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Messiah Vol. 1

John Newton





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Description: Most remember John Newton as the writer of one of the most beloved Christian songs of all time: “Amazing Grace.” Having spent his younger years serving on a slave ship, he faced an unfathomable guilt both before and after his conversion. Convicted, he spent years studying Scripture, and he offered his life to the Methodist Church as a minister. Newton’s congregation in Olney, Buckinghamshire flourished, and people crowded his church on Sundays. In 1786, Newton published fifty sermons on G.F. Handel’s Messiah. Just as the oratorio, Newton’s sermons address Christ’s death, resurrection, offer of salvation, and paving of the way to new life for his followers. Newton speaks powerfully about conversion and redemption. His words clearly belong to the iconic composer of “Amazing Grace.”

Kathleen O’Bannon

CCEL Staff

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MESSIAH
Fifty Expository Discourses
Preached in the years 1784 and 1785
by John Newton
VOLUME I
Digitized by Susanna K. Martens

PREFACE

The following Sermons, as to the substance (for most of them are considerably abridged) were preached at a public and numerous assembly. And, therefore, an accurate and logical discussion of the several subjects was not aimed at. They are rather popular discourses; in which, the Author, though he wished not to treat the politer part of his auditory with disrespect, thought it likewise his duty, so to adapt his manner to the occasion, as to be intelligible to persons of weak capacities, and in the lower ranks of life. He conceives himself to be a debtor to every class of his hearers; and that he ought to endeavour to please all men, with a view to their education; but, farther than this, not to be greatly affected, either by their approbation, or by their censure.

Many of the subjects, are so nearly coincident, that repetitions could not be always avoided, without the appearance of affectation. Besides, as it may be expected, that in a large congregation, there are always some persons present for the first time; with respect to these, an observation may be new, though, perhaps, the more stated hearers, may recollect its having been mentioned before. For a similar reason, such repetitions are not improper, in print. Many persons read part of a book, who may not have opportunity, or inclination, to read the whole. Should any one, by opening these sermons at a venture, meet with a passage, which, by a divine blessing, may either awaken a careless, or heal a wounded spirit, that passage will be in exactly the right page, even though the purport of it should be expressed in several other places. Farther, since we do not always so much stand in need of new information, as to have, what we already know, more effectually impressed upon the mind; there are truths which can scarcely be inculcated too often, at least, until the design, for which they were uttered once, be effectually answered. Thus, when the strokes of a hammer are often repeated, not one of them can be deemed superfluous; the last, which drives the nail to the head, being no less necessary, than any of those which preceded it.

From those Readers, whose habits of thinking on religious subjects, are formed by a close attachment to particular systems of divinity, the Author requests a candid construction of what he advances, if he ventures, in some instances, to deviate a little from the more beaten track. If he is, sometimes, constrained to differ from the judgment of wise and good men, who have deserved well of the Church of God, he would do it modestly. Far from depreciating their labours, he would be thankful for the benefit which he hopes he has received from them. It is a great satisfaction to him, that in all doctrinal points of primary importance, his views are confirmed by the suffrage of writers and ministers eminent for genuine piety, and found learning; who assisted him in his early enquiries after truth, and at whose feet he is still willing to sit. And yet, remembering that he is authorized and commanded to call no man Master, so as to yield an implicit and unqualified submission to human teachers; while he gladly borrows every help he can, from others, he ventures, likewise, to think for himself. His leading sentiments concerning the grand peculiarities of the Gospel, were formed many

years since, when he was in a state of almost entire seclusion from society; when he had scarcely any religious book, but the Bible, within his reach; and had no knowledge, either of the various names, parties, and opinions, by which, Christians were distinguished and divided, or of the controversies which subsisted among them. He is not conscious, that any very material difference has taken place in his sentiments, since he first became acquainted with the religious world; but, after a long course of experience and observation, he seems to possess them in a different manner. The difficulties, which, for a season, perplexed him, on some points, are either removed, or considerably abated. On the other hand, he now perceives difficulties, that constrain him to lay his hand upon his mouth, in subjects, which, once appeared to him obvious and plain. Thus, if he mistakes not himself, he is less troubled with scepticism, and at the same time, less disposed to be dogmatical, than he formerly was. He feels himself unable to draw the line, with precision, between those essential points, which ought to be earnestly contended for (in a spirit of meekness) as for the faith once delivered to the saints; and certain secondary positions, concerning which, good men may safely differ, and wherein, perhaps, we cannot reasonably expect them to be unanimous, during the present state of imperfection. But if the exact boundary cannot be marked with certainty, he thinks it both desirable and possible, to avoid the extremes, into which, men of warm tempers have often been led.

Not that the Author can be an advocate for that indifference to truth, which, under specious semblance of moderation and candour, offers a comprehension, from which none are excluded, but those who profess, and aim, to worship God in the Spirit, to rejoice in Christ Jesus, and to renounce all confidence in the flesh. Moderation, is a Christian grace. It differs much from that tame, unfeeling neutrality between truth and error, which is so prevalent in this present day. As the different rays of light, which, when separated by a prism exhibit the various colours of the rainbow, form, in their combination, a perfect and resplendent white, in which every colour is incorporated; so, if the graces of the Holy Spirit were complete in us, the result of their combined effect, would be a truly candid, moderate, and liberal spirit towards our brethren. The Christian, especially he who is advanced and established in the life of faith, has a fervent zeal for God, for the honour of His name, His law, and His Gospel. The honest warmth which he feels, when such a law is broken, when such a Gospel is despised, and when the great and glorious name of the Lord his God is profaned, would, by the occasion of his infirmities, often degenerate into anger or contempt, towards those who oppose themselves, if he was under the influence of zeal only. But his zeal is blended with benevolence and humility; it is softened by a consciousness of his own frailty and fallibility. He is aware that his knowledge is very limited in itself, and very faint in its efficacy; that his attainments are weak and few, compared with his deficiencies; that his gratitude is very disproportionate to his obligations, and his obedience unspeakably short of conformity to his prescribed rule; that he has nothing but what he has received,

and has received nothing, but what, in a greater or less degree, he has misapplied and mis-improved. He is therefore a debtor to the mercy of God, and lives upon his multiplied forgiveness. And he makes the gracious conduct of the Lord towards himself, a pattern for his own conduct towards his fellow-creatures. He cannot boast, nor is he forward to censure. He considers himself, lest he also be tempted ([Galatians 6:1](#)); and thus he learns tenderness and compassion to others, and to bear patiently with those mistakes, prejudices, and prepossessions in them, which once belonged to his own character; and from which, as yet, he is but imperfectly freed. But then, the same considerations, which inspire him with meekness and gentleness, towards those, who, oppose the truth, strengthen his regard for the truth itself, and his conviction of its importance. For the sake of peace, which he loves and cultivates, he accommodates himself, as far as he lawfully can, to the weakness and misapprehensions of those who mean well; though he is thereby exposed to the censure of bigots of all parties, who deem him flexible and wavering, like a reed shaken with the wind. But there are other points, nearly connected with the honour of God, and essential to the life of faith, which are the foundations of his hope, and the sources of his joy. For his firm attachment to these, he is content to be treated as a bigot himself. For here, he is immovable as an iron pillar, nor can either the fear, or the favour of man, prevail on him to give place, no not for an hour ([Galatians 2:5](#)). Here his judgment is fixed; and he expresses it, in simple and unequivocal language, so as not to leave, either friends or enemies, in suspense, concerning the side which he has chosen, or the cause which is nearest to his heart.

The minister who possesses a candour, thus enlightened, and thus qualified, will neither degrade himself to be the instrument, nor aspire to the head, of a party. He will not servilely tread in the paths prescribed him by men, however respectable. He will not multiply contentions, in defence, either of the shibboleths of others, or of any nostrum of his own, under the pretence that he is pleading for the cause of God, and truth. His attention will not be restrained to the credit, or interest, of any detached denomination of Christians, but extended to all who love the Lord Jesus Christ, in sincerity. On the other hand, knowing that the Gospel is the wisdom and power of God, and the only possible mean, by which, fallen man can obtain either peace or rectitude, he most cordially embraces and avows it. Far from being ashamed of it, he esteems it his glory. He preaches Christ Jesus the Lord, and Him crucified. He dares not sophisticate ([II Corinthians 4:2](#)), disguise, or soften the doctrines of the grace of God, to render them more palatable to the depraved taste of the times. He disdains the thought. And he will no more encounter the prejudices, and corrupt maxims and practices of the world, with any weapon, but the truth as it is in Jesus ([Ephesians 4:21](#)), than he would venture to fight an enraged enemy, with a wooden sword.

Such is the disposition which the Author wishes for himself, and which, he would endeavour to cultivate in others. He hopes that nothing, of a contrary tendency, will be found in the volumes now presented to the Public. MESSIAH, the great subject of the oratorio, is

the leading and principal subject of every sermon. His person, grace, and glory; His matchless love to sinners; His humiliation, sufferings, and death; His ability and willingness to save to the uttermost; His kingdom, and the present and future happiness of His willing people; are severally considered, according to the order suggested by the series of texts. Nearly connected with these topics, are the doctrines of the fall and depravity of man, the agency of the Holy Spirit, and the nature and necessity of regeneration, and of that holiness, without which, no man shall see the Lord. On these subjects, the Author is not afraid of contradictions, from those who are taught of God.

With respect to some other points which incidentally occur, he has endeavoured so to treat them, as to avoid administering fuel to the flame of angry controversy. He is persuaded himself, and shall be happy to persuade his readers, that the remaining differences of opinion, among those who truly understand, and cordially believe the declarations of Scripture, on the preceding articles, are neither so wide, nor so important, as they have sometimes been represented. Many of these differences are nearly (merely?) verbal, and would cease, if due allowance was made for the imperfection of human language, and the effects of an accustomed phraseology, which often lead people to affix different ideas to the same expressions, or to express the same ideas in different words. And if, in some things, we cannot exactly agree, since we confess that we are all weak and fallible, mutual patience and forbearance, would be equally becoming the acknowledgements we make, and the Gospel which we profess. We should, thereby, act in character, as the followers of Him who was compassionate to the infirmities and mistakes of His disciples, and taught them, not every thing at once, but gradually, as they were able to bear.

The Author ought not to be very solicitous, upon his own account, what reception his performance may meet with. The fashion of this world is passing away. The voice, both of applause and of censure, will soon be stifled in the dust. It is, therefore, but a small thing to be judged of man's judgment ([I Corinthians 4:3](#)). But conscious of the vast importance of the subject, which he thus puts into the Reader's hands, he cannot take leave of him, without earnestly entreating his serious attention.

The one principle, which, he assumes for granted, and which, he is certain cannot be disproved, is, That the Bible is a revelation from God. By this standard, he is willing, that whatever he has advanced, may be tried. If the Bible be true, we must all give an account, each one of himself, to the great and final Judge. That when we shall appear before His awful tribunal, we may be found at His right hand, accepted in the Beloved, is the Author's fervent prayer, both for his Readers and for himself.

London,
15 April, 1786.

Sermon I

The Consolation

[Isaiah 40:1, 2](#)

Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare

is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned:

for she hath received at the LORD 's hand double for all her sins.

The particulars of the great “mystery of godliness,” as enumerated by the Apostle Paul, constitute the grand and inexhaustible theme of the Gospel ministry, “God manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory” ([1 Timothy 3:16](#)). It is my wish and purpose to know nothing among you but this subject; to preach nothing to you but what has a real connection with the doctrine of Jesus Christ and Him crucified, and with the causes and the effects of His obedience unto death, even the death of the cross. But a regard to the satisfaction and the advantage of my stated hearers, has often made me desirous of adopting some plan, which might lead me to exhibit the principal qualities of the Saviour’s character and meditation in a regular series of discourses; so as to form, if not a picture, at least a slight sketch, of those features of His glory and of His grace, which endear Him to the hearts of His people. Such a plan has lately, and quite unexpectedly, occurred to me. Conversation in almost every company, for some time past, has much turned upon the commemoration of Handel; the grand musical entertainments, and particularly his Oratorio of the Messiah, which have been repeatedly performed on that occasion in Westminster Abbey. If it could be reasonably hoped that the performers and the company assembled to hear the music, or the greater part, or even a very considerable part of them, were capable of entering into the spirit of the subject; I will readily allow that the Messiah, executed in so masterly a manner, by persons whose hearts, as well as their voices and instruments, were tuned to the Redeemer’s praise; accompanied with the grateful emotions of an audience duly affected with a sense of their obligations to His love; might afford one of the highest and noblest gratifications, of which we are capable in the present life. But they who love the Redeemer, and therefore delight to join in His praise, if they did not find it convenient, or think it expedient, to hear the Messiah at Westminster, may comfort themselves with the thought, that, in a little time, they shall be still more gratified. Ere long death shall rend the veil which hides eternal things from their view, and will introduce them to the eternal song and universal chorus, which are even now performing before the Throne of God and of the Lamb. Till then, I apprehend, that true Christians, without the assistance of either vocal or instrumental music, may find greater pleasure in humble contemplation on the words of the Messiah, than they can derive from the utmost efforts of musical genius. This therefore is the plan I spoke of. I mean to lead your meditations to the language of the Oratorio, and to consider in their order (if the

Lord on whom our breath depends shall be pleased to afford life, ability, and opportunity), the several sublime and interesting passages of Scripture, which are the basis of that admired composition.

If He shall condescend to smile upon the attempt, pleasure and profit will go hand in hand. There is no harmony to a heaven-born soul like that which is the result of the combination and coincidence of all the divine attributes and perfections, manifested in the work of Redemption; mercy and truth meeting together, inflexible righteousness corresponding with the peace of offenders, God glorious, and sinners saved. There is no melody upon earth to be compared with the voice of the blood of Jesus speaking peace to a guilty conscience, or with the voice of the Holy Spirit applying the promises to the heart, and sweetly inspiring a temper of confidence and adoption. These are joys which the world can neither give nor take away, which never pall upon the mind by continuous repetition; the sense of them is always new ; the recollection of them is always pleasant. Nor do they only satisfy, but sanctify the soul. They strengthen faith, animate hope, add fervency to love, and both dispose and enable the Christian to run in all the paths of holy obedience with an enlarged heart.

The Messiah of Handel consists of three parts. The first , contains prophecies of His advent and the happy consequences, together with the angel's message to the shepherds informing them of His birth, as related by St. Luke. The second part describes His passion, death, resurrection and ascension; His taking possession of His Kingdom of glory, the commencement of His Kingdom of grace upon the earth, and the certain disappointment and ruin of all who persist in opposition to His will. The third part expresses the blessed fruits and consummation of His undertaking in the deliverance of His people from sin, sorrow and death, and in making them finally victorious over all their enemies. The triumphant song of the redeemed, to the praise of the Lamb who bought them with His own blood, closes the whole. The arrangement or series of these passages, is so judiciously disposed, so well connected, and so fully comprehends all the principal truths of the Gospel, that I shall not attempt either to alter, or to enlarge it. The exordium, or introduction, which I have read to you from the prophecy of Isaiah is very happily chosen.

If, as some eminent commentators suppose, the prophet had any reference, in this passage, to the return of Israel from Babylon into their own land, his principal object was undoubtedly of much greater importance. Indeed their deliverance from captivity, and their state afterwards as a nation, do not appear to correspond with the magnificent images employed in the following verses. For though they rebuilt their city and temple, they met with many insults and much opposition, and continued to be a tributary and dependent people. I shall therefore wave the consideration of this sense.

The eye of the Prophet's mind seems to be chiefly fixed upon one august [high-ranking; lofty] Personage, who was approaching to enlighten and bless a miserable world; and before he describes the circumstances of His appearance, he is directed to comfort the mourners

in Zion, with assurance, that this great event would fully compensate them for all their sorrows. The state of Jerusalem, the representative name of the people of God, was very low in Isaiah's time. The people, who in the days of Solomon were attached to the service of God, honoured with signal tokens of His presence and favour, and raised to the highest pitch of temporal prosperity, were now degenerated, the gold was become dim, and the fine gold changed. Iniquity abounded, judgments were impending, yet insensibility and security prevailed, and the words of many were stout against the Lord. But there were a few who feared the Lord, whose eyes affected their hearts, and who mourned for the evils which they could not prevent. These and these only were, in strictness of speech, the people of the Lord, and to these the message of comfort is addressed. Speak to Jerusalem comfortably, speak to her heart (as the Hebrew word is) to her very case, and tell her there is a balm for her wounds, a cordial [tonic] for all her griefs in this one consideration, MESSIAH is at hand. In the prophetic style things future are described as present, and that which the mouth of the Lord has spoken as sure to take place, is considered already done. Thus the Prophet rapt [enraptured] into future times contemplates the manifestation of MESSIAH, the accomplishment of His great undertaking, and all the happy consequences of His obedience unto death for men, as though he stood upon the spot, and with John, the harbinger of our Lord, (whose appearance he immediately describes,) was pointing with his finger to the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world.

This comfortable message consists of two parts. First, the removal of evil; her warfare is accomplished, her iniquity is pardoned. Secondly, a promise of good more than equivalent to all her afflictions; she has received at the Lord's hand double for all her sins.

I.

Two ideas are included in the original term translated warfare.

(1.) A state of service connected with hardship, like that of a military life ([Numbers 1:3](#))

(2.) An appointed time, as it is rendered in [Job 7:1](#) and [14: 14](#).

These ideas equally apply to the Mosaic dispensation. The spirit of that institution was comparatively a spirit of bondage, distance, and fear; and the state of the Church, while under the law, is resembled, by the Apostle, to that of a minor, who, though he be an heir, is under tutors and governors, and differs but little from a servant, until the appointed time of the Father ([Galatians 4:1-4](#)) The ceremonial law, with respect to its inefficacy, is styled weak, and with respect to the long train of its multiplied, expensive, difficult, and repeated appointments, a yoke and a burden. But it was only for a prescribed time. The Gospel was designed to supersede it, and to introduce a state of life, power, liberty, and confidence. The blackness and darkness, the fire and tempest, and other circumstances of terror attendant on the promulgation of the law at Mt. Sinai, ([Hebrews 12:18-22](#)) which not only struck the people with dismay, but caused even Moses himself to say, I exceedingly fear and quake, were expressive of its design; which was not to lead the people of Israel to expect peace and

hope from their best obedience to that covenant; but rather to convince them of the necessity of a better covenant, established upon better promises, and direct their hopes to MESSIAH, who was prefigured by all their sacrifices; and who, in the fulness of time, was to make a complete atonement for sin by the sacrifice of Himself. Then their legal figurative constitution would cease, the shadows give place to the substance, and the true worshippers of God would be instructed, enabled and encouraged to worship Him in spirit and in truth; no more as servants, but in the temper of adoption, as the children of God by faith in the Son of His love.

There is considerable analogy to this difference between the Law and the Gospel, as contradistinguished from each other, in the previous distress of a sinner, when he is made sensible of his guilt and danger as a transgressor of the law of God, and the subsequent peace which he obtains by believing the Gospel. The good seed of the word of grace, can only take root and flourish in a soil duly prepared. And this preparation of the heart ([Proverbs 16:1](#)) is wholly from the Lord —without which all that is read or heard concerning MESSIAH produces no permanent good effect.

The first good work of the Holy Spirit, upon the heart of fallen man, is to convince of sin ([John 16:9](#)) He gives some due impressions of the majesty and holiness of the God with whom we have to do, of our dependence upon Him, as our obligations to Him as our Creator, Lawgiver, and Benefactor; then we begin to form our estimate of duty, of sin and its desert, not from the prevalent maxims and judgments of mankind, around us, but from the unerring standard of Scripture. Thence new and painful apprehensions arise —the lofty looks of man are humbled, his haughtiness is brought low, his mouth stopped, or only opened to confess his guilt and vileness and to cry for mercy. He now feels himself under the law, it condemns him and he cannot reply, it commands him and he cannot obey. He has neither righteousness nor strength, and must sink into despair, were it not that he is now qualified to hearken to the Gospel with other ears, and read the Scriptures with other eyes (if I may so speak) than he once did. He now knows he is sick, and therefore knows his need of a physician. This state of anxiety, conflict and fear, which keeps comfort from his heart, and perhaps slumber from his eyes, is often of long continuance. There is no common standard whereby to determine either the degree or the duration. Both differ in different persons; and as the body and the mind have a strong and reciprocal influence upon each other, it is probable the difference observable in such cases may in part depend upon constitutional causes. However, the time is a prescribed time, and though not subject to any rules or reasonings of ours, is limited and regulated by the wisdom of God. He wounds, and He heals in His own appointed moment. None that continue waiting upon Him, and seeking salvation in the means which He has directed, shall be finally disappointed. Sooner or later He gives them, according to His promise, beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and

the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness ([Isaiah 61:3](#)) This warfare is accomplished, when they rightly understand, and cordially [sincerely] believe the following clause:

Her iniquity is pardoned. Though the sacrifices under the law had an immediate and direct effect to restore the offender, for whom they were offered, to the privileges pertaining to the people of Israel considered as a nation or commonwealth, they could not of themselves cleanse the conscience from guilt. It is a dictate of right reason, no less than of revelation, that it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sin ([Hebrews 10:4](#)) For this purpose the blood of Christ had a retrospective efficacy, and was the only ground of consolation for a convinced sinner from the beginning of the world. He was proposed to our first parents as the seed of the woman who should break the serpent's head ([Genesis 3:15](#)) In this seed Abraham believed and was justified, and all of every age who were justified were partakers of Abraham's faith. Therefore the Apostle teaches us, that when God set Him forth as a propitiation through faith in His blood, He declared His righteousness in remissions of sins that were past ([Romans 3:25](#)) For though we may suppose God would have declared His mercy in forgiving sin upon any terms, no consideration but the death of His Son could have exhibited His righteousness —that is His holiness, justice and truth, in the pardon of sin. True penitents and believers were pardoned and saved under the law, but not by the law. Their faith looked through all the legal institutions to Him who was represented and typified by them. But the types [prophetic symbols] which revealed Him, in a sense concealed Him likewise. So that though Abraham saw His day, and rejoiced, and a succession of the servants of God foresaw His glory and His sufferings and spake of Him; yet in general the Church of the Old Testament rather desired and longed for, than actually possessed, that fulness of light and knowledge concerning the person, offices, love and victory of MESSIAH, which is the privilege of those who enjoy and believe the Gospel ([Hebrews 11:39, 40](#))

Yet great discoveries of these things were vouchsafed [graciously granted] to some of the prophets, particularly to Isaiah, who on account of the clearness of his views of the Redeemer and His Kingdom, has been sometimes styled a fifth Evangelist. The most evangelical part of his prophecy, or at least that part in which he prosecutes that subject with the least interruption, begins with this chapter and with this verse. And he proposes it for the comfort of the mourners in Zion in his day. We know that the Son of God, of whom Moses and the prophets spake, has actually come ([I John 5:20](#)) —that the atonement for sin has been made, the ransom for sinners paid and accepted. Now the shadows are past, the veil removed, the night is ended, the dawn, the day is arrived, yea the Sun of Righteousness is arisen with healing in His beams ([Malachi 4:2](#)) . God is reconciled in His Son, and the ministers of the Gospel are now authorized to preach comfort to all who mourn under a sense of sin, to tell them all manner of sin is forgiven for the Redeemer's sake, and that the iniquity of those who believe in Him, is freely and abundantly pardoned.

II.

Though the last clause of the verse does not belong to the passage, as selected for the Oratorio, it is so closely connected with the subject that I am not willing to omit it: She hath received at the LORD's hand double for all her sins. The meaning here cannot be that her afflictions had already been more, and greater, than her sins had deserved. The just desert of sin cannot be received in the present life, for the wages of sin is death and the curse of the law, or in the Apostle's words, is everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and the glory of His power ([II Thessalonians 1:9](#)) Therefore a living man can have no reason to complain under the heaviest sufferings. If we acknowledge ourselves to be sinners, we have likewise cause to acknowledge, that He hath not dealt with us according to our iniquities.

Nor can the words be so applied to MESSIAH as to intimate that even His sufferings were more than necessary, or greater than the exigency of the case required. The efficacy of His atonement is indeed greater than the actual application, and sufficient to save the whole race of mankind if they truly believed in the Son of God. We read, that He groaned and bled upon the cross, till He could say, It is finished, but no longer. It becomes us to refer to infinite Wisdom, for the reasons why His sufferings were prolonged for such a precise time; but I think we may take it for granted that they did not endure for an hour or a minute longer than was strictly necessary. The expression seems to be elliptical, and I apprehend that the true sense is, that Jerusalem should receive blessings double, much greater than all the afflictions which sin had brought upon her. And in general to us, to every believing sinner, that the blessings of the Gospel are an unspeakably great compensation, and overbalance, for all the afflictions of every kind with which we have been, or can be exercised. Afflictions are the fruit of sin, and because our sins have been many, our afflictions may be many. But where sin has abounded, grace has much more abounded ([Romans 5:20](#))

Before our Lord healed the paralytic man who was brought to Him, He said, Be of good cheer, thy sins are forgiven thee ([Matthew 9:2](#)). His outward malady rendered him an object of compassion to those who brought him; but he appears to have been sensible of an inward malady, which only Jesus could discern, or pity, or relieve. I doubt not but his conscience was burdened with guilt. An assurance therefore that his sins were forgiven, was sufficient to make him be of good cheer, whether his palsy be removed or not. To this purpose the Psalmist speaks absolutely and without exception. Blessed is the man, however circumstanced, whose transgression is forgiven, whose iniquity is covered ([Psalm 32:1](#)) Though he be poor, afflicted, diseased, neglected or despised, if the Lord imputeth not his iniquity to him, he is a blessed man. There is no situation in human life so deplorable, but a sense of the pardoning love of God can support and comfort the sufferer under it, compose his spirit, yea make him exceedingly joyful in all his tribulations; for he feels the power of the blood of Jesus cleansing his conscience from guilt, and giving him access by faith to the Throne of Grace, with liberty to say, Abba, Father; he knows that all his trials are under the

direction of wisdom and love, are all working together for his good, and that the heaviest of them are light, and the longest momentary, in comparison of that far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, which is reserved for him in a better world ([II Corinthians 4:16, 17](#)) Even at present in the midst of his sufferings, having communion with God, and a gracious submission to His will, he possesses a peace that passeth understanding, and which the world can neither give nor take away.

I shall close this preliminary discourse with a few observations, by way of improvement.

(1.)

How justly may we adopt the Prophet's words, Who is a God like unto Thee! ([Micah 7:18](#)) . Behold and admire His goodness! Infinitely happy and glorious in Himself, He has provided for the comfort of those who were rebels against His government, and transgressors of His holy law. What was degenerate Israel, and what are we, that He should thus prevent [favour] us with His mercy, remember us in our low estate, and redeem us from misery, in such a way and at such a price! Salvation is wholly of grace : “ by grace ye are saved” ([Ephesians 2:5, 8](#)) ; not only undeserved, but undesired by us, till He is pleased to awaken us to a sense of our need of it. And then we find everything prepared that our wants require, or our wishes can conceive: yea, that He has done exceedingly beyond what we could either ask or think.

Salvation is wholly of the LORD ([Psalm 3:8](#)) , and bears those signatures of infinite wisdom, power and goodness, which distinguish all His works from the puny imitations of men. It is in every way worthy of Himself, a great, a free, a full, a sure salvation. It is great, whether we consider ⁽¹⁾ the objects miserable and hell-deserving sinners; ⁽²⁾ the end, the restoration of such alienated creatures to His image and favour, to immortal life and happiness; or ⁽³⁾ the means, the incarnation, humiliation, sufferings and death of His beloved Son. It is free, without exception of persons or cases, without any conditions or qualifications, but such as He Himself performs in them, and bestows upon them. It is full, including every desirable blessing; pardon, peace, adoption, protection and guidance through this world, and in the world to come eternal life and happiness, in the unclouded, uninterrupted enjoyment of the favour and love of God, with the perfect and perpetual exclusion of every evil.

(2.)

When the Lord God who knows the human heart would speak comfort to it, He proposes one object, and only one, as the necessary and all-sufficient source of consolation. This is MESSIAH. Jesus in His person and offices, known and received by faith, affords a balm for every wound, a cordial [tonic] for every care. If we admit that they who live in the spirit of the world, can make a poor shift to amuse themselves, and be tolerably satisfied in a state of prosperity, while everything goes on according to their wish; while we make this concession, (which however is more than we need allow them, for we know that no state of life is

free from anxiety, disappointment, weariness, and disgust) yet we must still consider them as objects of compassion. It is a proof of the weakness and disorder of their minds, that they are capable of being satisfied with such trifles.

