean by the dross? why he looked upon them as no better, notwithstanding their church-membership, than the rabble of the world, that is, with respect to their latter end; for to be called dross, it is to be put amongst the rest of the sinners of the world, in the judgment of God, though at present they abide in his house:

“Thou puttest away all the wicked of the earth like dross;
therefore I love thy testimonies,” Psalm. 119:119.

God saith of his saved ones, “He hath chosen them in the furnace of affliction.” The refiner, when he putteth the silver into his furnace, he puts lead I also among it; now this lead being ordered as he knows how, works up the dross from the silver, which dross, still as it riseth, he putteth by, or taketh away with an instrument. And thus deals God with his church; there is silver in his church, ay, and there is also dross; now the dross are the hypocrites and graceless ones that are got into the church, and these will God discover, and afterwards put away as dross. So that it will

without doubt prove a truth of God, that many of their professors that shall put in claim for heaven, will not have it for their inheritance.

6. It is said of Christ,

“His fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and will gather his wheat into his garner, but will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire,” Matthew 3:12.

The floor is the church of God: “O my threshing, and the corn of my floor!” said God by the prophet (Isaiah 21:10) to his people.

The wheat are those good ones in his church that shall be undoubtedly saved; therefore he saith, “Gather my wheat into my garner.”

The chaff groweth upon the same stalk and ear, and so is in the same visible body with the wheat, but there is not substance in it: wherefore in time they must be severed one from the other; the wheat must be gathered into the garner, which is heaven; and the chaff, or professors that want true grace, must be gathered into hell, that they may be burned up with unquenchable fire. Therefore let professors look to it.

7. Christ Jesus casts away two of the three grounds that are said to receive the word, Luke 8. The stony ground received it with joy, and the thorny ground brought forth fruit almost to perfection. Indeed the highway ground was to shew us, that the carnal, whilst such, receive not the word at all; but here is the pinch, two of the three that received it, fell short of the kingdom of heaven; for but one of the three received it so as to bring forth fruit to perfection. Look to it, professors.

8. The parable of the unprofitable servant, the parable of the man without a wedding-garment, and the parable of the unsavoury salt, do each of them justify this for truth, Matthew 25:24, 29; 22:11-13; also 5:13. That of the unprofitable servant is to shew us the sloth and idleness of some professors; that of the man without a wedding-garment, is to shew us how some professors have the shame of their wickedness seen by God, even when they are among the children of the bridegroom; and that parable of the unsavoury salt is to shew, that as the salt that hath lost its savor is fit for nothing, no, not for the dunghill, but to be trodden under foot of men; so some professors (yea, and great ones too, for this parable reached one

of the apostles) will in God's day be counted for nothing but to be trodden down as the mire in the streets. Oh! the slothful, the naked, and unsavoury professors, how will they be rejected of God and his Christ in the judgment! Look to it, professors.

9. The parable of the tares also giveth countenance to this truth: for though it be said, the field is the world, yet it is said, the tares were sown even in the church:

“And while men slept, the enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way,” Matthew 13:24, 25.

Objection: But some may object, The tares might be sown in the world among the wheat, though not in the churches.

Answer: But Christ, by expounding this parable, tells us, the tares were sown in his kingdom; the tares, that is, the children of the devil, ver. 30, 39. As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so shall it be in the end of this world:

“The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them that do iniquity, and shall cast them into a furnace of fire; there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth,” ver. 40-44.

Look to it, professors.

10. The parable of the ten virgins also suiteth our purpose: these ten are called the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 25:1), that is, the church of Christ, the visible rightly-constituted church of Christ; for they went all out of the world, had all lamps, and all went forth to meet the bridegroom; yet behold what an overthrow the one-half of them met with at the gate of heaven; they were shut out, bid to depart, and Christ told them he did not know them, ver. 10, 11. Tremble, professors! Pray, professors!

11. The parable of the net that was cast into the sea (Matthew 13:41, 42), that also countenanceth this truth. The substance of that parable is to shew, that souls may be gathered by the gospel, there compared to a net, may be kept in that net, drawn to a shore, to the world's end, by that net, and yet may then prove bad fishes, and be cast away. The parable runs

thus: — “The kingdom of heaven, the gospel, is like unto a net which was cast into the sea, the world, and gathered of every kind, good and bad, which when it was full, they drew it to shore, to the end of the world, and sat down, in judgment, and gathered the good into vessels, and cast the bad away.” Some bad fishes, nay, I doubt a great many, will be found in the net of the gospel, at the day of judgment. Watch and be sober, professors.