Thus, if a lunatic conceives his cell to be a palace and that his chains are ornaments of gold, if he calls a wreath of his straw a crown, puts it on his head, and affects the language of majesty —we do not suppose the poor creature to be happy, because he tells us that he is so; but we rather consider his complacency in his situation, as an effect and proof of his malady. We pity him, and if we were able, would gladly restore him to his senses, though we know a cure would immediately put an end to his pleasing delusions.

But, I say, supposing or admitting the world could make its votaries happy in a state of prosperity —it will, it must, leave them without resource in the day of trouble. And they are to be pitied indeed, who, when their gourds are withered, when the desire of their eyes is taken from them with a stroke, or the evil which they most feared touches them, or when death looks them closely in the face, have no acquaintance with God, no access to the Throne of Grace, but being without Christ, are without a solid hope of good hereafter, though they are forced to feel the vanity and inconstancy of everything here. But they who know MESSIAH, who believe in Him, and partake of His Spirit, cannot be comfortless. They recollect what He suffered for them, they know that every circumstance and event of life is under His direction, and designed to work for their good; that though they sow in tears, they shall soon reap in joy; and therefore they possess their souls in patience, and are cheerful, yea comfortable, under those trying dispensations of Providence, which when they affect the lovers of pleasure, too often either excite in them a spirit of presumptuous murmuring against the will of God; or sink them into despondency, and all the melancholy train of evils, attendant on those, who languish and pine away under the depression of spirits, emphatically styled a broken heart.

(3.)

To be capable of the comfort my text proposes, the mind must be in a suitable disposition. A free pardon is a comfort to a malefactor, but it implies guilt; and therefore they who have no apprehension that they have broken the laws, would be rather offended, than comforted, by an offer of pardon. This is one principle cause of that neglect, yea contempt, which the Gospel of the grace of God meets with from the world. If we could suppose that a company of people who were all trembling under an apprehension of His displeasure, constrained to confess the justice of the sentence, but not as yet informed of any way to escape, were to hear this message for the first time, and to be fully assured of its truth and authority, they would receive it as life from the dead. But it is to be feared, that for want of knowing themselves, and their real state in the sight of Him with whom they have to do, many persons who have received pleasure from the music of the Messiah [Oratorio], have neither found, nor expected, nor desired to find, any comfort from the words.

— O —

Sermon II

The Harbinger

[Isaiah 40:3-5](#)

The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD ,
make straight in the desert a high-way for our God. Every valley shall be exalted,
and every mountain and hill shall be made low,
and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain.
And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together,
for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it.

The general style of the prophecies is poetical. The inimitable simplicity which characterizes every part of divine revelation, is diversified according to the nature of the subject: and the magnificence and variety of imagery which constitute the life and spirit of poetry, evidently distinguish the style of the Psalms, of Isaiah, and the other poetical books, from that of the historical, even in the common versions. The various rules and properties of Hebrew poetry are not, at this distance of time, certainly known. But the present Bishop of London, in his elegant and instructive lectures on the subject, and in the discourse prefixed to his translation of Isaiah, has fully demonstrated one property. It usually consists either of parallel, or contrasted sentences. The parallel expressions (excepting in the book of Proverbs) are most prevalent. In these the same thought, for substance, expressed in the first member, is repeated, with some difference of phrase, in the following; which, if it enlarges or confirms the import of what went before, seldom varies the idea. Almost any passage I first cast my eye upon, will sufficiently explain my meaning. For instance, in the 59th chapter of Isaiah,

1: Behold, the LORD 's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save;

Neither His ear heavy, that it cannot hear:

9: Therefore is judgment far from us, Neither doth justice overtake us;

We wait for light, but behold obscurity;

For brightness, but we walk in darkness.

So in chapter 55.

2: Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread?

And your labour for that which satisfieth not?

Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good,

And let your soul delight itself in fatness.

So likewise in [Psalm 2](#).

4: He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh:

The LORD shall have them in derision. 5: Then shall He speak unto them in His wrath,

And vex them in His sore displeasure.

These specimens may suffice for my present purposes. The knowledge of this peculiarity of the poetical idiom, may often save us the trouble of enquiring minutely into the meaning of every single word, when one plain and comprehensive sense arises from a view of the whole passage taken together. This observation applies to the first of the verses in my text. Though it be true that John the Baptist lived for a season retired and unnoticed in a wilderness, and began to preach in the wilderness of Judea, the expression, The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, does not merely foretell that circumstance. The verse consists of two parallels. The Prophet, rapt into future times, hears a voice proclaiming the approach of MESSIAH, and this is the majestic language—

In the wilderness prepare ye the way of the LORD ;
Make straight in the desert a high-way for our God.

The wilderness and the desert are the same here, as likewise in chapter 35 where the happy, the sudden, the unexpected effects of His appearance are described — The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad.

And the desert shall rejoice, and blossom like a rose.

Now to see, by the eye of faith, the glory of the Redeemer in His appearance; to see divine power preparing the way for Him; to enter into the gracious and wonderful design of His Salvation; to acknowledge, admire and adore Him as our God, must afford a pleasure, very different from that which the most excellent music, however well adapted to the words, can possibly give. The latter may be relished by a worldly mind; the former is appropriate, and can only be enjoyed by those who are taught of God.

When the Eastern monarchs travelled, harbingers went before to give notice that the king was upon the road; and likewise proper persons to prepare his way, and to remove obstacles. Some of them, (if we may depend upon history) in the affectation of displaying their pomp and power, affected extraordinary things upon such occasion. For man, though vain, would appear wise ; though a sinful worm, he would fain be accounted as great. We read of their actually having filled up valleys, and levelled hills to make a commodious road, for themselves or their armies, through places otherwise impassable. The Prophet thus illustrates great things by small, and accommodates the language and usages of men to divine truth. MESSIAH is about to visit a wilderness world, and those parts which He blesses with His presence, shall become the garden of the Lord. Till then it is all desolate, rocky, and wild. But His way shall be prepared. Mountainous difficulties shall sink down before Him into plains. In defiance of all obstacles His glory shall see it, for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.

The leading ideas respecting MESSIAH'S appearance, suggested by this sublime representation, are:

I. The state of the world at His coming — A wilderness.

II. The preparation of His way — Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low.

III. The manner and effects of His manifestation — And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it.

I.

The word wilderness, I suppose, generally excites the idea of an intricate, solitary, uncultivated, dangerous place. Such is the description Jeremiah gives of that wilderness, through which the Lord led Israel, when He had delivered them from Egypt. A land of deserts and of pits, a land of drought and of the shadow of death, a land that no man passeth through, and where no man dwelt ([Jeremiah 2:6](#)) The world, in which we sojourn for a season, does not appear to us in this unpleasing view at first. The spirit and the things of it, are congenial to our depraved inclinations; and especially in early life, our inexperienced hearts form high expectations from it, and we rather hope to find it a paradise, than a wilderness. But when the convincing power of the Holy Spirit opens the eyes of the understanding, we awake as from a dream; the enchantment by which we were deluded is broken, and we then begin to judge rightly of the world; that it is a wearisome wilderness indeed, and that our only important concern with it, is to get happily out of it. In a spiritual view, a wilderness is a significant emblem of the state of mankind, both Jews and Gentiles, at that period which the Apostle calls the fullness of time, when God sent forth His Son ([Galatians 4:4](#))

Israel, once the beloved people of God, was at that time so extremely degenerated that, a few individuals excepted, the vineyard of the Lord, so signally protected, yielded only wild grapes ([Isaiah 5:4](#)) Though they were not addicted to imitate the idolatry of the heathens, as their forefathers had been, they were no less alienated from the true God, and their wickedness was the more aggravated, for being practiced under a professed attachment to the forms of His law. They drew nigh to God with their lips, but their hearts were far from Him ([Mark 7:6](#)) Their very worship profaned the temple in which they gloried, and the holy house of prayer, through their abominations, was become a den of thieves. They owned [acknowledged] the divine authority of the Scriptures, and read them with seeming attention, but rendered them of none effect, through the greater attention they paid to the corrupt traditions of their elders. They boasted in their relation to Abraham as their father, but proved themselves to be indeed the children of those who had persecuted and murdered the prophets ([Matthew 23:30, 31](#))

The Scribes and Pharisees who sat in the chair of Moses, and were the public teachers of the people, under an exterior garb of sanctity, of prayer and fasting, were guilty of oppression, fraud and uncleanness: and while they trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others, their real character was a combination of pride and hypocrisy. Therefore, He who knew their hearts and saw through all their disguises, compared them to painted sepulchres, fair to outward appearances, but full of filth and impurity within ([Matthew](#)

23:27) . From the spirit of these blind guides we may judge of the spirit of the blind people, who held them in admiration, and were willingly directed and led by them. Thus was the faithful city become a harlot. It was once full of judgment; once righteousness lodged in it, but now murderers ([Isaiah 1:21](#)) Such a wilderness was Judea when MESSIAH condescended to visit it.

Among the heathens, ignorance, idolatry, sensuality and cruelty prevailed universally. Their pretended wise men had, indeed, talked of wisdom and morality from age to age. But their speculations were no more than swelling words of vanity —cold, trifling, uncertain, and without any valuable influence, upon themselves or upon others. They had philosophers, poets, orators, musicians and artists, eminent in their way; but the nations reputed to be the most civilized, were overwhelmed with abominable wickedness equally with the rest. The shocking effect of their idolatry upon their moral principles and conduct, notwithstanding their attainments in arts and science, is described by the Apostle in the close of the first chapter of his epistle to the Romans. With great propriety therefore the state of the world, both Jew and Gentile, considered in a moral view, is compared by the Prophet to a wilderness—a barren and dreary waste. The pursuits and practices of the world were diametrically opposed to the spirit and design of that Kingdom which MESSIAH was about to set up; and therefore, as the event proved, directly disposed to withstand His progress. But,

II.

Before His appearance a way was prepared for Him in the wilderness.

The Providence of God, by a gradual train of dispensations, disposed [set in order; adjusted] the political state of mankind in a subservience to this great event. All the commotions and revolutions which take place in the kingdoms of this earth, are so many detached parts of a complicated but wisely determined plan, of which the establishment of MESSIAH'S Kingdom is the final cause. The kings and politicians of this world are not aware of this. God is not in their thoughts. But while they pursue their own ends, and make havoc of the peace of mankind, to gratify their own interests and ambition, and look no higher, they are ignorantly and without intention, acting as instruments of the will of God. The wrath of man is overruled to His praise and His purpose ([Psalm 76:10](#)) , and succeeds so far as it is instrumental to the accomplishment of His designs, and no farther. While they move in this line, their schemes, however judiciously laid, and whatever disproportion there may seem between the means they are possessed of and the vast objects they aim at, prosper beyond their own expectations, but the remainder of their wrath He will restrain. Their best projected and best supported enterprises issue in shame and disappointment, if they are not necessary parts of that chain of causes and events which the Lord of all has appointed. Thus Sennacherib, when sent by the God whom he knew not, to execute his displeasure against the kingdom of Judah, had, for a time, a rapid and uninterrupted series of conquests ([Isaiah](#)

37:26-29) : but his attempt upon Jerusalem was beyond the limits of his commission and therefore failed.

Among the principal instruments appointed to prepare a way in the wilderness for MESSIAH, and to facilitate the future spread of His Kingdom, we may take note of Alexander the Great; and this designation secured his success, though the extravagancies, excesses and rashness, which marked his character, were sufficient to have rendered his undertakings abortive, had he not been in the hand of the LORD of hosts, as an axe or a saw in the hand of the workman. By his conquests the knowledge of the Greek language was diffused among many nations; and the Hebrew Scriptures being soon afterward translated into that language, an expectation of some great deliverer was raised far and wide, before the MESSIAH appeared. When his [Alexander's] service was fulfilled, the haughty presumptuous worm who had been employed in it was no longer necessary, and therefore was soon laid aside; all his proud designs, for the establishment of his own family and dominion, perished with him. His empire was divided towards the four winds of heaven, and this division likewise contributed to bring forward the purpose of God ([Daniel 8:8](#)) For each of the four kingdoms established by his successors, being thus separated, became a more easy prey to the Roman power. This power, which had been gradually increasing and extending in the course of several hundred years, was at the height, about the time of our Lord's birth. The greatest part of the habitable earth which was at that time distinctly known, was united under one empire composed of various kingdoms and governments, which, though once independent and considerable, were then no more than Roman provinces; and as all the provinces had an immediate connection with Rome, a way was thus prepared and an intercourse opened on every side for the promulgation [proclamation] of the Gospel.

Among the Jews, the professing people of God, a way was prepared for MESSIAH by the ministry of His harbinger, John the Baptist, who came in the spirit and power of Elijah, (as had been foretold of him by the prophets, particularly by the last of the prophets, Malachi) preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins, and proclaiming that the Saviour and His Kingdom were at hand. He who sent him accompanied his mission with a divine power. A multitude of persons, of various descriptions, were impressed by his message, insomuch that John himself seems to have been astonished at the numbers and characters of those who came to his baptism.

When the ministry of John had thus previously disposed the minds of many for the reception of MESSIAH, and engaged the attention of the people at large, the MESSIAH Himself entered upon His public office, on the same scene and among the same people. As He increased, John willingly decreased. So the morning star ceases to be seen as the sun advances above the horizon. This distinguished servant of God having finished his work, was removed to a better world. Not in the triumphant manner in which Elijah was translated, but as he came to announce a new dispensation, under which believers were to expect op-

position and ill treatment, to walk by faith, and frequently be called to seal their testimony with their blood, he was permitted to fall a sacrifice to the revenge of a wanton woman; and though we are assured that none of the race of Adam was greater in the estimation of God than he, his death was asked and procured as the reward of an idle dance ([Matthew 6:11; 14:8-11](#))

III.

The latter of my text describes the manner and immediate effects of MESSIAH'S appearance during His personal ministry, with an intimation of its future and more extensive consequences — The valleys shall be exalted.

A valley is an emblem of a low condition. Such was the condition of most of our Lord's followers; but His notice and favour exalted them highly. He came to preach the Gospel to the poor, to fill the hungry with good things, to save the chief of sinners, to open a door of hope and salvation to persons of the vilest and most despicable characters in human estimation. Such, for instance, was the woman mentioned by the Evangelist Luke ([Luke 7:37, 38](#)) The Pharisees thought our Lord dishonoured Himself by permitting such a one to touch Him, nor had she a word to say in her own behalf.

But the compassionate Saviour highly exalted her, when He vouchsafed [graciously agreed] to plead her cause, to express His gracious acceptance of her tears and love, and to assure her that her sins, though many, were forgiven. Very low likewise was the state of the malefactor on the cross; he had committed great crimes, was suffering grievous torments, and in the very jaws of death ([Luke 23:42](#)) . But grace visited his heart, he was plucked as a brand out of the fire, and exalted to Paradise and glory. The world accounts the proud happy, and honours the covetous if they be prosperous. But true honour comes from God. They who are partakers of the faith and hope of the Gospel, and have interest in the precious promises, are, indeed, the rich, the happy, the excellent of the earth, however they may be unnoticed or despised by their fellow-creatures. The honour of places, likewise, is to be considered in this light. Bethlehem, though but of little note among the thousands of Judah, was rendered more illustrious by the birth of MESSIAH, than Babylon or Rome. The Galileans were held in contempt by the inhabitants of Jerusalem, as a mean and provincial people; but the places in Galilee which our Lord frequently visited, or where He sometimes resided, are spoken of as exalted unto heaven, by the honour and privilege of His presence, though some of them were no more than fishing towns. And so at this day, if we have spiritual discernment, we shall judge that a little village, where the Gospel is known, prized and adorned by a suitable conversation, has a dignity and importance far preferable to all the parade of a wealthy metropolis, if destitute of the like privileges.

On the contrary, Every mountain and hill shall be brought low MESSIAH came to pour contempt on all human glory. He detected the wickedness, and confounded the pride of the Scribes and Pharisees and rulers; and made it appear that what is highly esteemed by men,

the summit of their boasted excellence, To $\nu^{\wedge}\chi\omicron\nu$, is worthless, yea, abomination in the sight of God ([Luke 16:15](#)) And by living Himself in a state of poverty, and associating chiefly with poor people, He placed the vanity of the distinctions and affluence which mankind generally admire and envy, in the most striking and humiliating light. Such, likewise, was and will be the effect of the Gospel. When faithfully preached, it is found mighty through God, to the pulling down of strongholds, high thoughts, and every species of self-exaltation. When the convincing Word touches the heart, it has an effect like the hand-writing which Belshazzar saw upon the wall ([Daniel 5:6](#)) In that day the lofty looks of man are humbled, and his haughtiness bowed down ([Isaiah 2:11](#)) ; he dares no longer plead the goodness of his heart, or trust to the work of his hands. A sense of forgiveness and acceptance through the Beloved, received by faith in His atonement, lays him still lower; he now renounces as loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus the Lord, all that he once esteemed his gain, and is glad that he has nothing to trust or glory in but the cross ([Philippians 3:7,8](#)) . Farther, every mountain that opposes the Kingdom of MESSIAH, in due time must sink into a plain ([Zechariah 4:7](#)) Though the nations rage, and the rulers take counsel together, He who sits in the heavens will support and maintain His own work, and all their power and policy shall fall before it.

The crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places smooth. He came to rectify the perverse disposition of the hearts of men, to soften and subdue their obstinate spirits, and to form to Himself a willing people in the day of His power. The Jewish teachers, by their traditions and will-worship [self-imposed worship] , had given an apparent obliquity to [had deviated from] the strait and perfect rule of the law of God, and deformed the beauties of holiness, binding heavy burdens, and grievous to be borne upon the conscience; but He vindicated the law from their corrupt glories, and made the path of obedience plain, practicable and pleasant.

Thus the glory of the LORD was revealed —not to every eye. Many, prejudiced because of His outward appearance, and by the low mistaken views the Jews indulged of the office and Kingdom of the MESSIAH whom they expected, could see no form or excellence in Him, that they should desire Him; but His disciples could say, We beheld His glory ([John 1:14](#)) . He spake with authority. His Word was power. He controlled the elements, He raised the dead. He knew, and revealed, and judged the thoughts of men's hearts. He forgave sins, and thus exercised the rights, and displayed the perfections of divine sovereignty in His own person. But the prophecy looks forward to future times. After His ascension He filled His apostles and disciples with light and power, and sent them forth in all directions to proclaim His love and grace to a sinful world. Then the glory of the LORD was revealed, and spread from one kingdom to another people. We still wait for the full accomplishment of this promise, and expect a time when the whole earth shall be filled with His glory — For the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it! It is to the power of His Word that we owe the continu-

ance of day and night, and the regular return of the seasons of the year. But these appointments are only for a limited term; the hour is coming, when the frame of nature shall be dissolved. Heaven and earth shall pass away; but not a jot or tittle of what He has declared of His Kingdom of grace shall fail, till the whole be fulfilled.

Those of you who have heard the Messiah [Oratorio] will do well to recollect, whether you were affected by such thoughts as these, while this passage was performed; or whether you were only fascinated by the music, and paid no more regard to the words than if they had no meaning. They are, however, the great truths of God. May they engage your serious attention, now they are thus set before you.

— O —

Sermon III

The Shaking of the Heavens and the Earth

[Haggai 2:6, 7](#)

Thus saith the LORD of hosts, Yet this once, it is a little while,
and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea,
and the dry land: and I will shake all nations, and
the desire of all nations shall come, and I will fill this house
with glory, saith the LORD of hosts.

God shook the earth when He proclaimed His law to Israel from Sinai. The description, though very simple, presents to our thoughts a scene unspeakably majestic, grand and awful. The mountain was in flames at the top, and trembled to its basis ([Exodus 19:16-19](#))

Dark clouds, thundering and lightning filled the air. The hearts of the people, of the whole people, trembled likewise; and even Moses himself said, I exceedingly fear and quake. Then, as the Apostle, referring to this passage, observes, the voice of the LORD shook the earth. But the Prophet here speaks of another, a greater, a more important and extensive concussion. Yea, once a little while and I will shake not the earth only, but the heavens ([Hebrews 12:26](#))

If we really believe that the Scriptures are true, that the prophecies were delivered by holy men, who spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit, and that they shall all be certainly fulfilled; how studious should we be to attain a right understanding of passages and events in which we are so nearly interested, that our hearts may be duly affected by them? But alas! experience and observation strongly confirm the remark of the poet, * “Men are but children of a larger growth.” * from “All For Love” by John Dryden (1631-1700)

If you put a telescope into the hands of a child, he will probably admire the outside, especially if it be finely ornamented. But the use of it, in giving a more distinct view of distant objects, is what the child has no conception of. The music of the Messiah [Oratorio] is but an ornament of the words, which have a very weighty sense. This sense no music can explain, and when rightly understood, will have such an effect as no music can produce. That the music of the Messiah has a great effect in its own kind, I can easily believe. The ancients, to describe the power of the music of Orpheus, pretend, that when he played upon his harp, the wild beasts thronged around him to listen, and seemed to forget their natural fierceness. Such expressions are figurative, and designed to intimate, that by his address and instructions, he civilized men of fierce and savage dispositions. But if we were to allow the account to be true in the literal sense, I should still suppose that the wild beasts were affected by his music only while they heard it, and that it did not actually change their natures, and render lions and tigers gentle, as lambs, from that time forward. Thus I can allow that they who heard the Messiah [Oratorio], might be greatly impressed during the performance, but when it was ended, I suppose they would maintain the very same dispositions they had before it

began. And many, I fear, were no more affected by the sublime declaration of the Lord's design to shake the heavens and the earth, than they would have been, if the same music had been set to the words of a common ballad.

The Jews when they returned from captivity, and undertook to rebuild the temple of the Lord, met with many discouragements. They were disturbed by the opposition and arts of their enemies, who at one time so far prevailed, as to compel them, for a season, to intermit the work. And when the foundation of the temple was laid, the joy of those who hoped soon to see the solemn worship of God restored, was dampened by the grief of others, who remembered the magnificence of the first temple, and wept to think how far the second temple would come short of it ([Haggai 2:3](#)) In these circumstances the prophets Haggai and Zechariah were sent to animate the people by a promise, that inferior as the second temple might appear, compared with that which Solomon built, the glory of the latter house should be greater than the former ([Ezra 3:12, 13](#)) Had this depended upon a profusion of silver and gold, the Lord could have provided it, for the silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith the LORD of hosts. But the glory spoken of was of a different kind. The presence of MESSIAH in the second temple, would render it far more honourable and glorious, though less pompous than the temple of Solomon; and would be attended with greater consequences, than even the manifestation of the God of Israel on Mt. Sinai. Then He only shook the earth; but under the second temple, He would shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land, to introduce the Kingdom of MESSIAH.

We may consider from the words,

I. A character of MESSIAH — The desire of all nations.

II. The effects of His appearance — Shaking the heavens and the earth.

III. His — filling the house with glory. This close of verse 7 is not in the passage set to music, but it is an eminent part of the prophecy, and I shall not exclude it.

I.

MESSIAH is styled, the desire of all nations. The propriety of this title may be illustrated by two considerations.

(1.)

Before He came into the world to save sinners, an expectation prevailed in many nations that a great deliverer and friend of mankind was at hand. This was, perhaps, partly the effect of some ancient traditions founded on the promises of God respecting the seed of the woman, the traces of which, though much corrupted by the addition of fables, were not worn out—but might be chiefly owing to several of the dispersions of the people of Israel, and imperfect notices derived from the Scriptures in their hands. The sense of many prophecies concerning MESSIAH, though misapplied, is remarkably expressed in a short poem of Virgil, written a few years before our Saviour's birth. This eclogue [pastoral poem], of which we have a beautiful imitation in our own language, by Mr. Pope, affords a sufficient proof that

the heathens had an idea of some illustrious personage, who would shortly appear and restore peace, prosperity, and all the blessings of their imaginary golden age to mankind. The miseries and evil with which the world was filled, made the interposition of such a deliverer highly desirable. There were even a few among the heathens, such as Socrates and his immediate disciples, who seem to have felt the necessity of a divine teacher; and to be sensible that man, in a state of nature, was too depraved, and too ignorant, to be either able or disposed to worship God acceptably, without one. There is reason to believe that the revelation which we enjoy, though despised by too many who affect to be called philosophers in modern times, would have been highly prized by the wisest and best of the philosophers of antiquity. Socrates thought that men were not capable of knowing and expressing their own wants, nor of asking what was good for themselves, unless it should please God to send them an instructor from Heaven, to teach them how to pray. And therefore,

(2.)

The need that all nations had of such a Saviour, is sufficient to establish His right to this title, admitting they had no knowledge or expectation of Him. If we could suppose a nation involved for ages in the darkness of night, though they had no previous notion of light, yet light might be said to be their desire, because the light, whenever they should enjoy it, would put an end to their calamity, would answer their wants, and in that sense accomplish their wishes; for if they could not directly wish for light, they would naturally wish for relief. The heathens were miserably bewildered. They had a thirst for happiness, which could not be satisfied by any or all the expedients and pursuits within their reach. They had fears and forebodings of conscience for which they knew no remedy. They were so sensitive, both of their guilt and their weakness, that being ignorant of the character of the true God, and of that forgiveness which is with Him, in times of extremity they frequently offered the most expensive sacrifices to the objects of their idolatrous superstitions, even the blood and the lives of their children ([Micah 6:6](#))

When MESSIAH appeared, as He was the glory of Israel, so He was a light to the Gentiles, as we shall have opportunity of observing more at large hereafter. He therefore who came purposely to bless the nations by turning them from darkness to light, and from the worship of dumb idols to serve the living and true God, may justly be called their desire, though, in the time of their ignorance, they could form no suitable conception of Him.

II.

I will shake the heavens and the earth. This part of the prophecy has been, in a measure, literally fulfilled. At His birth a new star appeared. At His death the sun withdrew its shining, the earth quaked, the rocks rent, the dead rose. During His life He often suspended and overruled the stated rules of nature, and exercised supreme power over the visible and invisible worlds. He shook the kingdom of darkness, spoiled principalities and powers, triumphing over them by His cross. He shook the kingdoms of the earth; the idols trembled and disap-

peared before His Gospel, till at length the Roman empire renounced heathenism, and embraced the Christian name. But the language of prophecy is highly figurative. Mountains and trees, land and water, sun and moon, heaven and earth, often signify nations, people and governments. And particularly heaven and earth are used to denote the religious and political establishment of Israel; or, as we say, their constitution in church and state. This without doubt is a primary sense here. The appearance of MESSIAH shall be connected with the total dissolution of the Jewish economy. The whole of their Levitical institution was fulfilled, superseded and abrogated by MESSIAH, which was solemnly signified, by the rending of the veil of the temple from the top to the bottom at His death. And, a few years afterwards, the temple itself was destroyed. By which event, the worship of God, according to law, of which the temple service was an essential part, was rendered utterly impracticable. Their civil state likewise was dissolved, they were extirpated [uprooted] from the promised land, and dispersed far and wide among the nations of the earth. Though in one sense they are preserved by the wonderful Providence of God, as a distinct people, unaffected by the changes and customs around them; in another sense they are not a people, having neither settlement nor government, but living as strangers and foreigners in every country where their lot has been cast ([Hosea 3:4](#)). Nothing like this can be found in the history of mankind. It is an obvious, striking, and perpetual proof of the truth of the Scriptures. What was foretold concerning them by Moses and the succeeding prophets, is accomplished to a demonstration before our eyes. How unlikely was it once that it should be thus! yet thus it must be, because the mouth of the LORD has spoken it. And all that He has spoken is equally sure. He will yet again shake the heavens and the earth, dissolve the frame of nature, and execute His threatened judgments upon all those who do not receive and obey His Gospel.

III.

He shall fill this house with glory. He did so when He condescended to visit it in person. The blind and the lame came thither to Him and He healed them ([Matthew 21:14-16](#)). Children felt His power, and sang Hosanna to the Son of David, a title appropriate to MESSIAH; and when the Pharisees rebuked them, He said, If these should hold their peace, the stones would cry out ([Luke 19:40](#)). As the Lord in His own house, He purged the temple, and drove out those who profaned it, and not one of His enemies durst offer the least resistance to His will. And when He left it at the last time, with sovereign authority, He denounced that awful sentence, which was soon afterwards executed by the Romans, both upon the temple and the nation ([Matt. 23:37](#)).