12. “And many shall come from the east and from the west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven; and the children of the kingdom shall be cast out,” Matthew 8:12. The children of the kingdom, whose privileges were said to be these, — to whom pertained the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promise, Romans 9:4. I take liberty to harp the more upon the first church, because that what happened to them, happened as types and examples, intimating, there is ground to think, that things of as dreadful a nature are to happen among the churches of the Gentiles, 1 Corinthians 10:11, 12. Neither, indeed, have the Gentile churches security from God that there shall not as dreadful things happen to them. And concerning this very thing, sufficient caution is given to us also, 1 Corinthians 6:9, 10; Galatians 5:19-21; Ephesians 5:3-7; Philippians 3:10, 11; 2 Thessalonians 2:11, 12; 2 Timothy 2:20, 21; Hebrews 6:4-9; and 10:26-28; 2 Peter 2 and 3.; 1 John 5:10; Revelation 2:20-22.

13. The parable of the true vine and its branches confirms what I have said, John 15:1-6. By the vine there I understand Christ, Christ as head; by the branches, I understand his church. Some of these branches proved fruitless castaways, were in time cast out of the church, were gathered by men, and burned.

14. Lastly, I will come to particular instances.

- (1.) The twelve had a devil among them, John 6:70.
- (2.) Ananias and Sapphira were in the church of Jerusalem, Acts 5:3. Simon Magus was among them at Samaria, Acts, 8:4. Among the church of Corinth were them that had not the knowledge of God, 1 Corinthians 15:5. Paul tells the Galatians that false brethren crept in unawares; and so does the apostle Jude, and yet they

were as quick-sighted to see as any nowadays, Galatians, 2.; Jude 3, 4. 6. The church in Sardis had but a few names in her, to whom the kingdom of heaven belonged: “Thou hast a few names, even in Sardis, which have not defiled their garments, and they shall walk with me in white, for they are worthy.” As for the church of the Laodiceans, it is called “wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked,” Revelation 3. So that put all things together, and I may boldly say, as I also have said already, that among the multitude of them that shall be damned, professors will make a considerable party; or, to speak in the words of the observation, When men have put in all the claim they can for heaven, but few will have it for their inheritance.

I will now shew you some reasons of the point, besides those five that I shewed you before.

But, first, I will shew you why the poor, carnal, ignorant world miss of heaven, and then why the knowing professors miss of it also.

1. The poor, carnal, ignorant world miss of heaven, even because they love their sins, and cannot part with them: “Men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds be evil,” John 3: The poor ignorant world miss of heaven, because they are enemies in their minds to God, his word, and holiness: they must be all damned who take pleasure in unrighteousness, 2 Thessalonians 2:10-12. The poor ignorant world miss of heaven, because they stop their ears against convictions, and refuse to come when God calls: “Because I have called, and ye refused, I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded, but have set at nought all my counsels, and would none of my reproofs; I also will laugh at your calamities, and mock when your fear cometh as desolation, and your desolation like a whirlwind, when distress and anguish cometh upon you; then shall you call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but shall not find me,” Proverbs 1:24-29.

2. The poor ignorant world miss of heaven, because the god of this world hath blinded their eyes, that they can neither see the evil and damnable state they are in at present, nor the way to get out of it: neither do they see the beauty of Jesus Christ, nor how willing he is to save poor sinners, 2 Corinthians 4:2, 3.

3. The poor ignorant world miss of heaven, because they put off and defer coming to Christ, until the time of God's patience and grace is over. Some indeed are resolved never to come; but some again say, We will come hereafter, and so it comes to pass, that because God called, and they did not hear; so they shall cry, and I will not hear, saith the Lord, Zechariah 7:11-13.

4. The poor ignorant world miss of heaven, because they have false apprehensions of God's mercy. They say in their hearts, We shall have peace, though we walk in the imagination of our heart, to add drunkenness to thirst. But what saith the word?

“The Lord will not spare him; but then the anger of the Lord, and his jealousy, shall smoke against that man, and all the curses that are written in this book shall be upon him, and God shall blot out his name from under heaven,” Deuteronomy 29:19-21.

5. The poor ignorant world miss of heaven, because they make light of the gospel that offereth mercy to them freely, and because they lean upon their own good meanings, and thinkings, and doings, Matthew 22:1-6; Romans 9:30, 31.

6. The poor carnal world miss of heaven, because by unbelief, which reigns in them, they are kept for ever from being clothed with Christ's righteousness, and from washing in his blood, without which there is neither remission of sin, nor justification. But to pass these till anon.

I come, in the next place, To shew you some reasons why the professor falls short of heaven.

First, In the general, they reset in things below special grace; as in awakenings that are not special, in repentance that is not special, etc. and a little to run a parallel betwixt the one and the other, that, if God will, you may see and escape.