His glory filled the temple when He was an infant, so that Simeon and Anna then acknowledged His character, and spake of Him to those who were waiting for the consolation of Israel ([Luke 2: 25, 38](#)). Especially His glory was manifested when He proclaimed Himself the fountain of life, and invited every thirsty weary sinner to come to Him, to drink and live forever ([John 7:37](#)).

The temple in Jerusalem has been long since destroyed. But He still has a house, a house not made with hands. This is His Church, comprising all the members of His mystical Body. He dwells in each of them individually; He dwells in and among them collectively. Where two or three are met in His name, where His ordinances are administered and prized, where His Gospel is faithfully preached and cordially [sincerely] received, there He is present in the midst of them. There His glory is seen, His voice heard, His power felt, His goodness tasted, and the favour of His name is diffused as a precious ointment, which refreshes the hearts of His people, renews their strength, and comforts them under all their sorrows and cares. The glory and magnificence of the temple worship, even in the days of Solomon, was faint, compared with the glory displayed to the hearts of believers, who worship Him in spirit and truth, under the New Testament dispensation. But it can only be perceived by an enlightened and spiritual mind. To outward appearance all may be low and humiliating. The malice of their enemies has often constrained His people to assemble in woods and on mountains, in places underground; or, in the dead of night, to secret themselves from informers. But vaulted roofs, and costly garments, the solemn parade of processions, music and choristers, and the presence of nobles and dignitaries, are not necessary to constitute the glory of Gospel worship. It is enough that He, in whose name they meet, condescends to visit them with the power and influence of His Spirit, to animate and hear their prayers, to feed them with the good Word of His grace, and to fill them with joy and peace in believing. If they have these blessings they desire no more, they are compensated for all their difficulties and hardships; and however unnoticed and despised by the world, they can say, This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven ([Genesis 28:17](#)) . For they approach, by faith, the city of the living God, the Jerusalem which is above, to the worship that is carried on, day without night, by the innumerable company of angels, and the spirits of just men made perfect ([Hebrews 12:22, 23](#))

But every member of this mystical temple, being by nature afar off from God, experiences a previous change, which may be fitly described by the terms of my text. Before the LORD takes possession of His people, and in order to it, He shakes the heavens and the earth . Their former views of God and of themselves, are altered by a light which penetrates the soul. All that they have been building in religion, until then, is shaken and overturned. Their vain hopes are shaken to the foundation. This concussion makes way for the perception of His glory as a Saviour. In this Day of His Power they are made willing to throw open the gates of their hearts, that the King of Glory may enter.

But as I do not stand here to amuse you with a declamation on a subject in which you are not immediately interested; and as my office as a preacher both warrants and requires me to address myself not only to your understandings, but likewise to your consciences, I must be allowed, before I conclude, to propose this question to your consideration: Is MESSIAH, the desire of all nations, the object of your chief desire? How much depends

upon the answer! Do you wish to know your present state in the sight of God? If you are faithful to yourselves you may be satisfied, provided you will abide by the decision of the Scripture. God is well-pleased in his Son; if you are well pleased with Him, if He is precious to you, and the desire of your soul is supremely directed to Him, then you assuredly possess the beginning, the foretaste and the earnest of eternal life. If you so enter into the descriptions given in the Bible, of His person, love, office, and glory, as to place your whole dependence upon Him, to devote yourselves simply to Him, and to place your happiness in His favour, then you are happy indeed! Happy, even at present, though not exempted from a share in the afflictions incident in this mortal state. For your sins are pardoned, your persons are accepted in the Beloved; to you belong the promises of guidance, protection and supply through life, victory over death, and then a crown of glory that fadeth not away. To say all, in a few words, God is your Father, and Heaven is your home.

But on the other hand, If you trust in yourself that you are righteous and good, at least comparatively so; if your attachment to the business or the pleasure of the world engrosses your thoughts and application, so that you have no leisure to attend to the record which God has given of His Son, or no relish for the subject, you have been hitherto guilty of treating the most glorious display or the wisdom and goodness of God with contempt. Many persons thus employed and thus disposed, bear respectable characters in civil life, from which I do not wish to detract. But however amiable you may be in the judgment of your fellow-creatures, you are a sinner in the sight of God, and will be treated by Him as an enemy of His government and glory, if you finally persist in a rejection of His Gospel. The great point which will determine your destiny for eternity, will be this, What think you of Christ? For it is written, If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha ([I Corinthians 16:22](#)) He must and will fall under the curse and condemnation of the law, and be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and the glory of His power. Today, therefore, while it is called today (for tomorrow is not ours) may you hear His voice, and flee for refuge to the hope set before you!

— O —

Sermon IV

The LORD Coming To His Temple

[Malachi 3:1-3](#)

The LORD , whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to His temple;

even the messenger of the covenant in whom ye delight:

Behold, he shall come, saith the LORD of hosts.

But who may abide the day of his coming?

and who shall stand when he appeareth?

For he is like a refiner's fire, and like a fuller's soap,

— and he shall purify the sons of Levi —

that they may offer unto the LORD an offering in righteousness.

W hereunto shall we liken the people of this generation? and to what are they like? ([Luke 7:31](#)) . I represent to myself a number of persons of various characters, involved in one common charge of high treason. They are already in a state of confinement, but not yet brought to trial. The facts, however, are so plain, and the evidence against them so strong and pointed, that there is not the least doubt of their guilt being fully proved, and that nothing but a pardon can preserve them from punishment. In this situation, it would be their wisdom, to avail themselves of every expedient in their power for obtaining mercy. But they are entirely regardless [negligent; heedless] of their danger, and wholly taken up with contriving methods of amusing themselves, that they must pass away the term of their imprisonment with as much cheerfulness as possible. Among other resources, they call in the assistance of music. And amidst a great variety of subjects in this way, they are particularly pleased with one. They choose to make the solemnities of their impending trial, the character of the judge, the methods of his procedure, and the awful sentence to which they are exposed, the ground-work of a musical entertainment. And, as if they were quite unconcerned in the event, their attention is chiefly fixed upon the skill of the composer, in adapting the style of his music to the very solemn language and subject with which they are trifling. The king, however, out of his great clemency and compassion towards those who have no pity for themselves, prevents them with his goodness. Undesired by them, he sends them a gracious message. He assures them that he is unwilling they should suffer: he requires, yea, he entreats them to submit. He points out a way in which their confession and submission shall be certainly accepted; and in this way, which he condescends to prescribe, he offers them a free and full pardon. But instead of taking a single step towards a compliance with his goodness, they set his message likewise to music; and this, together with a description of their present state, and of the fearful doom awaiting them if they continue obstinate, is sung for their diversion, accompanied with the sound of cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, dulcimer, and all kinds of instruments ([Daniel 3:5](#)) . Surely, if such a case as I have supposed could be

found in real life, though I might admire the musical taste of these people, I should commiserate their insensibility!

But is not this case more than a supposition? Is it not in the most serious sense actually realized amongst ourselves? I should insult your understandings, if I judged a long application necessary. I know my supposition must already have led your thoughts to the subject of the Messiah [Oratorio], and to the spirit and temper of at least the greater part of the performers, and of the audiences The holy Scripture concludes all mankind under sin (Romans 3:9, 10). It charges them all with treason and rebellion against the great sovereign Lawgiver and Benefactor; and declares the misery to which, as sinners, we are obnoxious. But God is long-suffering, and waits to be gracious. The stroke of death, which would instantly place us before His awful tribunal, is still suspended. In the meantime He affords us His Gospel, by which He assures us there is forgiveness with Him. He informs us of a Saviour, and that of His great love to sinners, He has given His only Son to be an Atonement and Mediator, in favour of all who shall sue for mercy in His name. The character of this Saviour, His unspeakable love, His dreadful sufferings, the agony He endured in Gethsemane, and upon the cross, are made known to us. And as His past humiliation, so His present glory, and His invitation to come to Him for pardon and eternal life, are largely declared. These are the principal points expressed in the passages of the Messiah [Oratorio]. Mr. Handel, who set them to music, has been commemorated and praised, many years after his death, in a place professedly devoted to the praise and worship of God; yea, (if I am not misinformed) the stated worship of God, in that place, was suspended for a considerable time, that it might be duly prepared for the commemoration of Mr. Handel. But, alas! how few are disposed to praise and commemorate MESSIAH Himself! The same great truths, divested of the music, when delivered from the pulpit, are heard by many admirers of the Oratorio with indifference, too often with contempt.

Having thus, as I conceive myself bound in duty, plainly and publicly delivered my sentiments, of the great impropriety of making the fundamental truths of Christianity the subject of amusement, I leave what I have said to your serious reflections, hoping it will not be forgotten; for I do not mean to trouble you often with a repetition of it. Let us now consider the passage before us. If you read it with attention, and consider the great ideas it suggests, and the emphatical language with which they are clothed, you will not, perhaps, think the manner of my introducing it wholly improper. Malachi confirms and unites the prophecies of Isaiah and Haggai, which were the subjects of our two last discourses. John is the messenger, spoken of in the beginning of the first verse, sent to prepare the way of the Lord Then the LORD Himself shall come suddenly to His temple, that is, immediately after the appearance of His fore-runner, and with regard to the people in general, unexpectedly.

The question, Who may abide the day of His coming? intimates the greatness and solemnity of the event. If we take His coming in the extensive sense, to denote the whole of

His sojourning here on earth, from His incarnation to His ascension, it is unspeakably the greatest of all events recorded in the annals of mankind; though He lived in the form of a servant, and died the death of a malefactor, the vast consequences which depend upon His appearance under these humiliating circumstances, rendered it a manner of coming every way worthy of Himself. It afforded a more awful discovery of the majesty, glory, and holiness of God, than was displayed upon Mount Sinai, and proved a closer and more searching appeal to the hearts and consciences of men. To enter more into the spirit and meaning of the question here proposed, we shall briefly take notice of the following points which the words offer to our serious meditation. May the Holy Spirit, whose office it is to glorify the Saviour, enlighten our hearts to understand them, with application to ourselves!

I. The names which are ascribed to MESSIAH.

II. The suddenness of His coming.

III. The searching power of it in general, expressed by a refiner's fire and by fuller's soap.

IV. Its purifying power on the sons of Levi, the priesthood in particular.

I.

The names ascribed to the MESSIAH.

The LORD It is a general rule with our translators to express LORD in capital letters, where it answers to Jehovah, in the Hebrew, and there only. But this place is an exception. The word here is not Jehovah, but Adonai. It is however, a name of God, though not incommunicable like the other, being frequently applied to kings and superiors. It properly implies authority and rule. As we say, A Lord and Master. In this connection it is undoubtedly a divine name. The LORD is said to come to His temple, to His own temple. It was a house consecrated to the God of Israel. The first temple He honoured with tokens of His presence; the second, He visited in person; on which account it exceeded the first in glory. MESSIAH, therefore, who appeared in our nature, and was known among men, as a man, and who is now worshipped both in heaven and upon earth, is the God of Israel. He came to His own. This doctrine of God manifest in the flesh, is the pillar and ground of the truth: The only foundation on which a sinner, who knows the just desert of his sin, can build a solid hope of salvation, is, that Jesus Christ is the true God and eternal life ([I John 5:20](#)). Unless this be admitted, the whole tenor, both of the Old and New Testament is unintelligible. To say that this doctrine approves itself to human reason in its present fallen depraved state, would be to contradict the Apostle, who asserts, that no man can say that Jesus Christ is LORD but by the Holy Ghost ([I Corinthians 12:3](#)). But it is highly reasonable, to those who see that they must perish, without such an atonement as shall declare the righteousness of God, no less than His mercy, in the forgiveness of sin; who feel the necessity of holiness, in order to happiness; and are acquainted with the nature and variety of the snares, temptations, and enemies to which they are exposed. Such persons cannot venture their eternal concerns upon the dignity, or care, or power, or patience of a mere creature, however exalted or ex-

cellent; they must be assured, that their Saviour is Almighty, or they dare not trust in Him: nor would they dare to honour the Son as they honour the Father, to love Him with all their heart and soul and strength, to devote themselves absolutely to His service, and expect their supreme happiness from His favour and approbation, if they did not know that He is over all, God blessed for ever.

With respect to the inferior character He sustains in our nature and for our sakes, as the Father's servant, He is styled, the Messenger of the covenant. He is the gift, promise, head and substance of the Everlasting Covenant. And He came Himself to establish the Covenant, and to declare and bestow the blessings it contained. God who had before spoken at divers times and in sundry manners by His prophets, spoke in the fulness of time by His Son ([Hebrews 1:1](#)); testifying to Him by a voice from Heaven, This is my beloved Son, hear Him; in Him I am well pleased ([Matthew 3:17](#)). To the same purpose our Lord spake of Himself. He prefaced His gracious invitation to all, without exception, who are weary and heavy laden, to come to Him for rest ([Matthew 11:27, 28](#)), with a declaration of His commission and authority saying, All things are delivered unto me of my Father, and no one knoweth the Son but the Father, neither knoweth any one the Father, save the Son, and he to whom the Son will reveal Him. The law was given by Moses ([John 1:17](#)); the moral law to discover the extent and abounding of sin; the ceremonial law, to point out by typical sacrifices and ablutions, the way in which forgiveness was to be sought and obtained. But grace, to relieve us of the condemnation of the one, and truth answerable to the types [prophetic symbols] and shadows of the other, came by Jesus Christ.

It is farther said, The LORD whom ye seek, and the Messenger in whom ye delight — MESSIAH was the hope and desire of the true Israel of God, from the earliest times; and when He was born into the world, there was a prepared people waiting and longing for Him, as their consolation. The people at large likewise professed to expect great things from the coming of MESSIAH. But their expectations were low and earthly. They supposed that He would deliver them from the Roman yoke, and give them victory and power over the heathen nations. The more grievous bondage of sin under which they were enslaved, they were not sensible of, nor had they a disposition suited to the privileges and honours of the Kingdom He designed to establish; and therefore, their understandings being darkened by prejudice and prepossession, they could not discern His character. The prophecies which were read in their synagogues every Sabbath, marked out the time and circumstances of MESSIAH'S appearance, the places which He should principally visit, the doctrine He should teach, and the works which He should perform: but though all these particulars exactly applied to Jesus, they obstinately rejected Him, and proceeded to fulfil, what was farther foretold of His sufferings and death, with such a minute punctuality, as if they had designedly taken the prophecies for the rule of their conduct. Thus, by giving neither more nor less than thirty pieces of silver to His betrayer, by buying the potter's field, and no other, with the money

afterwards; by casting lots for one of His garments, and making a distribution of the rest; by piercing His side, contrary to the custom in such punishments, and by omitting to break His legs, which, from their treatment of the malefactors, who suffered with Him, seems to have been usual—in these and several other instances, they acted, though unwittingly, as if it had been their design and study to accomplish the Scriptures to their own confusion and condemnation.

II.

This was why His coming to His temple was sudden to them Though long foretold and long expected, and though the precise time of His Advent, and the accompanying signs, were accurately defined and described, yet when the season arrived He came suddenly, unlooked for and unknown. He came upon them in an hour that they thought not of, and in a manner of which they were not aware. When He stood in the midst of them, they knew not that it was He. How dreadful does sin harden and infatuate the hearts of men! The Jews, in our Saviour's time, furnish us with a striking instance that it is possible for people fatally to miscarry even with the greatest advantages and means for information in their possession. They accounted themselves the people of God, made their boast of His law and their relation to Abraham. But they hated MESSIAH, and crucified Him, who was the object of Abraham's faith. The opposition of their leaders and teachers was the most malicious, for many of them acted against the light of their minds and were often convicted in their consciences, though they refused to be convinced. But an ignorant attachment to these blind guides was ruinous to their blind followers, who, though they sometimes, from a view of His mighty works, were struck with astonishment, and constrained to say, Is not this the Son of David? were at length influenced by their priests to prefer a murderer to Him, and, with a clamorous importunity, to compel Pilate to put Him to death. The like misapprehensions produce the like effects among professed Christians today. We likewise have the Scriptures, but how many who admit their authority in words, live willingly ignorant of their contents and act in direct contradiction to their tenor! The power of the Saviour is likewise displayed among us: His preached Gospel is daily made effectual to the great purposes to which it was vouchsafed [graciously given], yet multitudes reject it with no less pertinacity [persistent determination], than the Jews rejected Him in person. At length, death surprises them and they sink into darkness beyond recall. To them, the LORD may be said to come suddenly, for they think not of Him till they actually find themselves at His tribunal. And this, not only when they are cut off by a sudden stroke, but often when their dissolution is most gradual, and everyone about them can perceive its approach by their countenances; they themselves, though wasting with disease, worn out with pain, still flatter themselves with hopes of amendment and recovery to their last gasp; lingering death is to them no less sudden than if they were killed by a flash of lightning.

III.

It is asked, Who may abide the day of His coming? The effect is compared to a refiner's fire, and to fuller's soap. The refiner's fire penetrates the metal, and thereby searches, discovers, and consumes the dross. The fuller's soap also, though it does not destroy the texture of the cloth, cleanses it by removing, as it were consuming the spots and defilement which are found in it. The idea conveyed by these illustrations is the same. The day of His coming is a day of trial, a trial which issues in the purification of the work of God in His Church, and in the detection and destruction of everything in it which is contrary to His will.

The coming of MESSIAH may be taken in several senses.

To the Jews according to the promise of God repeated from age to age, He came in person. The Word was made flesh and dwelt among them ([John 1:14](#)) The term in the original alludes to the visible symbol of the divine presence, which resided in the tabernacle and temple. Thus for a season He resided among them, in a temple not made with hands, but formed, by the immediate agency of the Holy Spirit, in the womb of a virgin. This was a happy time to those who received and acknowledged Him. But the bulk of the nation could not abide the trial which His appearance exposed them to; they were proved by it to be but reprobate and counterfeit silver. The thoughts of many hearts were revealed ([Luke 2:35](#)) Many specious characters were detected. The pretended sanctity and outward strictness of the Scribes and Pharisees, was evidenced to be mere hypocrisy. He exposed them in their true colours, and upon many occasions put them to shame and to silence.

And where His Word did not cleanse like soap, it burnt like fire, and the persons and places that rejected Him, were rendered inexcusable. Their great privilege of seeing His wonderful works, and hearing His gracious words, being abused, aggravated their guilt and condemnation, and made their doom heavier than that of Sodom and Gomorrah. To them the Day of the LORD, which in their own sense they professed to desire, was darkness and not light ([Amos 5:18](#)) If He had not come and spoken to them Himself, they had not had sin ([John 15:22](#)). That is, comparatively; He found them great sinners, and they would have been such if He had not visited them. But after He had spoken to them, and spoken in vain, they had no cloak for their sin. From that time they were deprived of every shadow of plea, excuse, or extenuation. And all their former wickedness was light, compared with the enormous crime they were guilty of in rejecting and crucifying the Son of God. By refusing Him, they rendered their case helpless and hopeless, because there is no other name but His, given among men, whereby they might be saved. But He cleansed those who received him, He removed their guilt, their fears, their ignorance. He gave them a clean heart and a new spirit. Yet to these also He was as a refiner's fire, and as fuller's soap. They likewise had prejudices and selfish tempers, which were not at once removed. He called them to a state of suffering and self-denial, to forsake all, and to take up their cross daily for His sake.

In another sense, His coming is not restrained to a particular time. Wherever His Gospel is preached, the Lord is come. It is by the Gospel He rides forth prosperously, conquering

and to conquer ([Psalm 45:4](#)) Thus He has promised to be present with His ministers, and wherever two or three are met in His name, to the end of the world. Thus He is come to us. And the effects are the same, as when He was personally upon earth. His Gospel still discovers the thoughts of many hearts. Many persons who till then were reputed religious by the contempt they cast upon this wonderful expedient of infinite wisdom and love to save sinners, manifest their ignorance and hatred of the law and holiness of God, and that the religion they pretend to is a lifeless form, destitute of love and power. To them, though in itself a favour of life, it proves a favour of death. It provokes their enmity, increases their obduracy, and leaves them without excuse. But it is life indeed to those who receive it. They are raised by it from a death of sin, unto a life of righteousness and peace. Their tempers, desires, pursuits, and hopes are changed and elevated. Old things pass away, and all things become new to them, according as it is written, If any man be in Christ Jesus, he is a new creature ([II Corinthians 5:17](#))

He comes to individuals by the power of His Spirit. This makes the Word of His Gospel effectual. For the Kingdom of God is not in word only, but in power. When He thus visits the hearts of sinners, His Word is like fire and soap; quick and powerful, and sharper than a two-edged sword ([Hebrews 4:12](#)) Then they feel and tremble, and cry out with the Prophet, Woe is me, I am undone. But in this way their dross is consumed, their defilement removed. When He thus wounds, He likewise heals. He gives them faith; by faith they look unto Him, and are enlightened and saved.

We surely expect that He will come again. Not as He once came, in a state of humiliation. The Babe of Bethlehem, the Man of Sorrows, who hung, and bled, and died upon the cross for our sins, will return in glory. Behold He cometh in the clouds, and every eye shall see Him ([Revelation 1:7](#)) Concerning this day, emphatically called the day of the LORD, we may well say, Who may abide it? To those who have not been the subjects of His refining operations here, He will then be a consuming fire. That great Day (for which all other days were made) when the LORD shall descend with the voice of the archangel and the trump of God, will burn like an oven, and all the proud, and all that do wickedly shall be as stubble, and the Day that cometh shall burn them up ([Malachi 4:1](#)) Where then shall the impenitent ungodly sinner appear? But it will be a joyful day to them that love His appearing. He will arise upon them, as the Sun of Righteousness, with healing in His wings; He will wipe away their tears, vindicate their characters, acknowledge them before the assembled world, and say unto them, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you ([Matthew 25:34](#))

IV.

It is particularly said, He will purify the sons of Levi, that they may offer an offering to the LORD in righteousness. The sons of Levi, the priests, the official ministers of God, were gone (departed) out of the way, and had corrupted the covenant of the Lord, and thereby

had caused many to stumble ([Malachi 2:8, 9](#)) ; they dishonoured their office, and became themselves vile and contemptible. Thus they went on from bad to worse, till the men of that generation filled up the measure of iniquity of their forefathers, by the rejection of MESSIAH. He also rejected them. The blasted barren fig tree ([Matthew 21:19](#)) , which withered to the very root at His Word, was an emblem of their condition. In a little time, wrath came upon them to the uttermost; they saw the temple in which they had trusted, and which they had profaned, destroyed by fire, and the greater part of them perished. But a remnant of them was purified. We read that after His ascension, a great company of priests were obedient to the faith ([Acts 6:7](#)) And His apostles and disciples were sent forth with a new spirit, and in a new character, to offer and to serve in righteousness. The purport of this passage has been repeatedly exemplified under the Christian dispensation. A declension from the simplicity and purity of worship, principles, and morals, was visible very early in the Church. The progress of it was rapid, especially from the time of Constantine. When the persecution ceased, and a tide of wealth and worldly honours flowed in upon those who by their profession, were bound to be patterns of humility and self-denial to others, from that period, till the Reformation, ecclesiastical history affords us little more than a detail of such instances of pride, intrigue, oppression, and cruelty, under the pretext of religion, as had not been known among the heathens. And the nations which were relieved from the chains of darkness of popery, at the Reformation, did not long preserve much more than a name and a form to distinguish them. In most countries, the state became the idol of the church, and the church the creature of the state. How it is with us in this nation, I need not say. The facts speak for themselves. It is a mournful fact that the ministry is become contemptible; nor is it difficult to assign the cause. But we are favoured with the Gospel, and are eye-witnesses of its purifying power. It still produces the effects, which marked its progress when preached by the apostles. It enlightens the dark mind, softens the hard heart, heals the wounded spirit; and many persons who before were burdensome to society, are rendered by it ornamental and useful. When every other argument and motive has failed of success, the consideration of the mercies of God in Christ, revealed by the Gospel, constrains the believing sinner to present himself a living, willing, holy sacrifice unto God. Thus being purified by the blood of Jesus, he offers to the Lord a sacrifice in righteousness. Such principles and aims are essential to a Christian minister. He knows the terrors of the Lord , and has tasted of His goodness. He is constrained by love, the love of Christ and the love of souls. He preaches as the Apostle did, Jesus Christ and Him crucified; a subject which, though despised and reproached by the formal Jew, and the sceptical Greek, is evidenced by its efficacy to be the wisdom and power of God. Such ministers may be, and frequently are, depreciated and disregarded; but they cannot be contemptible, until integrity, benevolence, and usefulness are the proper objects of contempt.

— O —

Sermon V

Immanuel

[Isaiah 7:14](#)

Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son,
and shall call his name IMMANUEL , God with us.

T here is a signature of wisdom and power impressed upon the works of God, which evidently distinguishes them from the feeble imitations of men. Not only the splendour of the sun, but the glimmering light of the glow-worm proclaims His glory. The structure and growth of a blade of grass, are the effects of the same power which produced the fabric of the heavens and the earth. In His Word likewise He is inimitable. He has a style and manner peculiarly His own. What He is pleased to declare about Himself by the prophet, may be prefixed as a proper motto to the revelation of His will in the Bible. My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD . For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts ([Isaiah 55:8, 9](#)) . This superiority of His thoughts to ours, causes a proportional difference in His manner of operation. His ways are above our conceptions, and often contrary to them. He sometimes produces great effects, by means, which, to us, seem unsuitable and weak. Thus He gave Gideon a complete victory, not by providing him an army equal to that of the enemy, but by three hundred men furnished with earthen pitchers and lamps ([Judges 7:19, 20](#)) . At other times the greatness of His preparations, intimates that there are difficulties in the case, insuperable to any power but His own, where our narrow apprehensions, until enlightened and enlarged by His teaching, can scarcely perceive any difficulty. It is eminently so, with respect to the restoration of fallen man to His favours. We have but slight thoughts of His holiness, and therefore are but slightly affected by the evil of sin. But though He be rich in mercy, no wisdom, but His own, could have proposed an expedient, whereby the exercise of His mercy towards sinners, might be made to correspond with His justice and truth, and with the honour of His moral government. His Gospel reveals this expedient, and points out a way in which mercy and truth meet together; and His inflexible righteousness is displayed, in perfect harmony with the peace of sinners who submit to His appointment; and thus God appears, not only gracious but just, in receiving them to favour. This is the greatest of all His works, and exhibits the most glorious discovery of His character and perfections. The means are answerable to the grandeur of the design, and are summarily expressed in my text.

I shall not take up your time with attempting to clear the difficulties which have been observed in the text. It may suffice for my purpose to affirm, that this passage expressly and exclusively refers to MESSIAH; for which my warrant is, the authority of the Evangelists Matthew and Luke ([Matthew 1:23](#) ; [Luke 1:31, 32](#)) , who directly apply it to Him, and assure

us that it was accomplished in Him. If sinners are to be saved, without injury to the honour of His law and government (and otherwise they must perish) two things are necessary,

I. That a virgin shall conceive and bring forth a son.

II. That this son of the virgin shall have a just right to be called Immanuel, God with us.

I.

A virgin shall conceive and bring forth a son. The mediator, the surety for sinful men, must himself be a man. Because those whom he came to redeem were partakers of flesh and blood, he therefore took part of the same. Had not MESSIAH engaged for us, and appeared in our nature, a case would have occurred, which we may warrantably deem incongruous to the divine wisdom. I mean, that while fire and hail, snow and vapour, and the stormy wind fulfill the will of God; while the brutes are faithful to the instincts implanted in them by their Maker, a whole species of intelligent beings would have fallen short of the original law and design of their creation, and indeed have acted in direct and continual opposition to it. For the duty of man, to love, serve, and trust God with all his heart and mind, and to love his neighbour as himself, is found in the very nature and constitution of things, and necessarily results from his relation to God, and his absolute dependence on Him as a creature. Such a disposition must undoubtedly have been natural to man before his fall, as it is for a bird to fly, or a fish to swim. The prohibitory form of the law delivered to Israel from Mount Sinai, is a sufficient intimation that it was designed for sinners. Surely our first parents, while in a state of innocence, could not stand in need of warning and threatening to restrain them from worshipping idols, or profaning the name of the great God whom they loved. Nor would it have been necessary to forbid murder, adultery, or injustice, if his posterity had continued under the law of their creation, the law of love. But the first act of disobedience degraded and disabled man, detached him from his proper centre, if I may so speak, and incapacitated him both for his duty and his happiness. After his fall, it became impossible for either Adam or his posterity to obey the law of God. But MESSIAH fulfilled it exactly, as a man, and the principles of it are renewed, by the power of His grace, in all who believe on Him. And though their best endeavours fall short, His obedience to it is accepted on their behalf; and He will at length perfectly restore them to their primitive order and honour. When they shall see Him as He is, they will be like Him, and all their powers and faculties will be perfectly conformed to His image.