1. Have they that shall be saved, awakenings about their state by nature? So have they that shall be damned. They that never go to heaven, may see much of sin, and of the wrath of God due thereto. This had Cain and Judas, and yet they came short of the kingdom, Genesis 4.; Matthew 27:4. The saved have convictions, in order to their eternal life; but the others'

convictions are not so. The convictions of the one doth drive them sincerely to Christ; the convictions of the other doth drive them to the law, and the law to desperation at last.

2. There is a repentance that will not save, a repentance to be repented of; and a repentance to salvation, not to be repented of, 2 Corinthians 7:10. Yet so great a similitude and likeness there is betwixt the one and the other, that most times the wrong is taken for the right, and through this mistake professors perish.

As

1. In saving repentance there will be an acknowledgment of sin; and one that hath the other repentance may acknowledge his sins also, Matthew 27:4.

2. In saving repentance there is a crying out under sin; but one that hath the other repentance may cry out under sin also, Genesis 4:13.

3. In saving repentance there will be humiliation for sin; and one that hath the other repentance may humble himself also, 1 Kings, 21:29.

4. Saving repentance is attended with self-loathing; but he that hath the other repentance may have loathing of sin too, 2 Peter 2:22, — a loathing of sin, because it is sin, that he cannot have; but a loathing of sin, because it is offensive to him, that he may have. The dog doth not loath that which troubleth his stomach, because it is there, but because it troubleth him; when it has done troubling of him, he can turn to it again, and lick it up as before it troubled him.

5. Saving repentance is attended with prayers and tears; but he that hath none but the other repentance, may have prayers and tears also, Genesis 27:34, 35; Hebrews 12:14-16.

6. In saving repentance, there is fear and reverence of the word and ministers that bring it; but this may be also where there is none but the repentance that is not saving; for Herod feared John, knowing that he was a just man, and holy, and observed him; when he heard him, he did many things, and heard him gladly, Mark, 6:20.

7. Saving repentance makes a man's heart very tender of doing any thing against the word of God. But Balaam could say,

“If Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold,
I cannot go beyond the word of the Lord,” Numbers 24:13.

Behold, then, how far a man may go in repentance, and yet be short of that which is called, “Repentance unto salvation, not to be repented of.”

- (1.) He may be awakened;
- (2.) He may acknowledge his sin;
- (3.) He may cry out under the burden of sin;
- (4.) He may have humility for it;
- (5.) He may loath it;
- (6.) May have prayers and tears against it;
- (7.) May delight to do many things of God;
- (8.) May be afraid of sinning against him; and after all this may perish, for want of saving repentance.

Secondly, Have they that shall be saved, faith? Why, they that shall not be saved may have faith also; yes, a faith in many things so like the faith that saveth, that they can hardly be distinguished (though they differ both in root and branch). To come to particulars.

1. Saving faith hath Christ for its object, and so many the faith have that is not saving. Those very Jews of whom it is said they believed on Christ, Christ tells them, and that after their believing,

“Ye are of your father the devil,
and the lusts of your father ye will do,” John 8:30-44.

2. Saving faith is wrought by the word of God, and so may the faith be that is not saving, Luke 8:13.

3. Saving faith looks for justification without works, and so may a faith do that is not saving, James 2:18.

- 4.** Saving faith will sanctify and purify the heart, and the faith that is not saving may work a man off from the pollutions of the world, as it did Judas, Demas, and others — See 2 Peter 2
- 5.** Saving faith will give a man tastes of the world to come, and also joy by those tastes, and so will the faith do that is not saving, Hebrews 6:4, 5; Luke 8:13.
- 6.** Saving faith will help a man, if called thereto, to give his body to be burned for his religion, and so will the faith do that is not saving, 1 Corinthians 13:1-5.
- 7.** Saving faith will help a man to look for an inheritance in the world to come, and that may the faith do that is not saving:

“All those virgins took their lamps,
and went forth to meet the bridegroom,” Matthew 25:1.

- 8.** Saving faith will not only make a man look for, but prepare to meet the bridegroom, and so may the faith do that is not saving:

“Then all these virgins arose and trimmed their lamps,”
Matthew 25:7.

- 9.** Saving faith will make a man look for an interest in the kingdom of heaven with confidence, and the faith that is not saving will even demand entrance of the Lord: “Lord, Lord, open unto us,” Matthew 25:11.
- 10.** Saving faith will have good works follow it into heaven, and the faith that is not saving may have great works follow it, as far as to heaven-gates:

“Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name, and in thy name cast
out devils, and in thy name done wondrous works,” Matthew 7:22.

Now, then, if the faith that is not saving may have Christ for its object, be wrought by the word, look for justification without works, work men off from the pollutions of the world, and give men tastes of, and joy in the things of another world: I say again, if it will help a man to burn for his judgment, and to look for an inheritance in another world; yea, if it will help a man to prepare for it, claim interest in it; and if it can carry great works — many great and glorious works, as far as heaven-gates, then no marvel if abundance of people take this faith for the saving faith, and so

fall short of heaven thereby. Alas, friends! There are but few that can produce such for repentance; and such faith as yet you see, I have proved even reprobates have had in several ages of the church. But,

Thirdly, They that go to heaven are a praying people; but a man may pray that shall not be saved. Pray! He may pray, pray daily; yea, he may ask of God the ordinances of justice, and may take delight in approaching to God; nay, further, such souls may, as it were, cover the altar of the Lord with tears, with weeping and crying out, Isaiah 28:2; Malachi 12:13.

Fourthly, Do God's people keep holy fasts? They that are not his people may keep fasts also — may keep fasts often — even twice a-week:

“The Pharisee stood, and prayed thus with himself: God, I thank thee that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust adulterers, or even as this Publican: I fast twice a-week, I give tithes of all that I possess,” Luke 16:11, 12.

I might enlarge upon things, but I intend but a little book. I do not question but many Balaamites will appear before the judgment-seat to condemnation: men that have had visions of God, and that knew the knowledge of the Most High; men that have had the Spirit of God come upon them, and that have by that been made other men; yet these shall go to the generations of their fathers, they shall never see light, Numbers 24:2, 4, 16; 1 Samuel 10:6, 10; Psalm 49:19.

I read of some men whose excellency in religion mounts up to heavens, and their heads reach unto the clouds, who yet shall perish for ever like their very refuse; and he that in this world hath seen them, shall say at the judgment, Where are they? Job 20:5-7. There will be many a one that were gallant professors in this world be wanting among the saved in the day of Christ's coming; yea, many whose damnation was never dreamed of. Which is the twelve ever thought that Judas would have proved a devil? Nay, when Christ suggested that one among them was naught, they each were more afraid of themselves than of him, Matthew 36:21-23. Who questioned the salvation of the foolish virgins? The wise ones did not; they gave them the privilege of communion with themselves, Matthew 25. The discerning of the heart, and the infallible proof of the truth of saving grace, is reserved to the judgment of Jesus Christ at his coming. The

church and best of saints sometimes hit, and sometimes miss, in their judgments about this matter; and the cause of our missing in our judgment is,

1. Partly because we cannot infallibly, at all times, distinguish grace that saveth from that which doth but appear to do so.
2. Partly also because some men have the art to give right names to wrong things.
3. And partly because we being commanded to receive him that is weak, are afraid to exclude the least Christian, by which means hypocrites creep into the churches. But what saith the scripture? "I the Lord search the heart, I try the reins." And again,

"All the churches shall know that I am he that searches the reins and hearts, and I will give to every one of you according to your works," Jeremiah 11:20; 17:10; Revelation 2:23.

To this searcher of hearts is the time of infallible discerning reserved, and then you shall see how far grace that is not saving hath gone; and also how few will be saved indeed. The Lord awaken poor sinners by these warnings and cautions.

I come now to make some brief use and application of the whole; and my first word shall be to the openly profane. Poor sinner, thou readest here that but a few will be saved, that many that expect heaven will go without heaven. What sayest thou to this, poor sinner? Let me say it over again. There are but few to be saved, but very few. Let me add, but few professors — but few eminent professors. What sayest thou now, sinner? If judgment begins at the house of God, what will the end of them be that obey not the gospel of God? This is Peter's question. Canst thou answer it, sinner? Yea, I say again, if judgment must begin at them, will it not make thee think, What shall become of me? And I add, when thou shalt see the stars of heaven to tumble down to hell, canst thou think that such a muck-heap of sin as thou art shall be lifted up to heaven? Peter asks thee another question, to wit,

"If the righteous scarcely be saved,
where shall the ungodly and sinners appear?" 1 Peter 4:18.

Canst thou answer this question, sinner? Stand among the righteous thou mayest not:

“The ungodly shall not stand in the judgment,
nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous,” Psalm 1:5.

Stand among the wicked thou then wilt not dare to do. Where wilt thou appear, sinner? To stand among the hypocrites will avail thee nothing: “The hypocrite shall not come before him,” that is, with acceptance, “but shall perish,” Job 13:16. Because it concerns thee much, let me over with it again. When thou shalt see less sinners than thou art, bound up by angels in bundles, to burn them, where wilt thou appear, sinner? Thou mayst wish thyself another man, but that will not help thee, sinner. Thou mayst wish, Would I had been converted in time; but that will not help thee neither. And if, like the wife of Jeroboam, thou should feign thyself to be another woman, the Prophet, the Lord Jesus, would soon find thee out! What wilt thou do, poor sinner? Heavy tidings, heavy tidings, will attend thee, except thou repent, poor sinner! 1 Kings 14:2, 5, 6; Luke 13:3, 5. O the dreadful state of a poor sinner, of an open profane sinner! Every body that hath but common sense, knows that this man is in the broad way to death, yet he laughs at his own damnation.