Again, MESSIAH must not only be a man, but a partaker of our very nature. It had been equally easy to the power of God to have formed the body of the second Adam, as He formed the first, out of the dust of the earth. But though, in this way he would have been a true and perfect man, he would not have been more nearly related to us than the angels. Therefore, when God sent forth His Son to be made under the law, to redeem us from the curse of the law, that we might receive the adoption of children ([Galatians 4:4, 5](#)), and be re-admitted

into His happy family, He was made of a woman. Thus He became our Gä-al , our nearest kinsman, with whom the right of redemption lay.

But farther, if He had derived His human nature altogether in the ordinary way, from sinful parents, we see not how He could have avoided a participation in that defilement and depravity which the fall of Adam had entailed upon all his posterity. But His body , that holy thing , conceived and born of a virgin, was the immediate production of God. Therefore He was perfectly pure and spotless, and qualified to be such a High Priest as became us, holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners ; who needed not, as the typical high priests of Israel, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sin, and then for the sins of the people ([Hebrews 7:26, 27](#)) . These difficulties were obviated by a virgin's conceiving and bearing a son. His obedience was without defect, His nature without blemish, and having no sin of His own, when He voluntarily offered Himself to make atonement for the sins of His people, His sacrifice was, so far, answerable to the strict and extensive demands of the law and justice of God.

Let us make a solemn pause, and call upon our souls to admire and adore the wisdom and power of God in this appointment. Thus the LORD created a new thing upon the earth!

II.

But surely our admiration and gratitude will be raised still higher, if we rightly understand the latter part of my text. This Son of the virgin shall be called Immanuel, God with us . Though the human nature of Christ was absolutely perfect, His obedience commensurate to the utmost extent of the law, and His substitution and sufferings for sinners voluntary; yet, had He been no more than a man, He would not have been equal to the great undertaking of saving sinners. A due consideration of the majesty, holiness, authority, and goodness of God, will make sin appear to be, as the Apostle expresses it, exceedingly sinful ([Romans 7:13](#)) Whoever has a right sense of the nature and effects of that rebellion against the Most High, which the Scripture intends by the term Sin , will not need many arguments to convince him, that the Mediator between God and man, must be possessed of such dignity and power as cannot be attributed to a creature, without destroying the idea of a created and dependent being, by ascribing to him those perfections which are incommunicably divine.

If MESSIAH had been a sinless and perfect man, and no more, he might have yielded a complete obedience to the will of God, but it could have been only for himself. The most excellent and exalted creature cannot exceed the law of his creation. As a creature, he is bound to serve God with his all, and his obligations will always be equal to his ability. But an obedience acceptable and available for others, for thousands and millions, for all who are willing to plead it, must be connected with a nature which is not thus necessarily bound. A sinner, truly convinced of his obnoxiousness to the displeasure of God, must sink into despair, notwithstanding the intimation of a Saviour, if he were not assured by the Scripture that it was a divine person in the human nature who engaged for us. It is this alone affords

a solid ground for hope, to know that He who was before all, by whom all things were made, and by whom they consist, assumed the nature of man; that the great Lawgiver Himself submitted to be under His own law. This wonderful condescension gave an immense value and dignity to all that He did, to all that He suffered; thus He not only satisfied but honoured the law. So that we may, without hesitation, affirm that the law of God was more honoured by MESSIAH, in His obedience to it, during the few years of His residence upon earth, and terminated by His last and highest act of obedience in submitting to the death of the cross, than it could have been the un-sinning obedience of all mankind to the end of time.

But MESSIAH was not only to obey the law for us, He was likewise to expiate, to sustain and to exhaust the curse due to sin ([Galatians 3:13](#)) In this attempt, no mere creature could have endured. Nor could the sufferings of a creature have been proposed to the universe, to angels and men, as a consideration sufficient to vindicate the righteousness and truth of God in the remission of sin, after He had determined and solemnly declared that the wages of sin is death. The Apostle assures us, that it is impossible for the blood of bulls and of goats to take away sin ([Hebrews 10:4](#)). They who differ from the Apostle in their judgment, who think it very possible for God, if He pleased, to forgive the sinner who should offer a bull or a goat, or even without any offering, by the sovereign exercise of His mercy, may be reminded, that the question is not simply what God can do, but what it becomes him to do, agreeable to His perfections, and to His character as Governor of the world. Of this His infinite wisdom is the only competent Judge; and we learn from His Word, that it is impossible any blood but that of His own Son, can cleanse us from guilt, or save us from misery. The blood of a bull or a goat, of a man or an angel (if angels could bleed) are all equally insufficient to the great purpose of declaring His righteousness, of manifesting to all intelligent creatures, His inflexible displeasure against sin, in the very act of affording mercy to sinners. But since the atoning blood is the blood of Immanuel, of Him who is God with us; the sinner who makes it his plea, builds his hope upon a rock which cannot be removed; and obtaining forgiveness in this way, he likewise obtains by it such a knowledge of the heinousness of sin, as disposes him from that hour to fear, hate, and forsake it.

But though forgiveness be an essential part of Salvation, it is not the whole. We cannot be happy, except the power of sin be likewise destroyed. A well-grounded hope in the mercy of God, is connected with a thirst for sanctification, and a conformity to His image. But neither this hope nor this desire are natural to us. Our case requires the help of an almighty arm, of the power which can cause the blind to see, the deaf to hear, the dead to arise; which can take away the heart of stone, and create a heart of flesh. So likewise the difficulties attendant on our Christian profession, arising from the spirit of the world around us, the snare to which we are exposed in every situation, our weakness, the deceitfulness of our hearts, the subtlety, vigilance, and power of our spiritual enemies, are so many and great,

that unless He, on whom we depend for Salvation, be able to save to the uttermost, we can have no security, either for our progress, or our perseverance, in the grace of God.

Unless the Saviour of sinners be omnipresent, omniscient, unchangeable, the same yesterday, today, and for ever, that is, unless He be God, how can He answer the prayers, satisfy the wants, and relieve the distresses of all who trust in Him in every age, and of all who in every place equally need His support at the same moment? Or how can He engage to give rest to every weary soul, to secure them from perishing, and to bestow upon them eternal life? David comfortably concluded, that because the LORD was his Shepherd, he should not want, and had no reason to fear ([Psalm 23:4](#)), not even when passing through the valley of the shadow of death. To us Jesus is made known as the great Shepherd of the sheep; but how can we place the like confidence in Him, unless we are likewise assured that our Shepherd is the LORD?

I shall not attempt to vindicate this doctrine largely from the exceptions of those who call themselves men of reason. It is a point of revelation, and it is expressly revealed. It demands our assent upon the authority of God, who requires us to receive this record which He has given us of His Son. Thus far it approves itself to our reason, that however difficult it may be to our conceptions, yet thus it must be, upon a supposition that sinners can be saved without prejudice to the honour of the divine government. If we affirm that He who was born in a stable, and suffered as a malefactor upon Mount Golgotha, is the true God and eternal life, many will think it a hard saying. But it is the doctrine of Scripture, the very pillar and ground of truth; the only foundation of hope for an awakened conscience, the only standard by which we can properly estimate the evil of sin, the worth of soul, and the love of God. We do not however, say that the human nature of Christ, considered in itself, possesses the attributes of Deity, or is the proper object of worship; nor do we suppose that God should suffer, bleed, and die. But we say, with the Apostle, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself ([II Corinthians 5:19](#)). We believe that the human nature was so intimately and indissolubly united to the divine, that the properties and actings of each nature, are justly ascribed to the one person of Christ, God-man, Immanuel, God with us. Thus we read that the final judgment of the world is committed to a man, and that God hath purchased the Church with His own blood ([Acts 20:28](#))

Behold then the character of MESSIAH in this prophecy! a man! a God! a Divine Person in the human nature! God manifested in the flesh! Immanuel, God with us.

As fallen creatures we had lost the true knowledge of God, and were unable to form such conceptions of His greatness and goodness as are necessary to inspire us with reverence to engage our confidence, or produce obedience to His will. His glory shines in the heavens and fills the earth; we are surrounded by the tokens of His power and presence; yet, till we are instructed by His Word, and enlightened by his Holy Spirit, He is to us an unknown God. The prevalence of idolatry was early, and (with exception to the people of Israel) soon

became universal. Men who boasted their reason, worshipped the sun and moon, yea, the works of their own hands, instead of the Creator. And even where revelation is vouchsafed [graciously given], the bulk of mankind live without God in the world. But He is known, trusted, and loved by those who know MESSIAH To them His glory is displayed in the person of Jesus Christ ([II Corinthians 4:6](#)) . His agency is perceived in the creation, His providence is acknowledged, and His presence felt as God with us.

As fallen creatures, God is against us, and we are against Him. The alienation of our hearts is the great cause of our ignorance of Him. We are willingly ignorant. The thoughts of Him are unwelcome to us, and we do not like to retain Him in our knowledge. Guilt is the parent of atheism. A secret foreboding, that if there be a God, we are obnoxious to His displeasure; and if He takes cognizance of our conduct, we have nothing to hope, but every thing to fear from Him, constrains many persons to try to persuade themselves that there is no God; and many more to think, or at least to wish, that if there be a God He does not concern Himself with human affairs. What a proof is this of the enmity of the heart of man against Him! That so many persons who would tremble at the thought of being in a ship, driven by the wind and waves, without compass or pilot, should yet think it desirable, if it were possible, to be assured that in a world like this, so full of uncertainty, trouble and change, all things were left at random, without the interference of a supreme governor. But this enmity, these dark apprehensions are removed, when the Gospel is received by faith. For it brings us the welcome news that there is forgiveness with Him. That God is reconciled in His Son to all who seek His mercy. In this sense, likewise, MESSIAH is Immanuel, God with us , on our side, no longer the avenger of sin, but the author of salvation.

Immanuel is God with us , God in our nature still. He suffered as a man, and as a man He now reigns on the Throne in glory; exercising all power and authority, and receiving all spiritual worship both in heaven and upon earth. He is the Head of all principalities and power, thrones and dominions. Thus man is not only saved, but unspeakably honoured and ennobled. He is brought into the nearest relation to Him, who is over all blessed forever. The angels adore Him, but only the redeemed sinners can say, He loved us, and gave Himself for us; He has washed us from our sin in His own blood ([Revelation 1:5](#)) ; He is our Saviour, our Shepherd, our Friend, our Immanuel, God with us.

I shall conclude with a few obvious reflections which offer from this important subject.

(1.)

What a cold assent is paid to the doctrine of the Godhead of Christ, by many who profess and receive it as a truth! They have received from education, from books or ministers, what is called an orthodox scheme of religious sentiments, and with this they are contented. They have not been accustomed to doubt of it, and therefore take it for granted that they really believe it. But as I have already hinted, it is so contrary to our natural apprehensions, that no man can, from his heart, say Jesus Christ is LORD , unless he be taught of God.

And a cordial [sincere] belief of this point, will and must produce great and abiding effects. They who know the Saviour's name, will so trust in Him, as to renounce every other ground of confidence. They will love Him supremely, and forsake everything that stands in competition with His favour. They will glory in His cross, they will espouse His cause, and devote themselves to His service. They will make continual application to Him, that they may receive out of His fulness grace according to their need. They will obey His precepts, and walk in His Spirit. Happy were it, indeed, if all who join in repeating the Creed, and who bow their knee at the mention of His name, were thus minded. But the lives, tempers, and pursuits of thousands, give too sure an evidence, that when they express their assent with their lips, they neither know what they say, nor whereof they affirm. Their acknowledgement of His character, has no more salutary influence, than that of the evil spirits when He was upon earth, who said, and perhaps with a much fuller conviction, We know Thee who Thou art, the holy one of God ([Mark 1:24](#))

(2.)

What a strong foundation does this doctrine afford for the faith and hope of those who indeed know MESSIAH, and have put their trust in Him. This truth is the rock upon which the Church is built, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. If God be for us, who shall be against us? The difficulties of our warfare are great, the enemies of our peace are many. The world may frown, and Satan will rage, but Jesus has overcome the world, and is greater than all our foes. He will guide His people with His unerring wisdom, support them with His almighty arm, supply them out of the inexhaustible riches of His grace, revive them when fainting, heal them when wounded, plead for them above as their great High Priest, manage for them upon earth as their great Shepherd, and at last make them more than conquerors, and give them a crown of life!

(3.)

On the contrary, how dreadful must be the state of those who finally reject Him, and say in their hearts, We will not have this man to rule over us! He is now proposed as a Saviour, He invites sinners to come to Him that they may have life, and assures us, that him that cometh He will in no wise cast out ([John 6:37](#)) . Happy are they who hear and obey His voice today, while it is called today. Tomorrow is uncertain. Death may be at the door, and at death our state will be determined for eternity. They who refuse Him now, in the character of a Saviour, must then appear at His tribunal, and stand before Him as their Judge; and must answer, in their own persons, for all their transgressions of the holy law, and for their contempt of the Gospel of the grace of God!

— O —

Sermon VI

Salvation Published from the Mountains

[Isaiah 40:9](#)

O Zion, that bringest good tidings, get thee up into the high mountain;

O Jerusalem, that bringest good tidings, lift up thy voice with strength;

lift it up, be not afraid: say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God!

It would be improper to propose an alteration, though a slight one, in the reading of a text, without bearing my testimony to the great value of our English version, which I believe, in point of simplicity, strength, and fidelity, is not likely to be excelled by a new translation of the whole Scripture. But there are, undoubtedly, particular passages, where a small change in the expression, might render the sense clearer, and be equally answerable to the original Hebrew or Greek. The address of this verse as it stand in the Messiah [Oratorio] is, O thou that tellest good tidings, etc. as the Bishop of London has lately translated it. Zion and Jerusalem are considered by the Prophet, not as bringing, but as receiving good tidings; and the publisher of these good tidings is written with a feminine construction.

The sense may be thus expressed, “Let her that bringeth good tidings to Jerusalem and Zion, get up into the high mountains and lift up her voice.” But the apostrophe is more animated. That it was the custom in Israel for the women to publish and celebrate good news with songs and instruments is well known. We have an early instance in the book of Exodus. When the LORD had delivered them from the power of Pharaoh, and they saw their enemies, dead upon the sea-shore, Miriam, the sister of Aaron, took a timbrel in her hand, and all the women went out after her with timbrels and dances; And Miriam answered them, Sing ye to the LORD for he hath triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea ([Exodus 15: 10, 21](#)) So afterwards, when David returned from the slaughter of the Philistines, the women came out to meet him and Saul with tabrets and instruments of music; and they answered one another as they played, Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands ([I Samuel 18:6, 7](#)) . Thus likewise, Deborah, in her sublime song, represents the mother of Sisera ([Judges 5:28, 29](#)) , and her women, singing alternately, from a confident, though vain expectation, that Sisera would return a conqueror. In my text the Prophet, in prospect of MESSIAH’S appearance, speaks of it as an event suited to excite a general joy. The Gospel (as the word imports) is good news, glad tidings indeed! the best news that ever reached the ears, or cheered the heart of man.

The women are, therefore, called upon to proclaim His approach, on the tops of the hills and mountains, from whence they may be seen, and heard to the greatest advantage, for the spreading of the tidings throughout the whole country. Zion is a besieged city, but let her know that relief is at hand; say unto her, Behold your God! The Lord will come with a strong hand, or against the strong one, and His people shall know Him as their Shepherd, full of care, kindness, and power.

The promise of Immanuel, God with us, is now to be spread like the morning from the tops of the mountains. The day is breaking, and this passage prepares for the following, Arise, shine, for thy light is come! The welcome news is to be dispersed from Jerusalem to Samaria, from Jew to Gentile, from one kingdom to another people, till all the nations and the ends of the earth shall see the Salvation of God ([Psalm 98:3](#))

The cause of this exultation arises from the character of MESSIAH, compared with the design of His appearance, and this is answerable to the condition in which He finds mankind.

The deplorable state of fallen man by nature, is largely described both in the Old Testament and the New. It may suffice to take notice of two principal features, which characterize our whole species, and apply to every individual of the race of Adam, until the grace of God, which bringeth Salvation, affords relief. These are guilt, alienation of heart, and misery.

(1.)

Guilt. All have sinned. We are the creatures of God. He made us, and He preserves us. Our life, faculties, and comforts are all from Him. He is therefore our great Lord, our supreme Benefactor. Of course we belong to Him. His we are, and not our own. It follows that dependence, gratitude, submission, and obedience, are incumbent on us, as they must be upon all intelligent creatures, from the very nature of things. The relation which subsists between an infinitely wise and good Creator and His creatures, if capable of knowing Him, necessarily implies this subjection. And the obligation is indissoluble. But we have evidently broken this law of our creation. We have violated the order of God's government. We have implicitly, if not formally, renounced our allegiance, disowned His right over us, and set up for ourselves. A dependent creature affecting independence; a worm presuming upon its own power, making itself its own end; a rebel against the divine government, boasting of morality and goodness, and trusting to his own conduct to recommend him to the favour of his Maker; a being formed for immortality, proposing his whole happiness in things which he feels to be unsatisfying, knows to be uncertain, and from which he is conscious he must, in a few years at most, be finally removed; these are solecisms [improprieties] which strongly prove the depravity, degeneracy, and demerit of man. It is possible, that had we been wholly left to ourselves, we should never have been aware, while in this world, of the just and inevitable consequences of our rebellion. Having lost all right thoughts of God, and conceiving of Him, as if He were altogether as ourselves, we might have felt neither fear nor remorse. But there is a revelation, by which we are informed of His determined purpose to avenge disobedience, and to vindicate the honour of His government; and we are assured, that He is not an indifferent spectator of our opposition to His established order. His justice and truth are engaged to punish transgressors, and our obnoxiousness to punishment, is what we mean by guilt. If the Scripture be true, there is no way of escape, unless He Himself be pleased to appoint one. This He has done, and the declaration of this appointment is a part of the good-tidings contained in my text. Proclaim it from the tops of the mountains, that there

is forgiveness with Him. Say unto Jerusalem, Behold MESSIAH, Behold your God! He comes to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself ([Hebrews 9:26](#)) . He can do it, for He is God; and He will do it, for He has taken on Himself our nature for this very purpose ([II Corinthians 5:21](#)) Behold the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sin of the world!

(2.)

Alienation of mind. Not only is it true that we have sinned against the Lord, but a principle of aversion from Him is deeply rooted in our hearts. Therefore one part of our natural character is, haters of God ([Romans 1:30](#)) . This is thought a hard saying. Many who will admit that their conduct is blameable, and that they are not altogether what they ought to be, will by no means plead guilty to this charge. If they fall short of their duty, and in some instances transgress His commandment, they say, It is their infirmity [moral weakness or failing]; they are sorry, and hope to do better some time or other. However, they are willing to think that their hearts are tolerably good, they mean well, and are shocked at the idea of hating God. They rather presume that they love Him, though they are not so careful of pleasing Him as they should be.

I do not assert that we hate God under that character, which, our vain imaginations form of Him. If we can persuade ourselves, in direct contradiction to the testimony of Scripture, that He is not strict to mark what is amiss; that He will dispense with the strictness of His law; that He will surely have mercy upon us, because we are not openly abandoned and profligate in our conduct; that He will accept of lip-worship in which the heart has no concern, reward us for actions in which we had no intention of pleasing Him, permit us to love and serve the world with all our mind, and soul, and strength, while we live, and make us happy in another world, when we can live in this no longer — If we form such an image of God, it is too much like our own to provoke our enmity, for it is destitute of holiness, justice, and truth. But the carnal mind is and must be, enmity against God ([Romans 8:7](#)) according to the character He has given of Himself in His Word. We have an inbred dislike to all His moral attributes, to the rule of His government, and to the methods of His grace. We cannot, that is, we will not, propose either His glory as our chief end, or His favour as our chief good. The proof is plain. The ends which we actually pursue, and supposed good which we deliberately prefer, are utterly inconsistent with the plan which He has prescribed for us. His ways, though truly pleasant in themselves, appear displeasing to us, and we think we can plan better for ourselves. We do not like to retain God in our thoughts ([Romans 1:28](#)) , which is a sure sign of enmity. Nay, this enmity is so strong in us naturally, that we cannot bear others think more highly of God than we do, or be more attached to Him than we are.

This was the ground of the first murder. Abel loved God, and God was pleased to testify His approbation of Abel —therefore Cain killed him ([I John 3:12](#)) . This has been the great cause of the opposition and ill-treatment which the servants of God have met with from the

men of the world in all succeeding ages. A cause which still subsists, and will continue to operate upon posterity yet unborn. Can we show a stronger mark of dislike to a person, than by hating all who profess a regard to him, and when that is the only cause of our resentment? Such is the prevailing enmity against God. For how often do we see that when His grace enables a sinner to forsake the spirit and practice of the world, his former friends are immediately offended; and, perhaps, those of his own household, become his inveterate enemies?

But, O thou that bringest good tidings, lift up thy voice. Say to poor sinners, Behold thy God! He comes to take this enmity away! The cross of Christ subdues it, when every other expedient has been found ineffectual. The heart, too hard to be softened by a profusion of temporal blessings, and too stout to be subdued by afflictions, is melted by the dying love of a Saviour; and by that discovery of the divine perfections, which is exhibited in redemption.

We have a striking instance of this effect, in the case of Saul of Tarsus ([Acts 9:1-20](#)). His misguided conscience, under the influence of prejudice, persuaded him, that he ought to do many things against Jesus of Nazareth. Instigated with rage, and not satisfied with the injuries he had offered to His disciples at Jerusalem, but still breathing out threatening and slaughter, he journeyed towards Damascus, designing to harass and persecute them wherever he found them. In this temper of mind, he was suddenly arrested on his way, by a light, and a voice from Heaven. He fell to the ground. But Jesus, whom he had ignorantly persecuted, instructed him in the knowledge of His person and love, pardoned his sin, and commissioned him to preach the faith he had laboured to destroy. How sudden, how evident, how abiding was the change which then took place in his heart and in his conduct! From that moment he accounted all things loss and dung, for the excellency of the knowledge of Jesus Christ his Lord ([Philippians 3:8](#)). Unwearied by labour and hardship, undismayed by opposition and danger, he spent the remainder of his life in the cause of his Master; and, like Caesar, accounting nothing done, while anything remained to do, his active and intrepid [courageous] spirit was continually meditating new services ([Acts 19:21](#)). And, though he knew that bonds and afflictions awaited him in every place, he was always upon the wings to publish to his fellow sinners, the grace and glory of Him, whom he had so long opposed, only because he knew Him not. And although the circumstances attending the Apostle's case were extraordinary, the case itself, as to the substance, is not singular. I trust many persons in this assembly have been subjects of a like change. The doctrine which Paul preached, has enlightened your understandings, has inspired you with hopes and desires to which you were once strangers, and given a new direction to the conduct and aims of your life. You were once afar off from God, but you are now brought nigh by the blood of Christ. You once lived to yourselves, but now you feel that you are no longer your own, and have devoted yourselves to Him who died to save you from the present evil world, and from the wrath to come.

(3.)

Misery. If we are guilty in the sight of God, and alienated from Him in our hearts, we must be miserable. Guilt entails a burden, and a foreboding of evil upon the conscience. And our alienation from the fountain of living waters ([Jeremiah 2:13](#)), compels us (for we are insufficient in our own happiness) to seek our resources from broken cisterns, and pits which will hold no water. Farther, sin has filled the world with woe. The whole creation travails and groans; and natural evil is inseparable from moral, as the shadow from the body. Though the earth be filled with tokens of the goodness, patience, and forbearance of God, it likewise abounds with marks of His displeasure. I think we have sufficient reason to attribute earthquakes, hurricanes, famine, and pestilence, to sin as their original cause. We can hardly conceive, that if mankind had continued in that happy state of love and obedience to God, in which our first parents were created, they would have been exposed to such calamities.

When God at the beginning, surveyed every thing that He had made, behold, it was very good ([Genesis 1:31](#)). All was beauty and harmony, till sin introduced disorder and a curse. But far worse than what we suffer immediately from the Providence of God, are the evils which we bring upon ourselves and upon each other. The dreadful consequences of war, rapine [robbery, pillage], discord, hatred, ambition, avarice, and intemperance, furnish part of every page in the mournful history of human life, and are felt in every nation, city, village, and family. Want, cares, and diseases prey upon individuals. Disappointment, dissatisfaction, vanity, and vexation of spirit, are experienced by persons of every rank, and in every stage of human life. How much more desirable would it be, were it not for the hope of the Gospel, to share with the brute creation, than to bear the name of man in his fallen state! The brutes have few wants; their propensities, and the means of gratifying them, are suited to their natures, adapted to their powers, and conducive to the preservation of their species. They neither regret the past, nor tremble under apprehensions of the future. It is far otherwise with man. His boasted pleasures end with a sting, and often he cannot bear his own reflections on them. He suffers almost as much from imaginary fears, as from real afflictions. The more he possesses, the more are the sources of his anxieties multiplied and enlarged. And after having been long wearied with a train of mortifications, pains, and inquietudes [disquieting thoughts], he must at last, however unwilling, yield to that stroke of death; the thought of which, when strongly realized to his mind, was always sufficient to embitter the happiest hours of his life.

But publish the glad tidings from the mountains, and let the joyful sound diffuse over the plain — Your God cometh! MESSIAH establishes a new, a spiritual Kingdom upon the earth, and His happy subjects are freed from the misery in which they were involved. They commit all their concerns to Him, and He manages for them. Their fears are removed, their irregular desires corrected, and all that is really good for them, is secured to them by His

love, promise, and care. Afflictions still await them, but they are sanctified. To them the nature of afflictions is changed. They are appointments graciously designed for their advantage. Their crosses no less than their comforts, are tokens of God's favour ([Hebrews 12:6,7](#)), they have them only because their present situation requires discipline, and they could not be so well without them. They are assured of support under them ([II Corinthians 12:9](#)), and a final deliverance out of them all: for there is a happy hour approaching when all their troubles shall cease, and they shall enter upon a state of eternal, uninterrupted, inconceivable joy ([Isaiah 60:20](#))

For these purposes the Son of God was revealed. The prophets saw His day afar off, and proclaimed His approach — Thy God cometh! Though truly man, He is truly God. Neither man nor angel could remove our guilt, communicate to us a spiritual life, relieve us from misery, and give us stable peace in a changing world, hope and triumph in death, and eternal life beyond it. But His wisdom and power are infinite, and His purpose unchangeable. He would not have invited the weary and heavy laden to come to Him, if He was not able and determined to give them rest. None that seek Him are disappointed, or sent empty away. A sufficient proof that His compassion, His bounty, His fulness are properly divine. Therefore the Apostle, speaking of the riches of His grace, uses the epithet, Unsearchable ([Ephesians 3:8](#)). His treasury of life and salvation is inexhaustible, like a boundless, shoreless, bottomless ocean; like the sun, which having cheered the successive generations of mankind with its beams, still shines with undiminished lustre, is still the fountain of light, and has always a sufficiency to fill innumerable millions of eyes in the same instant.

Does the language of my text cause joy to spring up in your hearts? or is it nothing to you? If you heard the Messiah [Oratorio], you were, perhaps, affected by the music of the passage; how much are you to be pitied, if you are hitherto unaffected by the sentiment! Yet once more, hear — Thy God cometh! He did come in the fulness of time, according to the prophecy, and the Word of prophecy assures us, that He will come again. Behold He cometh in the clouds; and every eye shall see Him, and they also that pierced Him ([Revelation 1:7](#)) — Prepare to meet thy God! ([Amos 4:12](#))

— O —

Sermon VII

The Morning Light

[Isaiah 60:1-3](#)

Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the LORD is risen upon thee.

For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people:

but the LORD shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee.

And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising.

One strong internal proof that the Bible is a divine revelation, may be drawn from the subject matter; and particularly that it is the book, and the only book, that teaches us to think highly and honourably of God. I say, the only book, for there is no right knowledge of God where the Bible is not known. What is the Jupiter of Homer, compared with the God of Israel as He is presented to us by His servants the prophets? And if the heathen philosophers, in some detached passages, have sentiments not altogether unworthy of Him, history honestly tells us how they obtained them. They travelled, and they are generally said to have travelled into Phoenicia or Egypt, to the confines of that people who alone thought rightly of God, because to them only He had made Himself known by revelation. If such a description as we have in the fortieth chapter of Isaiah, from the twelfth verse to the end, had been known only of late years, recovered, we will suppose, out of the ruins of Herculaneum, there is little doubt but it would have engaged the attention and admiration of the learned world. For the most admired writings of antiquity, upon candid comparison, are unspeakably inferior to it. The inimitable sublimity [high spiritual and moral worth] of the prophets is natural, just, and unforced, and flows from the grandeur of their subjects, because they were influenced by Him, who alone can speak worthily of Himself. A song so vast, a theme so high,

Calls for the voice that tuned the sky.

With them, the whole compass of the creation is but as dust upon the balance, in respect of the great Creator. His purpose is fate, His voice is power. He speaks, and it is done. Thus He called the universe into being; and thus, as the great LORD and Proprietor of all, He still maintains and governs it, directing the frame of nature, and every particular event and contingency, to the promoting of His own glory, the last and highest end of all His works.

The principal of these is, the exhibition of His perfections in the Person of His Son. The prophecies we have already considered, announce this event, with a gradual increase of clearness and precision, as the period of accomplishment is supposed to draw nigh. We lately heard the command to proclaim His approach from the hills and the tops of the mountains. Here the Prophet begins to contemplate the effects of His actual appearance. The earth is considered as involved in a state of gross darkness; but the sun, the Sun of Righteousness is about to arise, and to fill it, by His beams, with light, life, and glory. These effects, indeed, will not extend to all, for many will love darkness rather than light. But He

will not shine in vain. There will be a people prepared to receive Him, and to rejoice in His light. They shall arise as from sleep, as from the grave, and His light reflected upon them, shall cause them to shine likewise. Darkness shall still cover those who reject Him; yea, their darkness will be increased. But the glory of the Lord shall be seen upon all who believe, and their numbers, from age to age, shall be enlarged. Nations shall come to Him, and kings shall be subservient to the spreading of His Kingdom. Such is the scope of the passage before us. I shall briefly consider a few of the leading particulars contained in it.

I.

As the sun is the source of light to the natural world, so is MESSIAH to the moral and spiritual world. Light, and its opposite, darkness, are figuratively used in Scripture. The latter is applied to the state of ignorance, sin, and misery, as in the following texts, He that walketh in darkness knoweth not whither he goeth ([John 12:35](#)) ; If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth ([I John 1:6](#)) ; And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth ([Matthew 25:30](#)) . The former, therefore, signifies true knowledge, holiness, and happiness. For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the LORD : walk as children of light ([Ephesians 5:8](#)) When I sit in darkness, the LORD shall be a light unto me ([Micah 7:8](#)) Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart ([Psalm 97:11](#)) . I select but one instance of each kind; an attentive reader of the Scriptures will meet with many expressions of a like import. But there is likewise an intermediate state. Light advancing from the early dawn to the perfect day. This twilight, no less than daylight, is from the sun. Such was the state of the Old Testament Church. MESSIAH was the source of their knowledge, hope, and joy; but He was (if I may so speak) below the horizon, as to them. Though believers, under that dispensation, were a people saved of the Lord, they were trained up under types [symbols] and shadows, were influenced by a spirit of comparative bondage and distance, like children under age, and rather longed for, than actually possessed the gracious liberty which the children of God enjoy under the Gospel. But the Sun arose, and the shadows vanished, when the Son of God incarnate dwelt and conversed with men, honoured His temple with His personal presence, and superseded all the Levitical sacrifices, by the one offering of Himself upon the cross. The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. But more especially we date the beginning of His visible Kingdom from the day of Pentecost, which followed after His ascension. Then He signally bestowed the gifts, which, as Mediator, He had received for men, and by the power of the Holy Spirit, authorized and qualified His servants to go forth and preach Salvation in His name. Then the partition wall between Jew and Gentile was taken away, and His righteousness was openly shown in the sight of the heathen. Abraham, Moses, Elijah, and other servants of God, had been highly favoured and highly honoured; but we are assured by our Lord Himself, that none born of a woman had been greater than John His fore-runner — and yet He added,

the least in the Kingdom of Heaven , that is, the New Testament, or Gospel Church, is greater than he ([Matt. 11:11](#)) . The apostles were happy in the peculiar privilege of attending His person; yet He told them, It is expedient for you that I go away ([John 16:7](#)) . There were still greater privileges depending upon the influence of the promised Comforter, who was to abide with the Church forever. By the power of this Holy Spirit, the Lord is now present with all His ministers and people in every place, whether retired in secret from the view of men, or assembled together in His name ([Matthew 6:6; 18:20; 28:20](#)) ; and though the great events upon which their hopes were founded, His life, passion, death, resurrection, and ascension took place long ago, He so realizes the declaration of them in His Word to their hearts, that they are no less assured of what they read, than the apostles who saw Him with their own eyes. Thus the Gospel state is a dispensation of light. The Sun is risen with life and healing in His beams, and those who have the eyes of their understanding opened, enjoy a bright and marvellous day. They see, admire, adore, rejoice, and love.

II.

The subjects of MESSIAH'S Kingdom, the living members of His Church, are so irradiated by Him, that they shine likewise. As the moon shines, but with a borrowed light, derived from the sun. Beholding, in this glass [magnifying glass] , the glory of the Lord, they are changed into the same image from glory to glory ([II Corinthians 3:18](#)) , according to the measure and growth of their faith. Two points may be observed under this head.

(1.)

The fact. That they do thus shine. Though they were once darkness, they are now light ([Ephesians 5:8](#)) . A dark, ignorant, wicked, selfish Christian, is a contradiction in terms. There may be such, there are too many such amongst those who make profession of the name of Christ; but they who truly know Him walk in the light, as He is in the light. They have knowledge, a good understanding ([Psalm 111:10](#)) . Perhaps, the greater part of real Christians have little acquaintance with the literature and science of the world; their natural capacities may be weak, and not improved by education; they may be in the esteem of men, as they are in their own, but babes; yet they know more than the wisest philosophers, who are destitute of the grace of God. They know themselves, they know the Lord, they know the evil of sin, and the way of salvation; what their proper happiness consists in, and how it is to be obtained. They have learned to endure affliction, to forgive injuries, and to overcome evil with good. They have attained a just sense of the vanity of the world, and the importance of eternity. They are instructed to be contented and useful in their stations, to discharge their duties in relative life with propriety, and to meet death with comfort. In all these particulars, many who have dazzling talents, and are celebrated for abilities and endowments, are miserably at a loss. True believers are conformed to the spirit and temper of their Saviour, and therefore are different and distinguished from the world around them.

And they have, at least, the beginnings of true peace and solid happiness, in communion with Him whom they serve.

(2.)

The cause. They shine wholly by His light. If their own words may be taken, the proof of this is easy. They are free to confess that they are only wise by His wisdom, strong by His power working in them, and that without Him they have not sufficiency to think a good thought ([II Corinthians 3:5](#)). Experience has taught them that they cannot stand unless He upholds them, nor watch unless He watches with them, nor be safe or happy a single day, without fresh communications from Him. But this, their experience and acknowledgment, is the express and current doctrine of Scripture. There is a real, though mystical, union between Christ and His people. He is the Vine ([John 15:1](#)), they the branches: He is their Head, they the members of His body. They dwell in Him by faith, He dwells in them by His Spirit. He is their root and their life; all their springs are in Him, and it is out of His fulness that they receive ([John 1:16](#)). Therefore the Apostle says, I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me ([Galatians 2:20](#)); I can do all things through Christ strengthening me ([Philippians 4:13](#)). And our Lord Himself, who comforted Paul with that promise, My grace is sufficient for thee ([II Corinthians 12:9](#)), apprised all His followers of their entire dependence upon Him, by saying, Without me ye can do nothing ([John 15:5](#)). The language of the Old Testament is to the same purport, They looked unto Him and were enlightened ([Psalm 34:5](#)); In the LORD Jehovah I have everlasting strength ([Isaiah 26:4](#)) He giveth power to the faint, and to them that have no might He increaseth strength ([Isaiah 40:29](#)) Thus things are constituted and conducted, that no flesh should glory in His presence, but that he who glories may glory in the LORD ([I Corinthians 1:29-31](#))

III.

They who wilfully refuse and turn from this light, do thereby involve themselves in double darkness, and become more infatuated and wicked than those to whom the light has not been proposed. Their evils, likewise, are more aggravated than they would have been if the light had not visited them. Thus our Lord, MESSIAH, speaks of the Jews; If I had not come and spoken to them, they had not had sin; but now they have no cloak for their sin ([John 15:22](#)). And again, For judgment I am come into the world, that they which see not might see, and that they which see might be made blind ([John 9:39](#)). He came to make the ignorant wise unto salvation; but they who, from a proud conceit of their own wisdom and sufficiency, disdain His instruction, being left to themselves, give abundant evidence that the light they boast of, is but gross and palpable darkness. The grossest errors, the greatest obduracy of heart, the most extreme profaneness of spirit, and the most abominable wickedness in practice, may be expected, and will certainly be found where the Gospel is despised.

It is evident, that the morality which is so highly admired by the Christian world, and set in opposition to the Gospel of Christ, is much leaner, and more scanty than the morality of the heathens. I speak of the idea only, for neither have the heathens of old, nor of the present day, acted up to their own rules. But I do not hesitate to affirm, that none of our modern moralists, who have disowned the Gospel revelation, have given us a system of morality equal to that of ^{*} Tully the pagan. Many of the heathens acknowledged the desirableness and necessity of revelation; though infidels, born in a Christian land, think it a high mark of their wisdom to despise it. And avowed atheists, that is, men, who deny either the Being or Providence of God, or the obligations mankind are under to obey Him, are seldom to be met with but in countries where the Bible is known. The heart must have obstinately and repeatedly resisted light and conviction, before it can ordinarily proceed to these dreadful lengths. But while the blind stumble in the noon of day, MESSIAH'S people shall walk in confidence and peace ([Psalm 89:15, 16](#)), and shine as lights in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation ([Philippians 2:15](#)).

^{*} Roman Philosopher, Marcus Tullius Cicero (106 BC - 43 BC)

IV.

The third verse of this chapter foretells, and therefore secures, the conversion of the Gentiles or heathens. The times and seasons are in the disposal of God, but the Scriptures must be fulfilled. Much was done in the first age of Christianity. A single instrument, the Apostle Paul, as he himself informs us, preached the faith, which he formerly tried to destroy, from Jerusalem, and round about unto Illyricum ([Romans 15:19](#)), and probably much farther afterwards. And the Lord, who appointed him to this service, accompanied His message with His own power; so that he had signal success, in turning men from darkness to light, and from the worship of dumb idols, to serve the living and true God; and in planting the Gospel, and gathering churches in every province. The Gospel found an early reception at Rome, which facilitated its spread into the different parts of the Roman Empire. And we have reason to believe it was introduced into our island, in a few years after our Lord's ascension. And though it was called the conversion of the heathen nations, in some following ages, it went little farther than to prevail on them to assume the name of Christians, and left them, considered as nations, as destitute of the spirit and blessing of Christianity, as it found them; yet I cannot doubt, that wherever the New Testament, and the sufferings of MESSIAH were known, some individuals, at least, experienced a real and saving change. And we are warranted to hope for still greater things; for a time when the gross darkness, which as yet covers a great part of the world, shall be dispelled; and the Redeemer's Kingdom, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, as a stone cut out without hands, shall become a great mountain, and fill the whole earth ([Daniel 2:35](#)). But this pleasing subject shall come more directly under our consideration hereafter.

V.

The call in my text, may be taken in a general sense, like that of the Apostle, Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light ([Ephesians 5:14](#)) Natural light requires eyes to perceive it. It would be absurd to point out the beauties of an extensive prospect to a blind man. To him the face of nature presents only a universal blank. But the light of the Gospel, not only discovers the most important objects to those who can see, but has a marvellous efficacy to open the eyes of the blind. It is the appointed instrument of Divine power for this purpose. In vain would be the labour and expectation of the husbandman, if God did not afford the rain, and the snow, to water the earth, and the enlivening influences of the sun, to draw forth the tender blade, and to ripen the corn. Equally unsuccessful would the preaching of the Gospel prove to sinful men, though in itself it be eminently the truth and wisdom of God, exactly suited to their state, and of the highest importance to their welfare, if He had not promised that His Word, where simply and faithfully delivered, in dependence upon His blessing, shall not be spoken in vain, but shall certainly accomplish the end for which He has sent it ([Isaiah 55:10, 11](#)) This promise, together with the experience of its truth in our own case, and our knowledge of its uniform effects in every age and country where the doctrine of the cross has been preached, encourages ministers to persevere in publishing the glad tidings, in defiance of all the opposition and disappointments we meet with.

We lament, but cannot wonder, that the Gospel is so generally neglected. As a dispensation of grace, it offends the pride of man; as a dispensation of holiness, it contradicts his desires and passions. His spirit is degraded, his heart is pre-engaged, he loves the present world, and has no more taste or inclination for a life of communion with God here, and such a heaven as the Scripture proposes hereafter, than the beasts of the field. But the LORD has said, I will work, and who shall let it? I act and who can reverse it? ([Isaiah 43:13](#) KJV & NASV) When He is pleased to clothe the Word preached, with the influence of the Holy Spirit, and to apply it to the conscience, it is quick, powerful, penetrating, and irresistible as lightening; it conveys a voice, which the deaf, yea, the dead, must hear; it forces a light upon the mind which cannot be evaded. Then things are seen as they are. The nature and desert of sin is apprehended, and then the Gospel is found to be the only balm for a distressed and wounded conscience. Therefore having the Lord's command and promise, we are not to be discouraged by the carelessness or obstinacy of those who know not what they do. We are aware of the difficulty, yea the impossibility of succeeding in our endeavour to save the souls of our hearers, if we had only to depend upon our own arguments or earnestness. We are not to reason, but to obey. Our business is to deliver our message, and in our happier moments to water it with our prayers and tears. When we have done this we can do no more. The event must be left with Him in whose Name we speak.

We must not suppress nor disguise what we are commanded to declare; nor wilfully make any additions of our own, to accommodate it to the taste or prejudice of our hearers

(II Corinthians 4:2) . Let those preach smooth things who will venture to answer, at the great tribunal, for the souls that have miscarried under their ministry, we dare not. Let those be ashamed of the Gospel of Christ (Romans 1:16) , who feel no obligations to Him for His dying love; we cannot, and by the grace of God, we will not. We will glory in it. God forbid that we should glory in anything else! (Galatians 6:14) Like Ezekiel, we are commanded to preach and prophecy to dry bones, and He who sends us can cause the dry bones to live. O ye dry bones, hear the Word of the LORD (Ezekiel 37:4) The Word of His Salvation is sent to you. The Lord is risen indeed! Arise, shine, for your light is come. In His name we proclaim pardon and peace to all who will seek Him. But seek Him to day, while it is called today, tomorrow is not yours. Seek Him now, while He may be found. Harden not your hearts. Tremble lest, a promise being left us of entering into His rest, any of you should finally come short of it (Hebrews 4:1)

— O —

Sermon VIII

The Sun Rising upon a Dark World

[Isaiah 9:2](#)

The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light:

they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined.

Contrasts are suited to illustrate and strengthen the impression of each other. The happiness of those, who by faith in MESSIAH, are brought into a state of peace, liberty, and comfort, is greatly enhanced and heightened by the consideration of that previous state of misery in which they once lived, and of the greater misery to which they were justly exposed. They are not only made meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light ([Colossians 1:12, 13](#)), but they have been delivered from the powers of darkness. Thus while they have communion with God as a Father, they contemplate their privilege with a greater pleasure, than they probably could do if they had never known a difference. They remember a time when they were afar off, without hope and without God in the world; and they remember how carelessly they then trifled upon the brink of destruction. In this deplorable and dangerous situation they were found of the LORD, when they sought Him not ([Isaiah 65:1](#)) He convinced, humbled, and pardoned them, brought them near to Himself, into a state of adoption and communion by the blood of Jesus. The admiration, gratitude, and love which they feel for this undeserved grace, gives them a more lively sense of the blessings they enjoy. Yea, the thought of what they have redeemed from (of which they will then have a much clearer perception than at present) will add to their joys in Heaven, and inspire such a song of praise as will be peculiar to themselves, and in which the holy angels, who never felt the stings of guilt, nor tasted the sweetness of pardoning mercy, will not be able to join them. They are accordingly represented, in the prophetic vision, as standing nearest to the Throne, and uniting in the noblest strains of praise to Him who sitteth upon it ([Revelation 5:9-12](#)), while the surrounding angels can only take part in the chorus, and admire and adore, when they behold the brightest displays of the glory of the wonder-working God, manifested in His love to worthless, helpless sinners. These opposite ideas are joined in my text. The people who are spoken of as rejoicing in a great light, were, till this light arose and shone upon them, in darkness; walking, sitting, living in darkness, and in the land of the shadow or death. That this passage refers to MESSIAH, we have direct proof. The evangelist refers it expressly to Him ([Matthew 4:15, 16](#)), and points out the time and manner of its literal accomplishment. I shall first consider the literal sense and completion of the prophecy, and then show how fitly it applies to the state of mankind at large, and to the happy effects of the Gospel of Salvation; which, by the blessing of God, has been the instrument of bringing multitudes of many nations, peoples, and languages, out of a state of gross darkness, into marvellous light ([I Peter 2:9](#)).

I.

Hebrew words (like many in our own language) have often more than one signification. But only one sense can be expressed in a version. And therefore interpreters and translators frequently differ. Which of the different words, used to express the meaning of the same original term, is most happily chosen, may be sometimes decided by the context. The two words, in the first verse of this chapter, rendered lightly afflicted and grievously afflicted, signify likewise, the one to think lightly of, to account vile; and the other, to honour, to render honourable and glorious. Both these words occur in one verse, and are used in these senses, in the LORD's message to Eli, Them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed ([I Samuel 2:30](#)). Had the same words been thus rendered in the passage before us, the sense of both verses would, I think, have been more plain, connected, and consistent, to the following purport, agreeable to the translation given by * Vitringa, and the present Bishop of London. "Nevertheless there shall not be dimness [misunderstanding - vagueness] as in the time of her vexation or distress. He formerly de-based [made light or vile] the land of Zebulon and Naphtali, but in the latter time He made it glorious, even the land by the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles. For the people that walked in darkness have seen a great light, etc." —Such was the afflicted and low state of Galilee, previous to the coming of MESSIAH; such was the exaltation and honour it derived from His appearance.

* Vitringa Campegius (the Elder) - Dutch Christian Hebraist (1669 - 1722)

(1.)

The land allotted to the tribes of Issachar, Zebulon, and Naphtali, was chiefly included in the province, which, upon a subsequent division of the country, obtained the name of Galilee. The northern part of it, the inheritance of Naphtali, was the boundary or frontier towards Syria, and had been frequently vexed and afflicted, when the sins of Israel brought the armies of their enemies upon them, as frontier countries usually suffer most in times of invasion and war. Particularly this part of the land, called Galilee of the Gentiles, was the first, and most immediately exposed to the ravages of Tiglath-Pileser and Sennacherib. And as the people there were more mixed with foreigners, and at the greatest distance from the capital, Jerusalem, on these accounts, Galilee was lightly esteemed by the Jews themselves. They thought no prophet could arise in Galilee ([John 7:52](#)) It even prejudiced Nathanael against the first report he received of Jesus as MESSIAH, that He lived, and was generally supposed (by those who were content to be governed by popular rumour, without enquiring attentively for themselves) to have been born in Galilee. He asked, with an appearance of surprise, Can any good thing come out of Nazareth? ([John 1:46](#)) They [The Galileans] were accounted a rude, unpolished, provincial people. And therefore, when Peter would have denied any acquaintance with his Lord, he was discovered to be a Galilean ([Mark 14:70](#)) by his dialect and manner of speech.

(2.)

This despised and least valued part of the land of Israel, was the principal scene of MESSIAH'S life and ministry. Insomuch, that, as I have observed, He was supposed to have been born there. A mistake which His enemies industriously supported and made the most of; for those who could persuade themselves that it was so in fact, would think themselves justified in rejecting His claim. It being one undeniable mark of MESSIAH, given by the prophet Micah, that He was born in Bethlehem of Judah ([Micah 5:2](#)) He was, however, brought up at Nazareth, and lived for a time in Capernaum, towns in Galilee; but both of so little repute, that had they not been connected with His history, it is not probable that their names would have been transmitted to posterity.

(3.)

By His residence there, Galilee was honoured and ennobled. He Himself declared, that on this account, Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum (though probably none of them were more than inconsiderable fishing towns) were exalted even to heaven ([Matthew 11: 21-23](#)) Those were highly privileged places which our Lord condescended to visit in person; so, likewise, are those places where He is pleased to send His Gospel. I have observed formerly, and I make no apology for repeating a truth so very important, and so little attended to, that the glorious Gospel of the blessed God ([I Timothy 1:11](#)) , when faithfully preached, and thankfully received and improved [used to good purpose], renders an obscure village more honourable, and of more real consequence, than the metropolis of a great empire, where this light shineth not. For what are the dark places of the earth ([Psalm 74:20](#)) , however celebrated for numbers and opulence, for the monuments of ambition and arts, but habitations of cruelty, infatuation, and misery!

(4.)

Though Galilee was favoured with the Scripture, and with synagogue worship; and the inhabitants were a people who professed to know the God of Israel, it was a land of darkness at the time of MESSIAH'S appearance. Though they were not idolaters, ignorance prevailed among them. The Law and the Prophets were read in the synagogues; but we may believe to little good purpose, while they were under the direction of perverse teachers, who substituted the traditions of men for the commands of God. The single circumstance of keeping herds of swine, as the Gadarenes did, seems a proof, that the law of Moses was but little regarded by them. They, as well as the people of Judea, were under the guidance of the Scribes and Pharisees in their religious concerns, who were, if I may use a modern phrase, the clergy of that time; and these, we are assured by Him who knew their hearts, were generally corrupted; blind, leaders of the blind. Yet they were held in ignorant admiration, and implicitly submitted to. From the character of the public ministers of religion, we may, without great danger of mistake, infer the character of the people who are pleased and satisfied with their ministrations. As the disciple cannot, ordinarily, be expected to be superior to his Master ([Luke 6:40](#)) ; the religion of the Scribes may be taken as a standard of that of the Galileans,

who were instructed by them. Yet these were the people among whom MESSIAH chiefly conversed; so that His enemies styled Him a Galilean and a Nazarene, as a mark of reproach and contempt. Many of His apostles — perhaps most of them were Galileans likewise. He seeth not as men seeth ([I Samuel 16:7](#)) . The most of His immediate followers while upon earth, were such as men despised, on account of their situation, rank, or callings; publicans and sinners, fishermen and Galileans. This was, among other reasons, for the encouragement of the poor, the destitute, the despised, the miserable, and the guilty, in succeeding ages, who should desire to put their trust in His name, and to implore His mercy. To those who received Him, He was the light, the true light; He relieved them from the ignorance, wickedness, and distress in which He found them. They, on their parts, bore testimony to Him. They saw and acknowledged His glory. They felt His power, and devoted themselves to His service. Thus much for the literal sense.

II.

But this prophecy is not to be restrained to the first and more immediate season of its accomplishment. The LORD speaks thus of MESSIAH in another place, It is a light thing that thou shouldest be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth ([Isaiah 49:6](#)) . And there are many declarations of a like import. He is still the light of the world ([John 8:12](#)) , though no longer visible and conversant with men. By the influence and power of His Spirit, He is still present wherever His Gospel is known. This, His Word of grace and truth, He sends where He pleases, and with a discrimination, not unlike that which He observed when He was upon earth. The Gospel is preached to the poor. Courts and palaces are seldom favoured with it. While He passes by many great cities, many habitations of the wise and wealthy, He is known in villages and cottages. His condescension and favour to those who are unnoticed by the world, cannot be too highly extolled. That the others are excluded from the same benefits, is more properly ascribed to their obstinacy than to His will. They exclude themselves. He stands at the door and knocks ([Revelation 3:20](#)) His Word is within their reach, His ministers are within their call. They might easily enjoy every mean [resource] and help which the Gospel provides for sinners if they pleased, but they do not please. They are either engaged in a round of sensual pleasure, or engrossed by studies and pursuits, which possess their hearts, and fill up their thoughts and time, so that they have neither leisure nor inclination to attend to the things which pertain to their peace. Instead of inviting His Gospel to them, they too frequently employ their power and influence to discountenance, and if possible, to suppress it. They have their choice. The great and the gay will not receive His message; it is therefore sent to the poor, and to the wretched, and they will hear it. Yet as He visited Jerusalem in person, and taught there, so London likewise is favoured with the light of His Gospel. But alas, How few believe

the report? They who do, experience the change described in my text. Their darkness is changed into marvellous light.

Mankind, until enlightened by the Word and Spirit of grace, is truly in a state of darkness. Thick darkness is a veil which conceals from us, not only distant, but the nearest objects. A man in the dark cannot perceive either friend or enemy; he may be in great danger, yet think himself in safety; or, if he thinks himself in danger, be unable to take any step for his preservation, from a want of light. Thus, though God be our Maker and Preserver, though in Him we live and move and have our being, though we are surrounded with His presence, and proofs of His wisdom and goodness are before us wherever we turn our eyes; yet we live without Him in the world. Equally ignorant we are of ourselves, of the proper happiness of our nature, or how it is to be attained. We know neither the cause, nor the cure, nor the consequences of our tendency to cleave to the dust, and of placing our affection on inadequate and unsatisfying objects.

And if we suppose a person awakened to a conviction of the evil of sin, and to understand that nothing less than the favour of God can make a rational and immortal creature happy, still without the Gospel he would be in darkness and the shadow of death. His case may be compared to that of a person shipwrecked upon some desert, inhospitable coast, suffering great horrors and anxiety, from his exposedness to perish by hunger, by enemies, or wild beasts—who, if he saw, at no very great distance, an island, and was, by some means, informed and assured that island was the seat of safety, plenty, and pleasure; and that if he was once there, his dangers would all cease, and his utmost wishes be satisfied; still, if there were neither bridge, nor boat, nor any means by which he might arrive thither, to know that happiness was so near him, yet inaccessible to him, would but aggravate his misery, and make his despair more emphatically pungent. Miserable, indeed, must we be, if we clearly perceived that only He, whose creatures we are, can make us happy; and that as sinners we have forfeited His favour, and are utterly incapable of regaining it, if we were left under these views without any hope of relief. Such must have been our situation sooner or later, if God who is rich in mercy, had not Himself provided the means of reconciliation. For though a hope of pardon is easily taken up by those who are ignorant of the holiness of God and the malignity of sin, yet nothing but a declaration from Himself, that there is forgiveness with Him, can give peace to a truly awakened conscience.

But Jesus dispels this darkness, and brings life and immortality to light by the Gospel. For,

(1.)

The office and agency of the Holy Spirit, so absolutely necessary to make us duly sensible, either of our danger, or of the possibility of escaping it, is entirely the effect of His mediation. The soul of man, originally formed to be the temple of the living God, when defiled by sin, was justly forsaken by its great Inhabitant; and since the Fall, answers the prophetic de-

scription given of Babylon. It is become the habitation of devils, the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird ([Revelation 18:2](#)) If we ask, as with good reason we may, How can the wise and holy God, who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity, and with whom evil cannot dwell, return to His sanctuary thus polluted and profaned? an answer is afforded in that gracious promise, I will sprinkle clean water upon you and you shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you; and I will take away the stony heart, and will give you an heart of flesh, and (in order to do this) I will put My Spirit within you ([Ezekiel 36: 25, 26](#)) But the source of this mercy is His sovereign love and purpose, to give the seed of the woman, His only Son, to be the Mediator of sinners. By His atonement to be manifested in due time, but which had a virtual influence from the beginning, the Holy Spirit returned to dwell with men.

(2.)

His obedience unto death, when revealed by the Holy Spirit to the enlightened conscience, affords a clear and satisfactory discovery of reconciliation with God: it shows that on His part, every hindrance to the free exercise of mercy is thereby removed, the honour of His law vindicated, and the demands of His justice answered. On our parts, by opening a door of hope, it removes that enmity and obduracy [hardness] of heart which are nourished by a consciousness of guilt, and a secret foreboding of deserved punishment. But when the dignity of the Redeemer's person, the causes, nature, and design of His sufferings are understood, emotions of admiration, love, and gratitude, till then unknown, are felt, and obstinate sinners are made a willing people in this day of divine power.

(3.)