Shall I come to particulars with thee?

1. Poor unclean sinner, the harlot's house is the way to hell, going down to the chambers of death, Proverbs 2:18; 5:5; 7:27.

2. Poor swearing and thievish sinner, God hath prepared the curse, that every one that stealeth shall be cut off, as on this side, according to it; and every one that sweareth, shall be cut off on that side, according to it, Zechariah 5:3.

3. Poor drunken sinner, what shall I say to thee?

“Woe to the drunkards of Ephraim, woe to them that are mighty to drink wine, and men of strong drink; they shall not inherit the kingdom of heaven,” Isaiah 28:1; 5:22; 1 Corinthians 6:9, 10.

4. Poor covetous worldly man, God's word says,

“That the covetous the Lord abhorreth; that the covetous man is an idolator: and that the covetous shall not inherit the kingdom of God,” Psalm 10:3; Ephesians 5:5; John 2:15; 1 Corinthians 6:9, 10.

5. And thou liar, what wilt thou do? “All liars shall have their part in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone,” Revelation 21:8, 27.

I shall not enlarge, poor sinner, let no man deceive thee; for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience, Ephesians 5:6. I will therefore give thee a short call, and so leave thee.

Sinner, awake; yea, I say unto thee, awake: Sin lieth at thy door, and God's axe lieth at thy root, and hell-fire is right underneath thee: I say again, awake:

“Every tree therefore that bringeth not forth good fruit, is hewn down, and cast into the fire,” Genesis 4:7; Matthew 3:10.

Poor sinner, awake; eternity is coming, and his Son, they are both coming to judge the world; awake, art yet asleep, poor sinner? let me set the trumpet to thine ear once again. The heavens will be shortly on a burning flame; the earth, and the works thereof, shall be burned up, and then wicked men shall go into perdition; dost thou hear this, sinner? 2 Peter 3. Hark again, the sweet morsels of sins will then be fled and gone, and the bitter burning fruits of them only left. What sayest thou now sinner? Canst thou drink hell-fire? Will the wrath of God be a pleasant dish to thy taste? This must be thine every day's meat and rink in hell, sinner.

I will yet propound to thee God's ponderous question, and then for this time leave thee:

“Can thine heart endure, or can thine hands be strong in the day that I shall deal with thee, saith the Lord?” Ezekiel 22:14.

What sayest thou? Wilt thou answer this question now? or wilt thou take time to do it; or wilt thou be desperate, and venture all? And let me put this text in thine ear to keep it open; and so the Lord have mercy upon thee: “Upon the wicked shall the Lord rain snares, fire and brimstone, and an horrible tempest; this shall be the portion of their cup,” Psalm 11:6. Repent, sinners.

Secondly, My second word is to them that are upon the potter's wheel; concerning whom, we know not, as yet, whether their convictions and awakenings will end in conversion or not. Several things I shall say to you, both to further your convictions, and to caution you from staying any where below, or short of saving grace.

1. Remember that but few shall be saved; and if God should count thee worthy to be one of that few, what mercy would that be?

2. Be thankful, therefore, for convictions; conversion begins at conviction, though all conviction doth not end in conversion. It is a great mercy to be convinced that we are sinners, and that we need a Savior; count it therefore a mercy, and that thy convictions may end in conversion: Do thou,

1. Take heed of stifling of them: It is the way of poor sinners to look upon convictions as things there are hurtful; and therefore they use to shun the awakening ministry, and to check a convincing conscience. Such poor sinners are much like to the wanton boy that stands at the maid's elbow, to blow out her candle as fast as she lights it at the fire. Convinced sinner, God lighteth thy candle, and thou putteth it out; God lights it again, and thou putteth it out ("yea, how oft is the candle of the wicked put out?" Job. 31:17). At last God resolveth he will light thy candle no more; and then, like Egyptians, you dwell all your days in darkness, and never see light more, but by the light of hell-fire; wherefore give glory to God, and if he awakens thy conscience, quench not thy convictions:

"Do it (saith the prophet) before he cause darkness, and before your feet stumble upon the dark mountains, and he turn your convictions into the shadow of death, and make them gross darkness," Jeremiah 13:16.

1. Be willing to see the worst of thy condition; it is better to see it here than in hell; for thou must see thy misery here or there.

2. Beware of little sins, they will make way for great ones, and they again will make way for bigger, upon which God's wrath will follow; and then may thy latter end be worse than thy beginning, 2. Peter 2:20.

3. Take heed of bad company, and evil communication, for that will corrupt good manners. God saith, evil company will turn thee away from following him, and will tempt thee to serve other gods, devils:

“So the anger of the Lord will be kindled against thee,
and destroy thee suddenly,” Deuteronomy 7:4.