The doctrine of the cross pours a light upon every subject and circumstance in which we are concerned. It enlarges the mind, and forms the judgment and taste, agreeable to the standard of truth, and the real nature of things. It rectifies those prejudices and prepossessions which dispose us to mistake good for evil, and evil for good ([Isaiah 5:20](#)), to pursue trifles with earnestness, and to trifle with things of the greatest importance. In Jesus Christ crucified, all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, are, at once, both hidden and exhibited. The holy angels, whose knowledge of the wonders in creation, without doubt, greatly surpasses our conceptions, incessantly contemplate this Object with delight, as affording the brightest displays of the manifold wisdom of God ([Ephesians 3:10](#)) It is especially the fountain of wisdom to sinners. They look unto Him and are enlightened. The slight and partial thoughts they once entertained of the great God, the mistaken judgment they formed of themselves, of their state and their conduct, are corrected by their knowledge of the cross; from thence they derive a solid hope, a humble spirit, just views of their duty and obligations, and motives and prospects which animate them in a course of cheerful, persevering obedience to the will of God.

(4.)

In this way, God, as revealed in Christ, is apprehended and chosen, as the chief and proper good of the soul. Thus the poor are enriched with the pearl of great price, and the weary obtain rest. The mind, no longer burdened with anxiety, nor mortified with a succession of disappointments, which attended the vain pursuit of happiness in earthly things, possesses present peace, and rejoices in the expectation of future glory. It is released from the slavery of hewing out broken cisterns, and introduced to the fountain of living waters. Or, to close with the beautiful image in my text, The people who once walked in darkness and the region of the shadow of death, are translated into the Kingdom of life and salvation (Colossian 1:13)

How greatly are they to be pitied who reject the light of the Gospel! It is true, they cannot see it; but it is equally true, they will not. But may I not hope, that this is a day of divine power, in which some of you shall be made a willing people. Do not reason against your own life, but repent and believe the Gospel. The light shines around you; whether you perceive it or not; and has an efficacy to open the eyes of the blind. Where the Gospel is preached the Lord is present. If you call upon Him He will hear, and you shall receive your sight. If the grace and the glory of the Saviour have hitherto made no impression upon your heart, you are spiritually blind. Could you be sensible of your disorder, the remedy is at hand. If now at last you are willing to seek Him, He will be found of you. But if you deliberately prefer darkness, your state is awfully dangerous; and if you persist in your obstinacy, your ruin is unavoidable. God is gracious and long-suffering, but He will not be mocked ([Galatians 6:7](#)) Humble yourself at once and implore His mercy, or else prepare to meet Him in judgment. But be assured He will not meet you as a man. You must either bend or break. The Lord forbid that He should say to any of you, Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire!

— O —

Sermon IX

Characters and Names of Messiah

[Isaiah 9:6](#)

For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given:
and the government shall be upon his shoulder:
and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor,
The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.

Such was the triumphant exultation of the Old Testament Church! Their noblest hopes were founded upon the promise of MESSIAH; their most sublime songs were derived from the prospect of His Advent. By faith, which is the substance of things hoped for, they considered the gracious declarations of the faithful unchangeable God as already accomplished, though the actual performance respected a period, as yet, future and distant. Especially, as believers, under that dispensation, already felt the influence of the redemption which MESSIAH was to consummate in the fulness of time. It was the knowledge of His engagement on the behalf of sinners, that gave life and significance to all the institutions of the ceremonial law which otherwise, though of divine appointment, would have been a heavy and burdensome yoke ([Acts 15:10](#)) Isaiah therefore prepares his joyful song for the true servants of God, who lived in his time; and though it was a day of trial and rebuke, they were provided with a sufficient compensation for all their sufferings, in being warranted to say, Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon His shoulder, etc.

This ancient song is still new. It has been, and will be taken up from age to age, by the New Testament Church, with superior advantage. I trust many of you understand it well, and rejoice in it daily. Men naturally look for something wherein to rejoice and glory. Little reason have the wise ([Jeremiah 9:23](#)) to glory in their supposed wisdom, or the strong in their fading strength, or the rich in their transitory wealth; but this is a just and unfailing ground of glory to true Christians, that Unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given, etc.

When a sinner is enlightened by the Holy Spirit, to understand the character and offices of MESSIAH, to understand His ability to save those who are ready to perish, and the happiness of all who are brought into subjection to His gracious government; and when he begins to feel the cheering effects of faith in His name, then this song becomes his own, and exactly suits the emotions and gratitude of his heart. But many persons will despise and pity him as a weak enthusiast [fanatic] . And yet, perhaps, they do not think so unfavourably of the rapture of Archimedes, of whom it is related, that having suddenly discovered the solution of a difficult problem while he was bathing, he was so transported with joy, that he forgot his situation, sprung instantly from the bath, and ran through the city crying, "I have found it! I have found it!" He is not usually charged with madness on this account, though the expression of his joy was certainly over-proportioned to the cause. The truth is, the world will allow of a vehemence approaching ecstasy on almost any occasion, but on that alone,

which, above all others, will justify it. A person who would be thought destitute of taste, if he was unaffected by the music to which this passage is set, would, at the same time hazard his reputation for good sense, with some judges, if he owned himself affected by the plain meaning of the words. Incompetent judges surely! who are pleased to approve of warmth and emotion of spirit, provided the object be trivial, and only condemn it in concerns of the greatest importance! But, I trust, the character of my audience is very different, and that the most of you desire to enter into the spirit of this passage, and to have a more lively sense of your own interests in it. May the Lord grant your desire, and accompany our meditations upon it with His power and blessing!

Every clause in this passage might furnish subject for a long discourse; but my plan will only permit me briefly to touch upon the several particulars, which will lead to a recapitulation or summary of what has already been considered more largely concerning the Person, Offices, and Glory of MESSIAH. We have,

I.

His incarnation. Unto us a child is born. In our nature, born of a woman: Unto us a son is given, not merely a man-child, but, emphatically, a Son, the Son of God. This was the most precious gift, the highest proof and testimony of divine love. The distinction and union of these widely distant natures, which constitute the Person of Christ, the God-man, the Mediator, is, in the judgment and language of the Apostle, the great mystery of godliness ([I Timothy 3:16](#)), the pillar and ground of truth. I shall not repeat what I have already offered on this point in the fifth sermon. It is the central truth of revelation, which, like the sun, diffuses a light upon the whole system, no part of which can be rightly understood without it. Thus the Lord of all humbled Himself, to appear in the form of a servant, for the sake of sinners.

II.

His exaltation. The government shall be upon His shoulder. In our nature He suffered, and in the same nature He reigns. When He had overcome the sharpness, the sting of death, He took possession of the kingdom of glory as His own, and opened it to all who believe in Him. Now we can say, He who governs in heaven and on earth, and whom all things obey, is the Child who was born, the Son who was given for us. Some subsequent passages will lead us, hereafter, to contemplate more directly the glory of the Redeemer's administration in the kingdoms of providence and grace. At present, therefore, I shall only observe, that the exaltation of the Redeemer, infers the dignity and security of the people who are united to Him by faith. They have, in one respect, an appropriate honour, in which the angels cannot share. Their best friend, related to them in the same nature, is seated upon the throne of glory. Since He is for them, who can be against them? What may they not expect, when He who has so loved them as to redeem them with His own blood, has all power committed to Him, both in heaven and on earth! For,

III.

The names and characters here ascribed to Him, are not only expressive of what He is in Himself, but of what He is engaged to be to them.

(1.)

His name shall be called Wonderful. In another place the word is rendered Secret ([Judges 13:8](#)) . It is true of Him in both senses. He is Wonderful in His person, obedience, and sufferings; in His grace, government, and glory. So far as we understand His name, the revelation by which, as by a name, He is made known, we may, we must, believe, admire, and adore. But how limited and defective is our knowledge! His name is Secret. Who can by searching find Him out? ([Job 11:7](#)) His greatness is incomprehensible, His wisdom untraceable, His fulness inexhaustible , His power infinite No one knoweth the Son but the Father! But they have a true knowledge of Him , who trust , love , and serve Him And in their view He is Wonderful! The Apostle expresses the sentiment of their hearts, when he says, Yea, doubtless, I count all things but loss and dung for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus the LORD

(2.)

Another of His names is Counsellor. The great councils of redemptions, in which, every concern respecting the glory of God, and the salvation of sinners, was adjusted, were established with Him, and in Him, before the foundation of the world. And He is our Counsellor or Advocate with the Father, who pleads our cause, and manages all our affairs in perfect righteousness, and with infallible success; so that no suit can possibly miscarry which He is pleased to undertake. To Him likewise we must apply (and we shall not apply in vain) for wisdom and direction, in all that belongs to our duty, and the honour of our profession in this present life; in all our difficulties, dangers, and cares, we must look to Him for guidance and support. This is to be wise unto salvation . His secret is with them that consult Him, so that though the world may deem them weak and ignorant as babes (and He teaches them to think thus of themselves) they have a cheering and practical knowledge of many important subjects, which are entirely hidden from those who are wise and prudent in their own eyes.

(3.)

He is the Mighty God. Though in the office of Mediator, He acts in the character of a servant, His perfections and attributes are truly divine. Only the mighty God, could make a provision capable of answering the demands of the holy law, which we had transgressed; only the mighty God could be a suitable Shepherd to lead millions of weak, helpless creatures to glory; through the many difficulties, dangers, and enemies they are exposed to in their passage. Add to this, the honour, dependence, and obedience, which this great Shepherd claims from His sheep, are absolute and supreme; and they would be guilty of idolatry, if they did not know the He is the mighty God. Though real Christians, who are enlightened and taught by the Holy Spirit may, and do, differ in their views and explanations of some

revealed truths, I conceive they must be all agreed on this point. It is not only necessary to be known as the only solid foundation of a sinner's hope, but it immediately respects the object of divine worship. For if the Redeemer is not possessed of the incommunicable perfections of Deity, the New Testament in its most obvious and literal signification, would be chargeable, not only with countenancing, but with expressly teaching and enjoining idolatry.

(4.)

Farther, He shall be called the Everlasting Father. He is not ashamed to call them brethren ([Hebrews 2:11](#)), having condescended to assume their human nature. But they are also called His children. They are born into His family by the efficacy of His own Word and Spirit. From Him they derive their spiritual life, and receiving from first to last out of His fulness. And He is an everlasting Father. Our fathers, according to the flesh, are subject to death; but His relation to them subsists unshakeably, and therefore they cannot be destitute; and He is thus, equally to them all. They live upon the earth, and are removed from it, in a long succession of ages; but He is the Father of the everlasting age, the same yesterday, today, and for ever. All generations shall call Him blessed. To Him, therefore the Apostle teaches us to apply that sublime passage of the Psalmist, Thou, LORD, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of Thy hands ([Psalm 102:25-27](#)) They shall perish, but Thou remainest; and they shall wax old as doth a garment; and as a vesture shalt Thou fold them up, and they shall be changed; but Thou art the same, and Thy years shall not fail ([Heb. 1:10-12](#))

(5.)

Lastly, He shall be called the Prince of Peace, whose sovereign prerogative it is, to speak peace to His people ([Psalm 85:8](#)) And there is no peace, deserving the name, but that which He bestows. The Scripture expressly declares, There is no peace to the wicked ([Isaiah 57:21](#)) By whatever name we call that thoughtless security and insensibility, in which mankind generally live, while ignorant of God and of themselves, we cannot allow it to be peace. It is the effect of blindness and hardness of heart; it will neither bear reflection nor examination. Can they be said to possess peace, however fatally regardless they may be of futurity, who are at present under dominion of restless, insatiable, and inconsistent passions and appetites? But the Kingdom of MESSIAH is a Kingdom of Peace, and in Him, His happy subjects enjoy a peace which passeth all understanding ([Philippians 4:7](#)), such as the world can neither give nor take away. He has made peace by the blood of His cross ([Colossians 1:20](#)), for all that come unto God by Him. Until they are in trouble and distress; until they feel the bitterness, and fear the consequences of their sins, and see the impossibility of helping themselves, they will not apply to Him; but whenever they do seek Him, thus weary and heavy laden, He hears their prayer. Their minds, for a season, are like the sea in a storm, they are distressed with guilt, fears, and temptations; but when He reveals His mighty name, and boundless grace to their hearts, and says, Peace be still ([Mark 4:39](#)), there is a great

calm. Being justified by faith, they have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ. He gives them peace likewise in a changing troublesome world; by inviting, and enabling them to cast all their cares upon Him, and to trust all their concerns in His hands, upon the assurance His Word gives them, that He cares for them, and will manage and control everything for their good. In proportion as their faith realizes His promises, they feel a composure and satisfaction. Knowing that the hairs of their head are numbered, that their afflictions, no less than their comforts, are tokens of His love, that He will give them strength according to their day, that He will be their guide and their guard even unto death ; they are not greatly moved by any events, or disturbed by apprehensions, because their hearts are fixed ([Psalm 112:7](#)) , trusting in the Lord.

Farther, He teaches them (what can only be learnt of Him) how to seek and maintain peace among men. His love subdues the power of self, and forms them to a spirit of philanthropy and benevolence, which has often such an effect, that they who dislike them for their attachment to Him and to His precepts, and would willingly speak evil of them, are ashamed, and put to silence, by their perseverance in well-doing. Thus their peace increases as a river, which runs with a deeper and a broader stream as it approaches the ocean. For their peace is then strongest and most unshaken when they draw near to death, and are upon the point of resigning their souls into His hands. This is the time, when, if not before, the false peace of the worldling will give way to terror and dismay. But mark the perfect man, and behold the upright, for the end of that man is peace ([Psalm 37:37](#)) . It must be allowed, that many of His people, through the power of temptation and remaining unbelief, have, at some seasons, uncomfortable fears concerning a dying hour; but when the time of their dismissal actually arrives, we seldom see them afraid of the summons.

There is a strength necessary to support the soul at the approach of death, which is usually withheld till the time of need. But then it is vouchsafed [graciously given] . They who have frequently access to the beds of dying believers, can bear testimony, as eye-witnesses, to the faithfulness of their Lord. How often have we seen them triumphing in the prospect of immortality! as happy, in defiance of pain and sickness, as we can well conceive it possible to be, while in the body, and as sure of Heaven, as if they were already before the Throne.

Such is the character of MESSIAH! This is the God whom we adore; our almighty unchangeable Friend! His greatness and goodness, His glory and His grace, when once known, fix the heart no more to rove; and fill it with admiration, gratitude, and desire. From hence spring a cheerful, unreserved obedience to His commands, and a deliberate voluntary submission to His holy will. For His people do not serve him, or yield to Him by constraint; at least, it is only the pleasing constraint of love, which makes their duty their delight; and their burden and grief is, that they can serve Him no better.

May we be all thus minded. I dare not hope it is so with us all at present. But this is the day of His grace. For this cause He came into the world, that He might draw many hearts to Himself ([John 12:32](#)) And for this purpose He favours us with His Gospel, by which He still says, Look unto me and be ye saved ([Isaiah 45:22](#)) ; Come unto me, and I will give you rest ([Matthew 11:28](#)) . To be found among His faithful followers, in the great day when He shall come to judge the world, is the one thing, which, above all others, deserves our solicitude.

Hear then His voice today. Perhaps you are apprised of the necessity of a change of heart and life, at some future period, in order to die safely. Such a change is equally necessary, if you wish to live comfortably. While you are unfit to die, you can have no true enjoyment of life. It were easy to prove at large, that procrastination is highly dangerous. Admitting, that according to your present feelings, you really think yourself determined to seek the Lord at some future time, do you consider how many uncertainties you presume upon? Are you sure that you shall not be suddenly cut off, by an unexpected and unthought-of stroke; or visited by a fever, which may quickly bring you into a state of delirium or stupefaction, and render your projected repentance impracticable? yea, it will in any circumstances be impracticable, unless God is pleased to influence your mind by His good Spirit. If you grieve this Spirit now, by resisting His operations, what reason have you to expect that He will then return? Do we not see many instances of what the poet, with great propriety, calls, * a slow sudden death? How many people, while pining away under the power of incurable disease, amuse themselves with the hope of recovery to the last gasp; and though their acquaintances read death in their countenance for weeks or months, in defiance of such repeated and long-continued warnings, they die as suddenly, with respect to their own apprehensions, as if killed by lightning. Tremble lest such be your last end, if you trifle with God, who now calls you, by His Gospel, to seek Him today, while it is called today.

* “The Complaint - or Night Thoughts on Life, Death, and Immortality” by Edward Young (1856)

But I would lead you to consider your delay, not only as dangerous, but as unreasonable. Why are you afraid of being happy too soon? What strange and hard thought have you of God, if you suppose you can find more pleasure in living, according to your own wills, than in obedience to His commands! Can the world give you such peace and satisfaction as I have attempted to describe? Do you think a real persuasion that God is your Friend, and that Heaven will be your home, will spoil the relish of your earthly enjoyments, or make your lives uncomfortable? What hard thing does the Lord require of you, that you are so unwilling to comply? If we set aside, for a moment, the consideration of a future state, and a final judgment, yet even in a temporal view you would be a great gainer, if your spirit and your conduct were regulated by the Gospel. What heart-breaking troubles, what losses, contests, pains of body, and remorse of conscience, would some of you have avoided, if you

had believed and obeyed the Word of God! What distresses may your head-strong passions soon plunge you into, if you presume to go on in your sins! For that the way of transgressors is hard, is not only declared in Scripture, but proved by the history and observation of every day.

Forsake the foolish, therefore, and live. And while the door of mercy is still open before you, pray to Him who is able to bless you, indeed, by delivering you from the guilt, and from the power of your iniquities. Lest, if being often reprov'd, and still hardening your hearts, you should suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy ([Proverbs 29:1](#))

— O —

Sermon X

The Angel's Message and Song

[Luke 2:8-14](#)

And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the LORD came upon them, and the glory of the LORD shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the LORD . And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying,

Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.

The gratification of the Great, the Weakly, and the Gay, was chiefly consulted in the late * exhibitions in Westminster Abbey. But notwithstanding the expense of the preparations, and the splendid appearance of the auditory, I may take it for granted, that the shepherds who were honoured with the first information of the birth of MESSIAH, enjoyed at free cost, a much more sublime and delightful entertainment. How poor and trivial is the most studied magnificence and brilliance of an earthly court, compared with the effulgence of glory which surrounded the shepherds? * a reference to the performance of Handel's MESSIAH Oratorio at Westminster Abbey

The performers of that Oratorio , if I may be allowed the expression, were a multitude of the heavenly host. And though I do not suppose that the angel delivered his message in the cadence which we call Recitative, I have no doubt but the chorus was a Song, sweetly melodious as from blest voices. A song which the redeemed and the angels of the Lord, are still singing before the Throne. A new song ([Revelation 5:9](#)) — a song which will always be new. We are made acquainted with the subject, yea, with the very words of this song. May our hearts be suitably affected by the consideration of them today! The melody and harmony of heaven are far above our conceptions. The music of that happy land has no dependence upon the vibrations of the air, or the admirable structure of the human ear. But we have reason to believe, there is, in the world of light and love, something analogous to what we call music, though different in kind, and vastly superior in effect, to any strains that can be produced by the most exquisite voices, or instruments upon earth; as we readily judge the glory of an angel to be unspeakably more excellent, both in kind and in degree, than anything that is deemed glorious among mortals. To consider this passage at large would require many discourses. I shall confine myself at present to a few brief reflections, on the circumstances of this heavenly vision, the message of the angel, and the concluding chorus or song.

I.

The circumstances:

(1.) Lo, an angel came upon them, etc. Suddenly, when they had no expectation of such a visit, without any thing that might previously engage their attention, all at once, like a flash of lightning, a glory shone around them, and an angel appeared. We do not wonder that they were impressed with fear. We live near, perhaps, in the midst of, an invisible world, full of great and wonderful realities, which, yet, by too many persons, are considered and treated as nonentities, because they are not perceived by our bodily senses. But the Scripture assures us of the fact; and to reject this testimony, because it is not confirmed by our senses, is no less irrational and un-philosophical, than impious. A man born blind, can have no more conception of light and colours, than we have of what passes in the world of spirits. And a nation of blind men, if there were such a nation, would probably treat a seeing person as a visionary madman, if he spoke to them of what he saw. But he would be sure of his own perceptions, though he could not satisfy the enquiries and cavils of the blind. Our senses are accommodated to our present state; but there may be a multitude of objects, as real in themselves, and as near to us, as any that we behold with our eyes; of which we, for want of suitable faculties, can have no idea. To deny this, and make our senses the criteria of the existence of things, which are not within their reach, is exactly such an absurdity, as a blind man would be guilty of, who should deny the possibility of a rainbow, because he never heard of it nor felt it. However, Faith is the evidence of things not seen. And they who believe the Word of God, cannot doubt of the existence of an invisible state and invisible agents. The barrier between the inhabitants of that state and us, is too strong to be passed; for the will of the great Creator seems to be the barrier. Otherwise it is probable they could easily surprise us, since, upon special occasions, they have been permitted to discover themselves. We have a natural dread of such visitants, even though they should appear to us, as they did to the shepherds, as messengers of peace and mercy from God. Yet we must shortly mingle with them. Death will introduce us to the world of spirits; and who can say what we shall meet with then? what Beings will be ready to accost us upon our first entrance into that unknown, unchangeable state? It deserves our serious thought. We are now encompassed by the objects of sense, but we must soon be separated from them all. We live in a crowd, but we must die alone. Happy are they, who, like Stephen, shall be able to commend their parting spirits into the hands of Jesus! He is the Lord of all worlds, and has the keys of Hades, of the invisible state.

(2.)

The angel spoke. The Gospel was preached by an angel to Zacharias, to the virgin mother of MESSIAH, and now to the shepherds; and, perhaps to none but these. The angel who appeared to Cornelius, said nothing to him about Jesus, but only directed him to send for Peter ([Acts 10:4, 5](#)) The glorious Gospel of the blessed God, with respect to its dignity, depth, and importance, may seem a fitter theme for the tongue of an angel than of a man; but angels never sinned, and though they might proclaim its excellence, they could not,

from experience, speak of its efficacy. In this respect sinful worms are better qualified to preach to others, concerning Him by whom they have, themselves, been healed and saved. Their weakness, likewise, is better suited to show that the influence and success of the Gospel is wholly owing to the power of God. It has, therefore, pleased God to put this treasure into earthen vessels, and to commit the ministry of His Word, not to angels, but to men. They whom He is pleased to employ in this office, however weak and unworthy in themselves, derive an honour and importance from the message entrusted to them, and are so far worthy of the same attention, as if an angel from Heaven spoke. They are sinful men, and have reason to think humbly of themselves: nor should they, as the servants of a suffering, crucified Master, either wonder or complain if they meet with unkindness from those whom they wish to serve; but they may magnify their office ([Romans 11:13](#)) , and it is at the peril of their hearers to despise it. What the world accounts in us the foolishness of preaching , is made to those who simply receive it, the wisdom and power of God. To others, even angels would preach in vain. They who hear not Moses and the prophets, who submit not to the ordinary means of grace which God has appointed, would not be persuaded, though one should rise from the dead.

(3.)

The angel was sent with the most interesting news that could be made to mankind; not to Caesar, or to Herod, or to the High Priest, but to obscure and lowly shepherds. The LORD seeth not as man seeth —the petty distinctions that obtain among men are not regarded by Him. He is equally near to them that fear Him in every situation of life, as the sun shines, as freely and fully, upon a cottage as upon a palace. These shepherds were, doubtless, of the number of the happy few, who in that time of degeneracy, were waiting and longing for the consolation of Israel. The heads of the Jewish people found their consolation in their rank and wealth, and in the respect paid to them by the vulgar. These things usually add to the idea of self-importance, and feed those tempers that are most displeasing to the Lord, and which indispose the mind to the reception of the Gospel, or to any due enquiry concerning it. And thus, in fact, from age to age, it has generally been hidden from the wise and the great, and revealed unto babes. The magi, or wise men, who lived in the East, where the knowledge of astronomy obtained, but where the Scripture was not known, were guided to MESSIAH by the appearance of a new star, or meteor. The shepherds, who were acquainted with the prophecies concerning MESSIAH, were informed of their accomplishment [fulfillment] by an angel. Thus the Lord was pleased to suit the different manner of making known His will, to the previous situation of the persons.

II.

The message of the angel, though concise, was comprehensive and full. It contained,
— The fact, Unto you is born this day

— The place, In the city of David, that is, in Bethlehem, so called, because David likewise had been born there ([Luke 2:4](#))

— The office of MESSIAH, A Saviour

— His name, honour, and character, Christ or the Anointed; The LORD , the Head and King of Israel, and of the Church, the Lord of all.

I do but recite these particulars now, as they will repeatedly offer to our consideration in the series of subjects before me. The description of the state in which they would find Him, was such, as could only be reconciled to His titles and honours by that simple faith, which, without vain reasoning, acquiesce in the declarations of God. For how unlikely would it seem to a merely human judgment, that the Saviour of sinners, the promised MESSIAH, the Lord of all, should be a babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, and lying in a manger.

Yet, thus it was. Though rich in Himself, He became poor for our sakes ([II Corinthians 8:9](#)). On this account, as the Scripture had foretold, He was despised and rejected of men. Though He came to His own, as a Lord or Master to His own house; yet, coming in this manner, His own professed servants, who pretended that they were longing and waiting for Him, slighted and opposed Him; preferred a notorious malefactor to Him, and put Him to death as an impostor and blasphemer. But the shepherds reasoned not through unbelief, and therefore they were not staggered; they obeyed the message, they went, they saw, they believed.

The seeming repugnance between the greatness of MESSIAH'S claims, and the state of humiliation in which He appeared when upon earth, was the great stumbling-block then, and continues to be so at this day. Because He stooped so low, and made Himself of no reputation, too many still refuse to acknowledge His divine character. But they who are willing to be taught by the Word and Spirit of God, see a beauty and propriety in His submitting to be born in a stable, and to live as a poor man, destitute of house or property. Hereby He poured contempt upon worldly pomp and vanity, sanctified the state of poverty to His followers, and set them an encouraging example to endure it with cheerfulness. They, like the shepherds and His first disciples, are delivered from their natural prejudices, and are enabled to behold His glory, through the veil of His outward humiliation, as the glory of the only begotten of the Father. And His condescension in becoming poor for their sakes, that they through His poverty might be made rich, affects their hearts with admiration and gratitude. But though too many, who are governed by the spirit and maxims of this world, are far from admiring His love, in assuming our nature under those circumstances, which, from His infancy to His death, exposed Him to the contempt of His enemies, it is otherwise thought of in yonder world of light. For we read, that when the angel had declared the glad-tidings to the shepherds, a multitude of the heavenly host expressed their joy by a song, which is the next subject that offers to our consideration.

III.

Their highest praise was excited by a view of the effects which this unexampled love would produce.

(1.)

Glory to God in the highest. In the highest Heaven, in the highest degree, for this highest instance of His mercy. At the creation these morning-stars sang for joy ([Job 38:7](#)) But redemption was a greater work than they had yet seen, and a work, by which His goodness, wisdom, and power would be still more abundantly magnified. The glory of God, the exhibition of His adorable perfections, to the view of intelligent creatures, is the last and highest end of all His works. Nor would it be worthy of the infinite eternal God, in comparison with whose immensity, the aggregate of all created good is no more than a point compared with the universe, or a single ray of light compared with the sun, to propose anything short of His own glory, as the ultimate, final cause of His designs. And in proportion as any finite intelligences, are conformed to the will of their Creator, and impressed with a sense of His pre-eminence, their highest end and aim will be the same with His. If, therefore, we compare the glory of God and the good of His creatures together, we may refer to them what our Lord was pleased to declare of the two great commandments. The former is incomparably the first and greatest of His ends; the second, in its proper place and foundation, is like unto it, and inseparably connected with it, or rather derived from it. The former is, if I may so speak, the essential difference of the divine operations; the latter, so far as consistent with it, is the result of a glorious and efficacious property of His consummate excellence. In the redemption of fallen man, both are displayed to the highest advantage. Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace, good-will towards man.

The glory of His goodness, this shines bright in the capacities and happiness He has communicated to angels; but it shines with greater brightness in the mercy afforded to mankind. Whether we consider the objects who are sinners, rebels, and enemies; or His purpose in their favour, not only to restore the life they had forfeited, but to bestow it more abundantly ([John 10:10](#)), with respect to title, security, and honour; or, lastly, and principally, the mean [method], by which, their deliverance from everlasting misery, and their possession of everlasting happiness is procured; and which could only be procured by the humiliation and death of the Son of His love.