4. Beware of such a thought as bids thee delay repentance, for that is damnable, Proverbs 1:24; Zechariah 7:12, 13.

5. Beware of taking example by some poor carnal professor, whose religion lies in the tip of his tongue. Beware, I say of the man who heads swims with notions, but his life is among the unclean, Job 36:14.

“He that walketh with wise men shall be wise; but a companion of fools shall be destroyed,” Proverbs 13:20.

6. Give thyself much to the word, and prayer, and good conference.

7. Labor to see the sin that cleaveth to the best of thy performances, and know that all is nothing if thou beest not found in Jesus Christ.

8. Keep in remembrance that God's eye is upon thy heart, and upon all thy ways:

“Can any hide himself in secret places, that I should not see him,
saith the Lord? do not I fill heaven and earth, saith the Lord?”
Jeremiah 23:24.

9. Be often mediating upon death and judgment, Ecclesiastes 11:9; 12:14.

10. Be often thinking what a dreadful end sinners that have neglected Christ will make at that day of death and judgment, Hebrews 10:31.

11. Put thyself often, in thy thoughts, before Christ's judgment-seat, in thy sins, and consider with thyself, Were I now before my judge, how should I look, how should I shake and tremble?

12. Be often thinking of them that are now in hell past all mercy: I say, be often thinking of them thus:

(1.) They were once in the world, as I now am.

(2.) They once took delight in sin, as I have done.

(3). They once neglected repentance, as Satan would have me do.

(4.) But now they are gone, now they are in hell, now the pit hath shut her mouth upon them.

Thou mayest also double thy thoughts of the damned thus:

1. If these poor creatures were in the world again, would they sin as they did before? would they neglect salvation as they did before?

2. If they had sermons, as I have; if they had the Bible, as I have; if they had good company, would they neglect it as they did before? Sinner, couldst thou soberly think of these things, they might help (God blessing them) to awaken thee, and to keep thee awake to repentance, to the repentance that is to salvation, never to be repented of.

Objection: But you have said few shall be saved; and some that go a great way, yet are not saved. At this, therefore, I am even discouraged, and disheartened; I think I had as good go no further. I am indeed under conviction, but I may perish, and if I go on in my sins, I can but perish; and it is ten, twenty, an hundred to one if I be saved, should I be never so earnest for heaven.

Answer: That few will be saved must needs be a truth, for Christ hath said it; that many go far, and come short of heaven, is as true, being testified by the same hand. But what then? Why, then had I as good never seek? Who told thee so? Must nobody seek because few are saved? This is just contrary to the text, that bids us therefore strive; strive to enter in, because the gate is strait, and because many will seek to enter in and shall not be able. But why go back again, seeing that is the nearest way to hell? Never go over hedge and ditch to hell. If I must need go thither, I will go the farthest way about. But who can tell, though there should not be saved so many as there shall, but thou mayest be one of that few. They that miss of life perish, because they will not let go their sins, or because they take up a profession short of the saving faith of the gospel. They perish, I say, because they are content with such things, as will not prove graces of a saving nature when they come to be tried in the fire, otherwise the promise is free, and full, and everlasting:

“Him that cometh to me (says Christ) I will in nowise cast out; for God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him might not perish, but have everlasting life,” John 6:37.

Wherefore let not this though, Few shall be saved, weaken thy heart, but let it cause thee to mend thy pace, to mend thy cries, to look well to thy grounds for heaven; let it make thee fly faster from sin to Christ; let it keep thee awake, and out of carnal security, and thou mayest be saved.

Thirdly, My third word is to professors. Sirs, give me leave to set my trumpet to you ears again a little; when every man hath put in all the claim they can for heaven, but few will have it for their inheritance; I mean but few professors, for so the text intendeth, and so I have also proved: “For many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.”

Let me therefore a little expostulate the matter with you, O ye thousands of professors!

1. I begin with you whose religion lieth only in your tongues; I mean you who are little or nothing known from the rest of the rabble of the world, only you can talk better than they. Hear me a word or two. “If I speak with the tongue of men and angels, and have not charity (that is, love to God, and Christ, and saints, and holiness), I am nothing,” — no child of God, and so have nothing to do with heaven, 1 Corinthians 13: A prating tongue will not unlock the gates of heaven, nor blind the eyes of thy judge. Look to it:

“The wise in heart will receive commandments;
but a prating fool shall fall,” Proverbs 10:8.

2. Covetous professors, thou that makest a gain of religion, that usest thy profession to bring grist to thy mill, look to it also. Gain is not godliness. Judas's religion lay much in the bag, but his soul is now burning in hell. All covetousness is idolatry; but what is that, or what will you call it, when men are religious for filthy lucre's sake, Ezekiel 33:31.

3. Wanton professors, I have a word for you; I mean you that can tell how to misplead scripture, to maintain your pride, your banqueting, and

abominable idolatry. Read what Peter says. You are the snare and damnation of others:

“You allure through the lust of the flesh,
through much wantonness, those that were clean
escaped from them who live in error,” 2 Peter 2:18.

Besides, the Holy Ghost hath a great deal against you, for your feastings, and eating without fear, not for health, but gluttony, Jude 12. Farther, Peter says,

“That you that count it pleasure to riot in the day-time are spots
and blemishes, sporting yourselves with your own deceivings,”
2 Peter 2:14.

And let me ask, did God give his word to justify your wickedness? or doth grace teach you to plead for the flesh, or the making provision for the lusts thereof? Of these also are they that feed their bodies to strengthen their lusts, under pretense of strengthening frail nature. But pray, remember the text, “Many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.”

4. I come next to the Opinionist; I mean, to him whose religion lieth in some circumstantial of religion. With this sort of kingdom swarms at this day. These think all out of the way that are not of their mode, when themselves may be out of the way in the midst of their zeal for their opinions. Pray, do you also observe the text: “Many, I say unto you, seek to enter in, and shall not be able.”

5. Neither is the Formalist exempted from this number. He is a man that hath lost all but the shell of religion. He is hot indeed for his form; and no marvel, for that is his all to contend for. But his form being without the power and spirit of godliness, it will leave him in his sins; nay, he standeth now in them in the sight of God (2 Timothy 3:5), and is one of the many that “will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.”

6. The Legalist comes next, even him that hath no life but what he makes out of his duties. This man hath chosen to stand and fall by Moses, who is the condemner of the world:

“There is one that accuseth you, even Moses, in whom ye trust,”
John 5:45.

7. There is, in the next place, the Libertine — he that pretendeth to be against forms and duties, as things that gender to bondage, neglecting the order of God. This man pretends to pray always, but under that pretense, prays not at all; he pretends to keep every day a Sabbath, but this pretense serves him only to cast off all set times for the worship of God. This is also one of the many that “will seek to enter in, and shall not be able,” Titus 1:16.

8. There is the temporising Latitudinarian. He is a man that hath no God but his belly, nor any religion but that by which his belly is worshipped. His religion is always, like the times, turning this way and that way, like the cock on the steeple; neither hath he any conscience but a benumbed and scared one, and is next door to a downright Atheist; and also is one of the many that “will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.”

9. There is also the wilfully ignorant professor, or him that is afraid to know more, for fear of the cross. He is for picking and choosing of truth, and loveth not hazard his all for that worthy name by which he would be called. When he is at any time overset by arguments, or awakenings of conscience, he uses to heal all by — I was not brought up in his faith; as if it were unlawful for Christians to know more than hath been taught them at first conversion. There are many scriptures that lie against this man, as the mouths of great guns, and he is one of the many that “will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.”

10. We will add to all these, the professor that would prove himself a Christian, by comparing himself with others, instead of comparing himself with the word of God. This man comforts himself, because he is as holy as such and such; he also knows as much as that old professor, and then concludes he shall go to heaven: as if he certainly knew, that those with whom he compareth himself would be undoubtedly saved; but how if he should be mistaken, nay, may they not both fall short? but to be sure he is in the wrong that hath made the comparison, 2 Corinthians 10:12, and a wrong foundation will not stand in the day of judgment. This man, therefore, is one of the many that “will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.”

11. There is yet another professor; and he is for God and for Baal too; he can be any thing for any company; he can throw stones with both hands;

his religion alters as fast as his company; he is a frog of Egypt, and can live in the water and out of the water; he can live in religious company, and again as well out. Nothing that is disorderly comes amiss to him; he will hold with the hare, and run with the hound; he carries fire in the one hand, and water in the other; he is a very any thing but what he should be. This is also one of the many that “will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.”

12. There is also that free-willer, who denies to the Holy Ghost the sole work in conversion; and that Socinian, who denieth to Christ that he hath made to God satisfaction for sin; and that Quaker, who takes from Christ the two natures in his person; and I might add as many more, touching whose damnation (they dying as they are) the Scripture is plain: these “will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.”

But, fourthly, If it be so, what a strange disappointment will many professors meet with at the day of judgment! I speak not now to the openly profane; every body, as I have said, that hath but common understanding between good and evil, knows that they are in the broad way to hell and damnation, and they must needs come thither; nothing can hinder it but repentance unto salvation, except God should prove a liar to save them, and it is hard venturing of that.

Neither is it amiss, if we take notice of the examples that are briefly mentioned in the Scripture, concerning professors that have miscarried.