The glory of His wisdom, in adjusting the demands of His holiness, justice, and truth, with the purposes of His mercy. In providing such a method for the exercise of His mercy, as renders His displeasure against sin more conspicuous by pardoning, than by punishing it. In abasing the sinner's pride, by the very considerations which inspire his hope and confidence; so that while he confesses himself unworthy of the very air that he breathes, he is encouraged and warranted to claim a participation in all the blessings of grace and glory. And finally, in proposing motives, which, when rightly understood, are always found sufficient to influence the heart, even though it has been habitually hardened in sin, long deaf

to the voice of reason, conscience, and interest, and equally unaffected by the judgments and the mercies of God, till enlightened to perceive the excellence of the Gospel.

The glory of His power. In making all the acts of free agents, through a long succession of ages, subservient to this great purpose, not excepting those who most laboured to obstruct it; in changing the disposition of the sinner, however obstinate; and in carrying on His work of grace, when once begun, in such feeble inconsistent creatures as men are; in defiance of all difficulties and opposition arising from within, or without.

These are subjects which the angels desire to look into ([1 Peter 1:12](#)), which fill the most exalted intelligence with admiration. The glory of God was manifest, was celebrated in the highest heavens, when MESSIAH was born of a woman.

(2.)

The great design and effect of His appearance with regard to mankind, is peace. On earth peace. Man as a fallen creature is in a state of war and rebellion against his Maker. He has renounced his allegiance and dependence, is become his own end. He is now against God, disobedient to His laws, and disaffected to His government. And his conscience, if not stupefied and cauterized by frequent resistance of conviction, suggests that God is against him. He feels he is not happy here, he fears he shall be miserable hereafter. This apprehension strengthens his aversion from God. And, indeed, without an express assurance from the Lord Himself whom He has offended, that there is forgiveness with Him, he would not only fear, but sink into despair, if he rightly understood the horrid enormity of a state of alienation from the blessed God. But infinite wisdom and mercy have provided, and propounded a method, by which the honour of the divine perfections and government are secured, and pardon and peace vouchsafed [graciously granted] to rebels. God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself. The knowledge of this mercy, when revealed to the sinner's heart, subdues his enmity, constrains him to throw down his arms, and to make an unreserved submission and surrender of himself; forms him to a temper of love and confidence, and disposes him to habitual and cheerful obedience. Now mercy and truth are met together, righteousness and peace have kissed each other ([Psalm 85:10](#)); and God is glorified in the highest, for peace proclaimed upon the earth.

The expression of good-will towards men, seems to rise upon the former. Not only peace, but acceptance and adoption in the Beloved. Sinners, who believe in the Son of God, are not merely delivered from the condemnation they have deserved, but are united to their Saviour; considered as one with Him, His children, the members of His body, and made partakers of His life, and His glory. God is their portion, and heaven is their home. The Lord's satisfaction in this, as the greatest of all His works, is expressed by the Prophet in such astonishing terms of condescension, as surpass our utmost conceptions: and we can only say, Lord, what is man that Thou art thus mindful of him! We believe, admire, and adore. The LORD thy God in the midst of thee is mighty: He will save, He will rejoice over

thee with joy: He will rest in His love, He will rejoice over thee with singing ([Zephaniah 3:17](#))

Assuredly this song of the heavenly hosts is not the language of our hearts by nature. We once sought our pleasure and happiness in a very different way. We were indifferent to the glory of God, and strangers to His peace. And some of us are still blind to the excellencies of the Gospel, and deaf to its gracious invitations. But we must not expect to sing with the great company of the redeemed hereafter, before the Throne of glory, unless we learn and love their song while we are here ([Revelation 15:3](#)). They who attain to the inheritance of the saints in light, are first made meet for it in the present life, and in this way. They believe the testimony of the Scripture respecting their own guilt, unworthiness, and helplessness; then they receive the record which God has given of His Son. They renounce all confidence in the flesh ([Philippians 3:3](#)); they rejoice in Christ Jesus, and from His fulness they derive grace to worship God in the Spirit. A sense of their obligations to the Saviour, disposes them to praise Him now as they can; and they rejoice in hope of seeing him ere long as He is, and that then they shall praise Him as they ought. For heaven itself, as described in the Word of God, could not be a state of happiness to us, unless we are like-minded with the Apostle, to account all things loss and dung for the excellency of the knowledge of Jesus Christ our Lord

— O —

Sermon XI

Messiah's Entrance into Jerusalem

[Zechariah 9:9, 10](#)

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: He is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass. — And He shall speak peace unto the heathen.

The narrowness and littleness of the mind of fallen man are sufficiently conspicuous in the idea he forms of magnificence and grandeur. The pageantry and parade of a Roman triumph, or of an eastern monarch, as described in history, exhibit him to us in what, he himself accounts, his best estate. If you suppose him seated in an imperial carriage, arrayed in splendid apparel, wearing a crown or tiara, ornamented with jewels, preceded and followed by a long train of guards and attendants, surrounded by the unmeaning acclamations of ignorant multitudes, you see the poor worm at the summit of his happiness. He has no conception of anything greater than this. And the spectators are generally of the same mind. They admire, and they envy, his lot. And there is hardly a person in the crowds around him, but would be very glad to take his place were it practicable. Yet this great little creature would surely be mortified, if, in the height of his self-complacence, he could consider, that he had the very same regard for a pre-eminence in finery, the same desire to be admired and envied, and felt the same kind of satisfaction in distinction above his fellows, when he was a child ten years old. He is in effect a child still, only he has changed his play-things, and now acts upon a larger scale, but with the same trifling and contracted views.

How different was MESSIAH'S entry into Jerusalem foretold in this prophecy; the accomplishment of which, we read in the Evangelists! And how differently was He affected by the object around Him! He poured contempt upon the phantom of human glory. This King of kings, and Lord of lords, was meek and lowly, riding upon an asses' colt ([Luke 19: 25-38](#)) And though a secret divine influence constrained the multitude to acknowledge His character, and, with some accommodation to the customs of those times, to strew their garments in the way, as they proclaimed the King who came in the name of Jehovah; yet He appeared unmoved by their applause. Had the history of Jesus, like those which we have seen of Socrates or Cyrus, been merely the work of a human writer, ambitious to adorn a favourite character with the most splendid qualities of a philosopher or hero, we should never have known how His mind was engaged in this situation. The Saviour must be divine, His historian must be inspired, the fact must be true; for man could not have invented such a circumstance, that this meek and lowly Saviour took no notice of the zeal and homage of His friends, because His heart was filled with compassion for His enemies, who were thirsting for His blood. For it was then, amidst the acclamation of His disciple, that He beheld the city and wept over it, while He foretold the evils which the rejection of Him would bring

upon it. Oh that thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things belonging to thy peace! But now they are hidden from thine eyes ([Luke 19:42](#))

An angel proclaimed His birth to the shepherds; and wise men from the East paid such attention to the new-born Saviour, that the jealousy of Herod was excited, and attempts were made to destroy Him. But this wonderful infant was brought up in a state of obscurity, in a place of no repute, and known by no higher description than that of The carpenter's son. In the course of His ministry He appeared and was treated as a poor man, He had no certain dwelling-place, He submitted to receive supplies, for His support, from the contributions of a few of His followers, for the most of them were poor like Himself. And though He wrought many wonderful works for the relief of the necessitous and miserable, He admitted no alteration in His own external state, but was content to be poor and despised, for our sakes, to the end of His life. I think the only occasion on which He permitted a public acknowledgment of His person and character, was, when He fulfilled this prophecy. And still He was the same meek and lowly Saviour. As His Kingdom was not of this world, neither were there any marks of human grandeur in His procession. He approached Jerusalem, attended, indeed, by a concourse of people, but riding upon an ass, and weeping for His enemies.

The passage of the Messiah [Oratorio] which follows the chorus of the heavenly host, is taken from these verses. It does not include the whole of them. In one clause there is a small alteration in the expression, but it does not affect the sense. Instead of, He is just, having Salvation, it is, He is a righteous Saviour.

We may notice,

- I. The prophet's address. To the daughter of Zion and Jerusalem.
- II. The exhortation to joy. Rejoice and shout.
- III. The cause assigned for this joy. Thy King cometh.
- IV. The characters of the King. A righteous Saviour.
- V. His great design. To speak peace to the heathen.

I.

Zion and Jerusalem, are indifferently used as emblems of the Church, or professing people of God. When they occur together, as here, contradistinguished from each other, Zion, the city of David, the seat of government, and of the temple-worship, may denote the principal persons of the ecclesiastical and civil state; and Jerusalem may be expressive of the people at large, the daughters of a place, signifying, according to the Hebrew idiom, the inhabitants. They boasted that they were the Lord's peculiar people, they had the prophecies and promises concerning MESSIAH in their hands, and were professedly expecting and waiting for His appearance. They are therefore called upon to rejoice in it. But when He actually came, though He came to His own, to His own nation, city, and temple; His own people, to whose affection and allegiance He had the most just claim, they received Him

not ([John 1:11](#)) But there were a few who truly waited for Him, as the hope and consolation of Israel, at the time of His birth; and many more were afterwards convinced by His gracious words and works, that He only had the Words of eternal life, and became His followers.

By their acknowledged principles, they were all bound to acknowledge that Prophet whom Moses had foretold, God would raise up among them like unto Himself ([Deuteronomy 18:15-19](#)) ; that is, to be, as he had been, a lawgiver, to institute a new dispensation of the true religion; and their refusal involved them, as a nation, in the punishment, which, Moses had likewise denounced against those who should refuse to hearken to Him. Thus their peculiar advantage in possessing a divine revelation, while the rest of mankind were left ignorant of the will of God, proved an aggravation to their guilt, and rendered their obstinacy more inexcusable, and their condemnation more severe. I am bound to take every opportunity of noticing the striking parallel in this respect, between the Jewish nation in our Saviour's time, and the nations, who, since that period, have admitted the New Testament as a revelation from God. By assuming the Christian name, and so far calling the Saviour 'Lord,' while they reject the spirit and design of the Gospel, and treat the ministers of it with neglect or contempt, they tread in the steps, and share in the guilt of those who pretended to expect MESSIAH, and yet crucified Him when He appeared among them. In person, He could be crucified but once, but the Scripture speaks of those who crucify the Son of God afresh, and put Him to open shame. How far this is the case of the persons who can bear to hear of His Passion and His Kingdom, when made the subject of a musical entertainment, but upon no other occasion, deserves their serious consideration.

II.

The exhortation can only be complied with by those who are sensible of their need of a Saviour, and His authority and ability to save. To these the Prophet brings a joyful message, and they will rejoice and shout. The joy of harvest ([Isaiah 9:3](#)) , and of the victors in war, when dividing the spoil of the vanquished, is celebrated with shouting. But sinners, who, by the knowledge of MESSIAH, are delivered from going down into the pit, from the dominion of the powers of darkness, and are translated into the Kingdom of God, experience a joy far superior, in kind and degree, to any satisfaction that temporal things can afford. It is a joy unspeakable, and full of glory ([I Peter 1:8](#)) Jesus, when known and received by faith, is, in the highest sense, light to those who sit in darkness, health to the sick, food to the hungry, and rest to the weary soul. Thus many rejoiced in His goodness when He was upon earth, and He still has a people, and will have to the end of time, who do and shall rejoice in Him upon these accounts, though every spring of temporal joy should be dried up. They who know His name, and put their trust in Him are warranted to appropriate those strong expressions of another Prophet, Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vine, the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat, the flock

shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation ([Habakkuk 3:17, 18](#))

III.

The ground and cause of this joy is assigned. Thy King cometh. MESSIAH is a King. This title He avowed to Pilate ([Mark 15:2](#)), by whose order it was fixed over Him upon His cross. That this was not a slight and arbitrary circumstance, but providential and important, we may, I think, infer by the care taken by the Evangelists [Matthew, Mark, Luke, John], to preserve the remembrance of it, for it is recorded by them all. He is, indeed, King of kings; King and Lord of nations; King of worlds; but He is here spoken of as King of Zion. The Kingdom He came to establish upon earth is not of this world, nor like the kingdoms of the world. The maxims, language, interests, and aims of it, are peculiar to itself. His power and Providence rule over all, but He is only known, admired, and willingly obeyed by the subjects of His spiritual Kingdom, who, though they are in the world, are not of it, but strangers and pilgrims upon earth. Their true citizenship is in heaven ([Philippians 3:20](#)). These are His peculiar people. And though they partake with others in the changes and trials incident to this mortal life, and have their several departments and duties assigned to them according to His will, as members of society, it does not yet appear what they shall be ([I John 3:2](#)). They are even now the children and servants of the Lord, and He manifests Himself to them as He does not to others. Happy are these His subjects who dwell under His shadow. He rules them not with that rod of iron by which He bruises and breaks the power of His enemies, but with His golden sceptre of love. He reigns by His own right, and by their full and free consent, in their hearts. He reigns upon a throne of grace, to which they have, at all times, access; and from whence they receive in answer to their prayers, mercy and peace, the pardon of all their sins, grace to help in every time of need, and a renewed supply answerable to all their wants, cares, services, and conflicts. So that though they are surrounded with snares, and fiercely opposed by many enemies, they cannot be overpowered, for the Lord Himself is their King and Saviour. We have,

IV.

Two characters of this King. He is just, having salvation, or, as it is in the passage of the Messiah [Oratorio], He is a righteous Saviour.

(1.)

He is righteous. His Kingdom is founded in righteousness. It is the effect and reward of His obedience unto death, by which He made an end of sin, and brought in an everlasting righteousness. As His people receive and expect all from His hand, so likewise for His sake. Such is His command, and such is His promise. If ye shall ask anything in my name, I will do it ([John 14:14](#)) In pleading their cause, and managing their concerns, He is their righteous Advocate. And, therefore, because His intercession is founded upon a righteous stipulation,

which He has completely fulfilled, He does not say, Father, I ask, but, I will, that those whom Thou hast given me, be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory ([John 17:24](#))

(2.)

He is a Saviour. Having salvation in Himself; yea, He is their salvation ([Isaiah 12:2](#)) His wisdom, power, compassion, and determined purpose, are all engaged to save them fully, freely, and forever. To save them from guilt, from Satan, and from sin, through all the dangers and trials of this life. To save them to the uttermost, till He fixes them finally, out of reach of all evil, and puts them in possession of all the happiness of which their natures are capable, in a conformity to His own image, and the enjoyment of unclouded, uninterrupted communion with God.

V.

His great design was not confined to Israel after the flesh. He shall speak peace to the heathen, also. His Kingdom comprises, besides the believing posterity of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, a great multitude gathered from amidst all nations, people, and languages, from the East and the West, from the North and the South ([Luke 13:28, 29](#)) Though the heathen were universally alienated from God, by evil works and an evil conscience, He has undertaken to reconcile them, and to bring those near who were once afar off. By their knowledge of Him, their prisons shall be opened, their chains broken ([Isaiah 45:14](#)), their condemnation reversed, and they shall be renewed and accepted in the Beloved, as the true children of Abraham.

He shall likewise conciliate peace between Jew and Gentile, make, of both, one people ([Ephesians 2:13-16](#)), pulling down the walls of separation and prejudice, that, with one heart and mind, they may love, serve, and praise Him. For where faith in Him obtains, all distinctions are lost and superseded. There is then neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor un-circumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free, but Christ is all, and in all ([Colossians 3:11](#))

Much has already been done by the Gospel. Multitudes have been turned from darkness to light, and from the worship of dumb idols to serve the living and true God. And we expect a time when this promise will be more extensively and literally fulfilled. When the Kingdom shall be the Lord's to the end of the earth; when the fulness of the Gentiles shall come in, all Israel be saved, and the nations shall learn war no more.

From these characters of the Saviour, we may collect the characters of His people. For they beholding His glory, are changed (according to the measure of their faith) into the same image. The incommunicable perfections of God, such as His sovereignty and all-sufficiency, can only produce in His people correspondent expressions of reverence, submission, and dependence; an attempt to be like Him in these respects would be highly impious, and was, indeed, the original source of our apostasy from Him. Man, by indulging a desire of being like God, rebelled against Him, aspired at independence, and preferred the gratification

of his own will, to the righteous and equitable commands of his Maker. The unavoidable consequence of this madness, is misery. It is not possible that he should be happy, till he be reduced to his proper state of subordination. But that light of the glory of God in the person of Jesus Christ, which is revealed to the renewed heart by the Gospel, has a transforming effect upon those who receive it; they are made partakers of a divine nature, and resemble Him, whose they are, and whom they serve, in righteousness, goodness, and truth ([Ephesians 5:9](#))

They are righteous as He is righteous. I speak not of the relative state, as they are accepted and accounted righteous in the Beloved, but of their real character. They learn of Him to love righteousness and hate iniquity ([Psalm 45:7](#)) Their principles are right, drawn from the revealed truths of God. They comport themselves as becomes weak and unworthy sinners, and ascribe the glory of their salvation to the Lord alone; and therefore the general tenor of their conduct is governed by the righteous rules of His precepts; of which they have the most endearing and animating exemplification in the conduct of their Saviour; from Him they learn to frame their tempers, desires, and hopes, and thus give evidence that they are, in deed and in truth, a saved people. His love, in proportion as it is realized in their hearts by faith, teaches them likewise to love one another, and to exercise benevolence to all men. When they understand the true nature of His spiritual Kingdom, which consisteth not in external distinctions and form, but in righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost ([Romans 14:17](#)) ; and that it is His great design to form to Himself a people from amongst the nations of the earth, who shall be one body, enlivened by one and the same Spirit, they acquire a large and comprehensive mind. They rise above the influence of names, parties, and divisions; are freed from the narrow views and interests of self, and put on, as the elect of God, bowels of mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, long-suffering, forbearance and forgiveness ([Colossians 3:12](#)) , in conformity to the pattern and will of their great Exemplar. Thus He speaks peace to them, and hushes all their angry, tumultuous passions into a calm.

Such is the spirit and tendency of the Gospel. Let us try ourselves by this touch-stone, measure ourselves by this rule, and weigh ourselves in these balances of the sanctuary. They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh, have put off the old man, and are renewed in the spirit of their minds. If He be, indeed, your King, your consciences will bear you witness that you revere, imitate, and obey Him. If He be your Saviour, you certainly must be sensible yourself, and others must observe, that you are different from what you once were.

And if any of you should be convinced, that, hitherto, you have been a Christian only in name and in form, but destitute of that which constitutes the life and power of real godliness, this will be a good beginning. For though it be high time that you should in good earnest attend to these things, blessed be God it is not yet too late. He is a righteous and a gracious Saviour; seek Him as such, and He will speak peace to you also. His sure promise

is recorded for your encouragement — Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out ([John 6:37](#))

— O —

Sermon XII

Effects of Messiah's Appearance

[Isaiah 35:5, 6](#)

The eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped:

Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing.

How beautiful and magnificent is the imagery, by which the Prophet, in this chapter, represents the effects of MESSIAH'S appearance! The scene, proposed to our view, is a barren and desolate wilderness. But when He, who in the beginning said, Let there be light, and there was light, condescends to visit this wilderness, the face of nature is suddenly changed by His presence! Fountains and streams of water burst forth in the burning desert, the soil becomes fruitful, clothed with verdure, and adorned with flowers. The towering cedars, which were the glory of Lebanon, and the richest pastures, which were the excellency of Carmel, present themselves to the eye, where, a little before, all was uncomfortable and dreary. How is it, that so few of those who value themselves upon their taste, and who profess to be admirers of pastoral poetry in particular, are struck with the elegance and beauty of this description? Alas, we can only ascribe their indifference to the depravity of the human heart. They would, surely, have admired this picture, could they have met with it in any of their favourite authors; but descriptive paintings in this style, so exquisitely combining grandeur with simplicity, are only to be found in the Bible, a book, which their unhappy prejudices and passions too often lead to depreciate and neglect.

But they who have a scriptural and spiritual taste, not only admire this passage as a description of a pleasing change in outward nature, but consider it as a just and expressive representation of a more important change, a moral change, of which they have themselves been, in a measure, the happy subjects. The barren wilderness reminds them of the state of mankind by the Fall, and of their own hearts, before MESSIAH, the Sun of Righteousness arose upon them with healing, with light, power, and comfort, in His beams. In that memorable hour, old things passed away, and all things became new. The Lord, by shining into their hearts, and showing them His glory in the person of Christ, has created for them a new heaven and a new earth. The works of God around them in His creation and providence assume a different appearance. Before, they lived without Him in the world; but now, they see His hand wherever they look, they hear His voice in every event, for now the principles of His grace are planted in their souls, and they are no longer barren or unfruitful, but are filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Christ Jesus to His praise ([Philippians 1:11](#))

The verses which I have read, exhibit the effects of MESSIAH'S power and goodness by another image equally pleasing. Not only the wilderness, but the inhabitants of the wilderness partake of the virtue of the great Redeemer. He finds them in circumstances of distress, which only He can relieve. But when He comes, the blind receive their sight, the deaf hear,

the lame walk, and the dumb have voices given them to resound His praise. These mighty works, in their literal sense, marked His character, and confirmed His claims, when He was upon earth; and He Himself appealed to these, in proof of His being the promised Saviour whom the prophets had foretold, and that no other was to be expected ([Matthew 11:3-6](#))

But the words have a still more sublime and important sense. As the great Physician, He cured all manner of diseases and infirmities. But this was not the principle design for which He came into the world. The maladies to which sin has subjected the body, are but emblems of the more dreadful evils which it has brought upon the soul. He came to open the eyes of the mind; to make the obstinate will attentive and obedient to the voice of God; to invigorate our benumbed and paralytic faculties; that we may be active and cheerful in His service; and to open our lips, that our mouths may show forth His praise. I have a good hope that I may warrantably say, This day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears ([Luke 4:21](#)) Some of you who were once darkness, are now light in the Lord.

These different effects are produced by one simple, but powerful, operation. While Lazarus lay in the grave, all his natural powers were inactive. But when the voice of the Son of God restored him to life ([John 11:43](#)), he was, of course, immediately enabled to see, to hear, to move, and to speak. Thus, while we were spiritually dead, we were necessarily blind, deaf, dumb, and motionless, with respect to all the objects and faculties of that life of God in the soul, which is the perfection and honour of our nature. When we are made partakers of this life, by a new and heavenly birth, then our spiritual senses are brought into exercise. Then the eyes of the blind are opened, to see the beauty and glory of divine truths; we hear the voice of God, we feel at liberty to walk and act in His service, and our tongues are taught to praise Him. Here are four chief effects of a work of grace upon the heart, which distinguish believers from the rest of mankind.

And these effects are all to be ascribed to MESSIAH. For they are all wrought by the agency of His Holy Spirit. The gifts and graces of the Holy Spirit which are absolutely necessary, as well for the perpetuating of His Gospel from age to age, as for making it efficacious and successful, are bestowed upon sinners wholly upon the account of His mediation. It was when He ascended on high and led captivity captive ([Psalm 68:18](#)), that He procured these blessings for rebellious men, that the LORD God might dwell among them. And it was only for His sake, and on the account of what He was to accomplish in the fulness of time, as intimated in the promise of the seed of the woman appointed to break the serpent's head, that there were any gracious communications afforded to fallen man, from the first entrance of sin into the world. But now the Redeemer's great work is fulfilled, His salvation is more openly revealed and applied, by the publication of the Gospel, with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven, and sinners hear the voice of God and live. Then all the changes, prefigured and predicted in my text, take place, and the wilderness becomes a fruitful field.

(1.)

They were once blind, but now they see. The religion of true believers is not the effect of imagination and blind impulse, but is derived from a solid knowledge which will bear the strictest scrutiny, and is the reasonable service of an enlightened understanding. They see God; their apprehensions of Him, are, in some measure, answerable to His greatness and His goodness, and inspire them with reverence and love. Their conceptions of other things in which they are most nearly interested, are agreeable to the truth. Sin appears to them hateful in itself, as well as mischievous in its consequences; and holiness, not only necessary by the ordination of God, but desirable for its own sake, as essentially belonging to the true dignity and happiness of man. They know themselves; they see and feel that they are such creatures as the Bible describes them to be, weak, depraved, and vile. Of course, they see the folly of attempting to recommend themselves to God, and can no longer place any dependence on what they once accounted their wisdom, power, and righteousness; and therefore they see the absolute necessity of a Saviour. They see, likewise, and approve the method of salvation proposed by the Gospel, as worthy of the wisdom and justice of God, and every way adapted to the exigencies [urgent requirements] of their sins, wants, and fears. They see and admire the excellence, dignity, and sufficiency of Him, on whom their help is laid. His power and authority engage their confidence, His love captivates and fixes their hearts. They see the vanity of the present state, and the vast importance of eternity. In these respects they have all of them a good understanding, however inferior in natural capacity, or acquired knowledge, to the wise men of the world.

(2.)

Their knowledge, so far as they have attained, is not merely speculative, cold, and indistinct, like the light of the moon. The Sun of Righteousness has shined into their hearts. The light they enjoy is vital, cheering and effective. Because they thus see, they hear likewise. They were once deaf to the voice of God, whether He spoke by His Word or His Providence; whether in the language of mercy or judgment. But now their deaf ears are unstopped. They are now attentive, submissive, and willing to receive His instructions, and to obey His commands. With them, one "Thus saith the LORD" has the force of a thousand arguments. They desire no further proof of a doctrine, no other warrant for their practice, no other reason for any dispensation, than Thus the Lord has said, This He requires, and This is His appointment. Thus their wills are brought into subjection; and they so understand, as to believe and obey.

(3.)

Farther, with their sight and hearing, they receive power and activity. Once they were tied and bound in the chain of their sins, or like a man benumbed with a dead-palsy, unable to move. If they sometimes seemed to express desires, that might be called good with respect to their object, they were faint and ineffectual. But now their fetters are broken, the health and strength of their souls is restored, and God has wrought within them not only to will,

but also to do according to His good pleasure ([Philippians 2:13](#)) It is not more wonderful that a cripple should suddenly recover the use of his limbs, than that a person, who has long been fettered in sinful habits, should be enabled to move and act with alacrity in the service of God. But in the day of divine power, sinners are made both willing and able. How burdensome was that which they once accounted their religion! how little comfort did it yield them! how little did it assist them against their passions, or against their fears? But all things are become new, since they have attained to a life of faith in the Son of God. Their religious service is now pleasant, and their warfare against sin and the world, victorious.

Their obligations, motives, resources, encouragements, and prospects, inspire them with a holy vigour to run, with patience and perseverance, the race that is set before them.

(4.)

Having their sight and hearing thus restored, and their hearts enlarged to walk at liberty in the ways of wisdom; they are no longer dumb, silent, and sullen, but out of the abundance of their hearts their mouths speak the language of gratitude, praise, and joy. For though most people have the faculty of speech, and can use, or rather abuse, their tongues fluently; though we are sufficiently expert from our childhood, in the dialects of falsehood, profaneness and folly, yet, by nature, we are dumb with respect to the language that becomes us, as the creatures of God, and as those who have sinned against Him, and are yet invited to seek His mercy. But when grace teaches the heart, then the heart teaches the mouth ([Proverbs 16:23](#)) When we believe, then we speak, yea, we sing and greatly rejoice; as it is written, In that day I will praise thee; though Thou wast angry, Thine anger is turned away ([Isaiah 12:1](#)) And again, The voice of joy and thanksgiving is in the tabernacles of the righteous ([Psalm 118:15](#)) Let the redeemed of the LORD say, That He is good, and His mercy endureth for ever ([Psalm 107:1, 2](#))

It is of great importance to examine ourselves by this test, and not to be satisfied with our knowledge of the Gospel, any farther than our consciences bear us witness, that it has produced a real, moral, change in our tempers, conduct, and pursuits. For there is a knowledge which is falsely so called. It puffeth up, but edifieth not. Our Lord's declaration deserves our most serious attention. For judgment I am come into this world; that they which see not may see; and that they which see might be made blind ([John 9:39](#)) It is very possible, yea, very easy, by the help of books, sermons, and converse, to acquire an orderly and systematic knowledge of divine truths; it may be learnt thus, like any other branch of human science, and the head be well-stored with orthodox sentiments; and there may be an ability to prove and defend them, in a way of argumentation, while the heart is utterly a stranger to their salutary influence. Such characters are too common. None make a greater parade and boast of seeing, than these persons. None are more fatally blinded. They smile, with disdain, when they speak of a self-righteousness founded upon prayers, alms-deeds, and sacraments; but are not aware that they themselves live in the very spirit of the Pharisees

([Luke 18:2](#)) , so clearly described, and so expressly condemned in the New Testament. Their supposed knowledge of the doctrines which they misunderstand and abused, is the righteousness on which they base their hopes; and trusting to this, they despise all those who are stricter in practice than themselves, as ignorant and legal; and discover, almost as great dislike to close and faithful preaching, as they could do to poison. Though the doctrines of the Gospel, when rightly received, are productive of godliness, it is to be feared, there are people who espouse and plead for them, to quiet their consciences, by furnishing them with excuses for the sins they are unwilling to forsake. It is not surprising, that they who are displeased with the yoke of our Lord's precepts, should seem friendly to the idea of salvation without the works of the law.