- 1.** Judas perished from among the apostles, Acts 1
- 2.** Demas, as I think, perished from among the evangelists, 2 Timothy 4:9.
- 3.** Diotrefes from among the ministers, or them in office in the church, John 10
- 4.** And as for Christian professors, they have fallen by heaps, and almost by whole churches, 2 Timothy 1:15; Revelation 3:4, 15-17.
- 5.** Let us add to these, that the things mentioned in the Scripture about these matters, are but brief hints and items of what is afterwards to happen; as the apostle said, “Some men's sins are open beforehand, going before to judgment; and some men they follow after,” 1 Timothy 5:24. So that, fellow-professors, let us fear, lest a promise being left us of entering into this rest, any of us should seem to come short of it. O! to come short!

nothing kills like it, nothing will burn like it. I intend not discouragements, but awakenings; the churches have need of awakening, and so have all professors. Do not despise me, therefore, but hear me over again. What a strange disappointment will many professors meet with at the day of God Almighty! — a disappointment, I say, and that as to several things.

- (1.) They will look to escape hell, and yet fall just into the mouth of hell: what a disappointment will here be!
- (2.) They will look for heaven, but the gate of heaven will be shut against them: what a disappointment is here!
- (3.) They will expect that Christ should have compassion for them, but will find that he hath shut up all bowels of compassion from them: what a disappointment is here!

Again, *fifthly*, As this disappointment will be fearful, so certainly it will be very full of amazement.

1. Will it not amaze them to be unexpectedly excluded from life and salvation?

2. Will it not be amazing to them to see their own madness and folly, while they consider how they have dallied with their own souls, and took lightly for granted, that they had that grace that would save them, but hath left them in a damnable state?

3. Will they not also be amazed one at another, while they remember how in their lifetime they counted themselves fellow-heirs of life? To allude to that of the prophet,

“They shall be amazed one of another,
their faces shall be as flames,” Isaiah 13:8.

4. Will it not be amazing to some of the damned themselves, to see some come to hell, that then they shall see come thither? to see preachers of the word, professors of the word, practisers in the word, to come thither. What wondering was there among them at the fall of the king of Babylon, since he thought to have swallowed up all, because he was run down by the Medes and Persians! “How art thou fallen from heaven, Lucifer, son of the morning! How art thou cast down to the ground that didst weaken the nations!” If such a thing as this will with amazement surprise the damned,

what an amazement will it be to them to see such a one as he, whose head reached to the clouds, to see him come down to the pit, and perish for ever like very dross?

“Hell from beneath is moved for thee, to meet thee at thy coming;
it stirreth up the dead for thee, even all the chief ones of the earth,”
Isaiah 14.

They that see thee shall narrowly look upon thee, and consider thee, saying, Is this the man? Is this he that professed, and disputed, and forsook us; but now he is come to us again? Is this he that separated from us, but now is he fallen with us into the same eternal damnation with us?

Sixthly, Yet again, one word more, if I may awaken professors. 1. Consider, though the poor carnal world shall certainly perish, yet they will want these things to aggravate their sorrow, which thou wilt meet with in every thought that thou wilt have of the condition thou wast in when thou was in the world.

1. They will not have a profession, to bite them when they come thither.
2. They will not have a taste of a lost heaven, to bite them when they come thither.
3. They will not have the thoughts of, I was almost at heaven, to bite them when they come thither.
4. They will not have the thoughts of, how they cheated saints, ministers, churches, to bite them when they come thither.
5. They will not have the dying thoughts of false faith, false hope, false repentance, and false holiness, to bite them when they come thither. I was at the gates of heaven, I looked into heaven, I thought I should have entered into heaven; O how will these things sting! They will, if I may call them so, be the sting of the sting of death in hell fire.

Seventhly, Give me leave now in a word to give you a little advice.

1. Dost thou love thine own soul? then pray to Jesus Christ for an awakened heart, for an heart so awakened with all the things of another world, that thou mayst be allured to Jesus Christ.

2. When thou comest there, beg again for more awakenings about sin, hell, grace, and about the righteousness of Christ.
3. Cry also for a spirit of discerning, that thou mayst know that which is saving grace indeed.
4. Above all studies, apply thyself to the study of those things that shew thee the evil of sin, the shortness of man's life, and which is the way to be saved.
5. Keep company with the most godly among professors.
6. When thou hearest what the nature of true grace is, defer not to ask thine own heart, if this grace be there. And here take heed,
 - (1.) That the preacher himself be sound, and of good life.
 - (2.) That thou takest not seeming graces for real ones, nor seeming fruits for real fruits.
 - (3.) Take heed that a sin in thy life goes not unrepented of; for that will make a flew in thine evidence, a wound in thy conscience, and a breach in thy peace; and a hundred to one, if at last it doth not drive all the grace in thee into so dark a corner of thy heart, that thou shalt not be able, for a time, by all the torches that are burning in the gospel, to find it out to thine own comfort and consolation.