The notion of the final perseverance of believers, may afford a pillow for those to rest on, who being at present destitute of all feeling of spiritual life, labour to persuade themselves that they are Christians, because they had some serious thoughts, and made some profession of the truth, many years ago. So, likewise, in what the Scriptures teach, of the total inability of fallen man, they think they have a plea to justify their negligence and sloth, and therefore are not disposed to contradict the testimony. They evade invitation and command to wait, and watch, and strive, in the ways and means of the Lord's appointment, as they think, with impunity, by confessing the charge, and saying, I am a poor creature indeed, I can do nothing of myself aright, and therefore to what purpose should I attempt to do any thing? A minister may preach upon these points, in general terms, and obtain their good word. But if he speaks plainly and faithfully to conscience; if he bears testimony not only against dead works, but against a dead faith; against spiritual pride, evil tempers, evil speaking, love of the world, and sinful compliances; if he insists that the branches of the true vine should bear grapes, and not the same fruit as the bramble; hearers of this stamp will think they do God service by censuring all he can say, as low and legal trash. How awful! that people should be blinded by the very truths which they profess to believe! Yet I fear such cases are too frequent. God grant a delusion of this kind may never be found amongst us! For if the salt itself should lose its savour, wherewith shall it be salted? ([Matthew 5:13](#)) May we come simply to the light, with a desire of seeing more of ourselves, and more of our Saviour; that we may be more humble and spiritual, more afraid of sin, more watchful and successful in striving against it; and, in our whole conversation, more conformable to our glorious Head!

But to return. From what has been offered upon this subject, we may observe,

(1.)

That true Christianity is friendly to society, and to the common interests of mankind. It is the source of peace, tenderness, benevolence, and every humane temper. It is calculated to soothe the fierce disposition, to enlarge the selfish spirit, and to transform the lion into the lamb. What then must we think of those pretended friends to liberty and free enquiry, whose unhappy zeal is employed to rob us of the only light and balm of life? Who by their

misrepresentations and cavils, endeavour to persuade others, though they cannot effectually persuade themselves, that the Gospel, a scheme so wise in its constitution, so salutary in its design, so powerful in its effects, is no better than an imposition, the contrivance of superstitious or artful men! Why should they attempt to take away the foundation of our hope, and the spring of our comfort (if they were able) when they know they have nothing to substitute, in their place! Let us think of them with the compassion which their state calls for; and pray for them, peradventure God will give them repentance to the acknowledgment of the truth ([II Timothy 2:25](#))

(2.)

The change thus wrought is great, marvellous, and, if not so frequent, might be styled miraculous. It is more than education, example, persuasion, or resolution can perform. It is the work of God alone to open the blind eyes, to change the heart of stone into flesh, and to raise the dead.

This thought should exclude boasting. The happy subjects of this change, were no better by nature or practice, than others. They have nothing but what they have received. The glory and praise is due to the Lord alone. It should likewise soften their censure of those who are still in a state of alienation from God, or, at least, prevent the emotions of anger and resentment towards them. They know not what they do. Their danger should excite our pity, and our friendly endeavours to recover them from the error of their way. And, especially, we should be careful to regulate our behaviour, that if they obey not the Word, they may without the Word be convinced and won ([I Peter 3:1](#)), by the force of our example. If the Lord be pleased to do that for them, which He has done for us, their dislike of us, and their opposition to us, will be quickly at an end; and though they set out after us, they may possibly make a swifter progress in the Christian life, than we have done. Thus, though Saul of Tarsus approached Damascus as an enemy and a persecutor, when the scales fell from his eyes, he not only immediately joined the disciples, but in a little time became a pattern to them.

That the change is the work of God, should likewise be considered by those, who, from a sense of the greatness of their sins, and the strength of their sinful habits, are ready to sink into despair. Whatever apparent difficulty there may be in your case, it is easy to divine power. All things are possible with God ([Mark 10:27](#)), and all things, likewise, are possible to him that believeth ([Mark 9:23](#)) The promises invite you to apply to Him who is the Author and Finisher of faith, and who has said for your encouragement, Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out.

— O —

Sermon XIII

The Great Shepherd

[Isaiah 50:11](#)

He shall feed his flock like a shepherd; He shall gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young.

It is not easy for those, whose habits of life are insensibly formed by the customs of modern times, to conceive any adequate idea of the pastoral life, as obtained in the eastern countries, before that simplicity of manners, which characterized the early ages, was corrupted, by the artificial and false refinements of luxury. Wealth, in those days, consisted principally in flocks and herds; and Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and others, who were, to speak in modern language, persons of high distinction, were likewise shepherds. The book of Genesis, which is an authentic and infallible history of the most ancient times, exhibits a manner of living, so different from our own, that, perhaps, few persons are qualified to enter fully into the spirit of the description. The poets seem to have derived their idea of the golden age, from some imperfect tradition of this primitive state; and if we compare it with the state of things around us, methinks we have reason to say, How is the gold become dim, and the fine gold changed! ([Lamentations 4:1](#)). The opulence of Jacob may be conjectured from the present he sent to his brother Esau ([Genesis 32:14, 15](#)) Yet Jacob attended his flocks himself, in the drought by day, and in the frost by night ([Genesis 31:40](#)). The vigilance, the providence, the tenderness, necessary to the due discharge of the shepherd's office, have been frequently applied, in describing the nature and ends of government; and it has been esteemed a high encomium [formal expression of high praise] of a good king, to style him the shepherd of his people. This character, MESSIAH the Saviour condescends to bear; and happy are they who can say, with pleasing consciousness, We are His people, and the sheep of His pasture ([Psalm 100:3](#))

The passage will lead me to speak of the Shepherd, the flock, and His care and tenderness over them.

I.

Our Lord expressly styled Himself the "Shepherd," the good Shepherd of the sheep ([John 10:11, 14](#)), and the Apostle Peter styled Him the chief Shepherd ([I Peter 5:4](#)) His faithful ministers have the honour to be under-shepherds; He appoints, and qualifies them, to feed His flock. They are the messengers of His will, but they can do nothing without Him; they can only communicate what they receive, and cannot watch over the flock, unless they are themselves watched over by Him ([Psalm 127:1](#)). For, with respect to efficacy, He is the chief, and, indeed, the sole Shepherd. The eyes of all are upon Him, and His eye is upon, and over, all His flock. The Old Testament Church had a Shepherd, and their Shepherd was Jehovah ([Psalm 23:1](#)) Unless, therefore, the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls, likewise, be Jehovah, we fall unspeakably short of the privilege of ancient Israel, if their Shepherd was

almighty, and if ours could be but a creature. Surely we could not then say, what yet the Apostle affirms, that we have a better covenant, established upon better promises ([Hebrews 8:6](#)) ; since MESSIAH, Himself, is expressly declared, to be the Surety and the Mediator of this Covenant. But would it not be better, upon this supposition, with David, who could say, Jehovah is my Shepherd, than with us, who are entrusted to the care of a delegated and inferior keeper, if Jesus be not Jehovah. Besides, who but Jehovah can relieve the necessities of multitudes in all places, in the same moment, and be equally near and attentive to them, in every age? The sinner, who is enlightened to know himself, his want, enemies, and dangers, will not dare to confide in anything short of an almighty arm; he needs a shepherd, who is full of wisdom, full of care, full of power; able, like the sun, to shine upon millions at once, and possessed of those incommunicable attributes of Deity, omniscience and omnipresence. Such is our great Shepherd; and He is eminently the good Shepherd also, for He laid down His life for the sheep, and has redeemed them to God by His own blood.

II.

Shepherd is a relative name; it has reference to a flock. This great and good Shepherd has a flock whom He loved from everlasting , and whom having loved , He will love to the end ([John 13:1](#)) *Formosi pecoris custos, formosior ipse!*

The Shepherd with a handsome flock, is Himself more handsome!

He humbled Himself for their sakes, submitted to partake of their nature and their sorrows, took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of sinful flesh. He died for His sheep, the just for the unjust ([I Peter 3:18](#)) , to redeem them from the curse of the law, from the guilt and dominion of sin, from the power of Satan, and to bring them to God. They, by nature, are all gone astray, every one to his own way ([Isaiah 53:6](#)) ; but having thus bought them with His blood, in His own appointed time, He seeks, finds, and restores His sheep. By the power of His Word and Spirit, He makes Himself known to their hearts, causes them to hear and understand His voice, and guides them into the fold. Then, they became His sheep in the sense of my text. They are under His immediate protection and government.

Considered as individuals, they are fitly described by the name of sheep. A sheep is a weak, defenceless, improvident creature; prone to wander, and if once astray, is seldom known to return of its own accord. A sheep has neither strength to fight with the wolf, nor speed to escape from him; nor has it the fore-sight of the ant, to provide its own sustenance. Such is our character, and our situation. Unable to take care of ourselves, prone to wander from our resting-place, exposed to enemies which we can neither withstand nor avoid, without resource in ourselves, and taught, by daily experience, the insufficiency of everything around us. Yet, if this Shepherd be our Shepherd, weak and helpless as we are, we may be of good courage. If we say with David, The LORD is my Shepherd, we may make the same inferences he did, Therefore I shall not want; therefore I need not fear.

Collectively they are a flock. They are not, indeed, in one place. They are scattered abroad, dispersed through different ages and countries, separated by seas and mountains, and, too often, by misapprehensions and prejudices, by names and forms; and, only a very small part of the flock are known to each other. But they are all equally known to Him, and equally under His eye. In His view they are one flock, one body; they are animated by one and the same spirit; their views, hopes, and aims are the same; and, yet a little while, they shall be all brought together, a number without number, to rejoice and to join in worship, before His throne of glory. For they have an inheritance reserved for them in heaven ([I Peter 1:4, 5](#)), and they shall be safely kept, while they are sojourners upon earth, for the Shepherd of Israel is their Keeper.

III.

He shall feed His flock like a shepherd.

The word is not restrained to feeding. It includes all the branches of the shepherd's office. He shall act the part of a Shepherd to His flock. We have a beautiful miniature description, of what He has engaged to do, for His people, as their Shepherd, in the twenty-third Psalm. And the subject is more largely illustrated in the thirty-fourth chapter of Ezekiel's Prophecy. His sheep, from age to age, have been witnesses to the truth of His promises. He has a flock at present who rejoice in His care; and greater multitudes, as yet unborn, shall successively arise in their appointed seasons and call Him blessed ([Psalm 72:17](#)) For He is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

He feeds them.

He leads them into green and pleasant pastures. These pastures are His Word and Ordinances, by which He communicates to them of His own fulness; for, in strict propriety of speech, He Himself is their Food. They eat His Flesh and drink His blood ([John 6:54](#)) This was once thought a hard saying ([John 6:58-60](#)) by some of His professed followers, and is still thought so by too many. But it is His own saying, and, therefore, I am not concerned, either to conform, or to vindicate it. The knowledge they receive by faith, of His incarnation and sufferings unto death, of the names He bears, and of the offices and relations in which He is pleased to act for them, is the life and food of their souls. The expression of 'feeding them' is agreeable to the analogy He has been pleased to establish, between the natural and the spiritual life. As the strength of the body is maintained and renewed, by eating and drinking; so they, who, in this sense, feed upon Him in their hearts by faith with thanksgiving, even they live ([John 6:57](#)) by Him, for His flesh is meat indeed, and His blood is drink indeed.

He guides them.

First by His example. He has trodden the path of duty and trial before them; and they perceive and follow His footsteps. Again, by His Word and Spirit He teaches them the way in which they should go; and both inclines and enables them to walk in it ([Isaiah 30:21](#)) He guides them, likewise, by His Providence; He appoints the bounds of their habitations, the

line and calling in which they are to serve Him, and orders and adjusts the circumstances of their lives, according to His infinite wisdom, so as, finally, to accomplish His gracious designs in their favour.

He guards them.

It is written concerning Him, He shall stand and feed in the strength of the LORD , in the majesty of the name of the Lord His God ([Micah 5:4](#)) If we conceive of a flock of sheep feeding in the midst of wolves, who are restrained from breaking in upon them, not by any visible enclosure, but merely by the power of the shepherd's eye, which keeps them in awe at a distance, it will give us some idea of the situation of His people. He provides them food in the midst of many mighty enemies ([Psalm 23:3](#)) , who envy them their privilege; but cannot prevent it. If, for a single minute, He should withdraw His attention from the flock, they would be worried. But He has promised to keep them night and day ([Isaiah 27:3](#)) , and every moment; therefore their enemies plot and rage in vain. Their visible foes are numerous; but if we could look into the invisible world , and take a view of the subtlety, malice, machinations, and assiduity of the powers of darkness, who are incessantly watching for opportunities of annoying them, we should have a most striking conviction that a flock, so defenceless and feeble in themselves, and against which such a combination is formed, can only be kept by the power of God.

He heals them.

A good shepherd will examine the state of his flock. But there is no attention worthy of being compared with His flock. Not the slightest circumstance in their concerns, escapes His notice. When they are ready to faint, borne down with heavy exercises of mind, wearied with temptations, dry and disconsolate in their spirits, He seasonably revives them. Nor are they in heaviness without a need-be for it. All His dispensations towards them are medicinal, designed to correct, or to restrain, or to cure, the maladies of their souls. And they are adjusted, by His wisdom and tenderness, to what they can bear, and to what their case requires. It is He, likewise, who heals their bodily sickness, and gives them help in all their temporal trouble. He is represented to us, as counting their sighs ([Psalm 56:8](#)) , putting their tears into His bottle, recording their sorrows in His book of remembrance; and even, as being Himself touched with a feeling of their infirmities ([Hebrews 4:15](#)) , as the Head feels for the members of the Body.

He restores them.

The power and subtlety of their enemies, are employed to force, or entice them from His rule; and too often prevail for a season. The sheep turn aside into forbidden paths; and whenever they do, they would wander, farther and farther, till they were quite lost again, if He were not their Shepherd. If He permits them to deviate, He has a time, to convince them, that it was an evil and a bitter thing to forsake the LORD their Shepherd ([Jeremiah 2:19](#)) , and to humble them, and to bring them back. Thus they become more sensible of their own

weakness, and of the obligations to His gracious care; for He will not suffer their enemies to triumph over them. He will not lose one of His true flock; not one convinced sinner, who has, indeed, and in truth, surrendered and entrusted his all to Him. They must, and they shall, smart and mourn for their folly; but He will, in due season, break their snares, and lead them again into the paths of peace, for His own name's sake.

The flock are not all sheep. There are lambs among them These are especially mentioned, and for these He expresses a peculiar tenderness. He will gather them in His arm, and carry them in His bosom. Though they are weaklings, they shall not be left behind. This is a beautiful and pathetic [pitiful, piteous] image. If a poor lamb is weary, and unable to keep up with the flock, it shall be carried. This clause affords encouragement,

(1.)

To young people. Early serious impressions are often made upon the hearts of children, which we are to cherish, by directing their thoughts to the compassion of the Good Shepherd, who has said, Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the Kingdom of God ([Mark 10:14](#)). This high and holy One, who humbles Himself to notice the worship of the heavenly host, hears the prayers of worms upon the earth; and His ear is open to the prayers of a child, no less so, than to the prayer of a king.

(2.)

To Young converts. These, at whatever age, are children in the Lord's family, lambs in His flock. They are, as yet, weak, unsettled, and inexperienced. Almost every day brings them into a new and untried situation. They often meet with opposition and discouragement, where they have promised themselves help and countenance. Perhaps their nearest friends are displeased with them. They are liable, likewise, while they are enquiring the way to Zion, to be perplexed by the various opinions, and angry contentions, prevailing among the different religious persons, or parties, to whom they may address themselves. They are frequently discouraged by the falls and miscarriages of professors, some of whom, it is possible, they may have admired, and looked up to, as patterns for their own imitation. Add to these things, what they suffer from new and unexpected discoveries of the evil and deceitfulness of their hearts; the mistakes they commit, in judgment and practice, for want of a more solid and extensive knowledge of the Scriptures; and the advantage the great enemy of their souls derives from these their various difficulties to assault their peace, and obstruct their progress. What would become of them in such circumstances, if their faithful Shepherd had not promised to lead, and uphold them, with the arm of His power?

There is, likewise, particular mention made of those who are with young. These He will gently lead. If we take the word according to our version, it may signify a state of conviction, or trouble. Many are the afflictions of the righteous ([Psalm 34:19](#)), by which they are often wearied and heavy-laden. But when their spirits are overwhelmed within them, He knoweth their path. Jacob would not permit his cattle, that were with young, to be over-driven for

one day, lest they should die ([Genesis 33:13](#)) Much less will this Good Shepherd suffer the burdened, among His flock, to be hurried and tempted, beyond what they are able, or what He will enable them to bear.

But the word signifies, Those that have young, rather than those that are with young. Two sorts of persons in the Lord's flock, who come under this description, feel an especial need of His compassion, tenderness, and patience.

(1.)

He only knows the feelings of the hearts of parents. What solicitude and anxiety they have for their young ones, the sucklings, if I may so speak, of the flock, which mingle with all their endeavours, to manage rightly the important charge committed to them, and to bring their children up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

(2.)

Ministers, likewise, have painful exercises of mind. The Apostle Paul speaks of travailing in birth again, till Christ be formed in our hearers ([Galatians 4:19](#)) When we know of any newly-awakened, and begin to seek his salvation, how solicitous is our care to bring them forward, to comfort them, to warn them against the devices of their own hearts, and of their enemies! And how piercing our grief and disappointment, if they miscarry! How much is felt in sympathy for the trials of the flock! What wisdom, faithfulness, courage, meekness, and unction from on high, are necessary to the due discharge of what we owe to the flocks, of which we have the oversight! Who is sufficient for these things! And when we have done our best, our all, what defects and defilements have we to mourn over! But this is our great consolation, that He, who knows us, and leads us, considers our frame, and remembers that we are but dust.

In this delineation of the character and conduct of the Great Shepherd of the sheep ([Hebrews 13:20](#)), we have an affecting Exemplar and Pattern, for the imitation of those, who act in the honourable office of under-shepherd, and are called, by their profession and engagement, to feed His sheep and lambs. Whether there be any ministers in our assembly, or not, you will at least permit me to speak a word to my own heart; which may, I hope, at the same time, impress your minds with a sense of our great need of your prayers. Brethren, pray for us! ([I Thessalonians 5:25](#)); and pray to the Lord of the harvest, that He may send forth more faithful labourers into His harvest ([Matthew 9:38](#)); for it is His work alone. It is not absolutely necessary, that a minister of the Gospel should be in the first line, of those who are admired for their abilities or literature; much less that he should be distinguished by such titles, honours, and emoluments as this world can give. But it is necessary, and of the last importance, to his character and usefulness here, and to his acceptance in the great Day of the LORD, that he should have a shepherd's eye and a shepherd's heart. He must serve the flock, not for filthy lucre, or by constraint ([I Peter 5:2, 3](#)) — (that constraint, which the Apostle attributes to the love of Christ, only excepted) — but willingly, and with a view

to their edification. And he must, indeed, serve them, not acting as a lord over God's heritage, but as an example to the flock. Not preaching himself (II Corinthians 4:5) , perverting his sacred office to the purposes of ambition, or vain-glory, or the acquisition of wealth; but preaching Christ Jesus the Lord, and employing all his powers to turn sinners from the error of their ways. He who winneth souls is wise (Proverbs 11:30) If it be wisdom, to propose the noblest end, the faithful minister is wise; the end at which he aims, in subordination to the will and glory of God, is the salvation of souls; and the recovery of one immortal soul to the favour and image of God, is, and will at length be found, a greater and more important event, than the deliverance of a whole kingdom from slavery or temporal ruin.

If it be wisdom, to pursue a right end by the fittest means, he is wise; he knows the Gospel of Christ to be the power of God, the appointed, the effectual, the only sufficient means for accomplishing His great purpose; therefore, however unfashionable it may be, he is not ashamed of it, he preaches it, and he glories in it. If it be an effect of wisdom, not to be deterred from the prosecution of a great and noble design, by the censure and dislike of weak and incompetent judges, the faithful minister is truly wise. He loves his fellow-creatures, and would willingly please them for their good, but he cannot fear them, because he fears and serves the Lord. He looks forward, with desire, to the day of that solemn and general visitation, when the Shepherd and Bishop of souls shall Himself appear (I Peter 2:25) . And if he may then stand among those, who are pardoned and accepted in the Beloved, and receive the crown of life, which his Lord has promised to them that love Him (II Timothy 4:8) —this thought fully reconciles him to the trials of his situation; and however depreciated, misrepresented, opposed, or ill-treated here, he can say, None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the Gospel of the grace of God (Acts 20:24)

There is a counterpart to this character, described by the prophets in strong and glowing language. There are idle shepherds, who feed not the flock, but themselves (Ezekiel 34:2); who neither attempt to heal the sick, to strengthen the feeble, to bind up that which is broken, nor to recover that which has been driven away. Shepherds who cannot understand, greedy, lovers of gain —and who, by a change of metaphor, are compared to slumbering watchmen, and dumb dogs that cannot bark (Isaiah 56:10, 11) . The New Testament teaches us to expect that such persons, under the name of ministers, will be found, likewise, in the visible Church of Christ. Men of corrupt minds, destitute of the truth, who serve not the Lord Jesus, but their own belly (I Timothy 6:5; Romans 16:18) . Men who are of the world (I John 4:5) and speak of the world, and therefore the world hears and favours them. But alas —neither the wretched slave who toils at the galley-oar, nor he that is doomed to labour in a deep mine, where the light of the sun never reaches him; nor the lunatic who howls in a chain, are such emphatical [striking] objects of our compassion, as the unhappy man, who prostitutes the

name and function of a minister of Christ, to the gratification of his pride and avarice; and the whole object, is not the welfare of the flock, but the possession of the fleece. Who intrudes into the post of a watchman, but gives no alarm of the impending danger ([Ezekiel 33:7, 8](#)) . If the Scriptures be true; if the Gospel be not, indeed, as Pope Leo the tenth, profanely styled it, a lucrative fable; the more he accumulates riches, the more he rises in dignity, the more his influence extends, the more he is to be commiserated. He may have the reward he seeks. He may be admired and flattered; he may, for a season, be permitted to withstand and discountenance the efforts of the Lord's faithful servants; he may shine in the accomplishments of a scholar or a courtier. But nothing less than repentance, and faith in the Redeemer, whose name and cause he has dishonoured, can finally screen him from the full effect of that terrible denunciation — Woe to the idle shepherd that forsaketh [neglects] the flock: The sword shall be upon his arm, and upon his right eye: His arm shall be clean dried up, and his right eye shall be utterly darkened ([Zechariah 11:17](#))

— O —

Sermon XIV

Rest for the Weary

[Matthew 11:28](#)

Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden,
and I will give you rest.

Which shall we admire most — the majesty, or the grace, conspicuous in this invitation? How soon would the greatest earthly monarch be impoverished, and his treasures utterly exhausted, if all, that are poor and miserable, had encouragement to apply freely to him, with a promise of relief, fully answerable to their wants and wishes! But the riches of Christ are unsearchable and inexhaustible. If millions and millions of distressed sinners seek to Him for relief, He has a sufficiency for them all. His mercy is infinite to pardon all their sins; His grace is infinite, to answer and exceed their utmost desires; His power is infinite, to help them in all their difficulties. A number, without number, have been thus waiting upon Him, from age to age; and not one of them has been sent away disappointed and empty. And the streams of His bounty are still flowing, and still full. Thus the sun, His brightest material image, has been the source of light to the earth, and to all its inhabitants, from the creation; and will be equally so to all succeeding generations, till time shall be no more. There is, indeed, an appointed hour, when the sun shall cease to shine, and the course of nature shall fail. But the true Sun, the Sun of Righteousness has no variableness or shadow of turning ([Malachi 4:2](#) ; [James 1:17](#)) ; and they who depend upon Him, while in this world, shall rejoice in His light forever. Can we hesitate to accept of these words, as affording a full proof of the divine character, the proper Godhead of our Lord and Saviour; supposing only, that He meant what He said, and that He is able to make His promise good? Can a creature, however excellent and glorious, use this language? Can a creature discharge the debts, soothe the distresses, and satisfy the desires of every individual who looks to him? Who but the Lord God can raise up all that are bowed down, and comfort all that mourn? ([Psalm 146:8](#); [Isaiah 61:2](#)).

Again, as is His majesty, so is His mercy. In acts of grace amongst men, there are always some limitations. If a king proclaims a pardon to a rebellious nation, there are still exceptions. Some ringleaders are excluded. Either their crimes were too great to be forgiven, or their obstinacy, or influence, are supposed to be too great, to render their safety consistent with the safety of the State. But the Saviour excludes none, but those who wilfully exclude themselves. As no case is too hard for His power, so no person who applies to Him is shut out from His compassion. Him that cometh to Him, whatever his former character or conduct may have been, He will in no wise cast out ([John 6:37](#)) This glorious exercise of sovereign mercy, is no less a divine attribute, than the power, by which He created the heavens and the earth. It is the consideration of His mercy in pardoning sin, and saving sinners, which

causes that admiring exclamation of the Prophet, Who is a God like unto Thee? ([Micah 7:18](#))

This passage (including the two following verses) closes the first part of the Oratorio . In tracing the series of the Scriptures thus far, we have considered several signal prophecies which foretold His appearance; we have seen their accomplishment in His birth, and have (I hope) joined with the heavenly host, in ascribing glory to God in the highest, for this unspeakable gift and effect of His love. From the prophets we have learnt His characters, as the great Restorer, and the great Shepherd. The Evangelist proposes Him to our meditation here, in a gracious and inviting attitude, as opening His high commission, proclaiming His own sovereignty and power, and declaring His compassionate purpose and readiness, to give refreshment and rest to the weary and heavy laden.

The principal points in the text are, the Invitation and the Promise.

I.

The Invitation is expressed in very general terms. Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden. There is no qualifying or restraining clause, to discharge any person who is willing to accept it. Whoever hath an ear to hear, let him hear. Let him that is athirst come, and whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely ([Revelation 22:17](#)) I cannot doubt, but these words authorize me to address myself to every person in the assembly. I speak first to you, who are spending your money for that which satisfieth not ([Isaiah 55:2](#)) : who are wearied in seeking happiness where it is not to be found, and in digging pits, and hewing out cisterns for yourselves, which will hold no water ([Jeremiah 2:13](#)) , and have hitherto been regardless of the fountain of living waters, which is always near you. While you are pursuing the wealth, or honours, of this world, or wasting your time and strength, in the indulgence of sensual appetites, and look no higher, are you, indeed, happy and satisfied? Do you find the paths in which you are led, or rather hurried and driven on, to be the paths of pleasantness and peace? ([Proverbs 3:17](#)) With what face can you charge the professors of religion with hypocrisy, if you pretend to satisfaction in these ways? We have trodden them far enough ourselves, to be assured that there are feelings in your heart which contradict your assertion. You know that you are not happy, and we know it likewise. Are you quite strangers to a secret wish, that you had never been born? Or that you could change condition with some of the brute creation? Are you not heavy laden, burdened with guilt, and fears, and forebodings; harassed with crosses, disappointments, and mortifications? Are you not often, at least sometimes, like children in the dark, afraid of being alone; unable to support the reflections which are forced upon you in a solitary hour, when you have nothing to amuse you? And while you seem so alert, and upon the wing, after every kind of dissipation within your reach, is not a chief motive that impels you, a desire, if possible, of hiding yourselves from yourselves, and of calling off your attention from those thoughts, which, like vultures, are ready to seize you, and prey upon you, the moment they find you unem-

ployed. And how often do your poor expedients fail you, especially in a time of trouble, or on a sick bed? What comfort does the world afford you then? What relief do you then derive from the companions of your vain and gay hours? Most probably, at such a season, they stand aloof from you; the house of mourning, or the chamber of sickness, are no less unpleasing to them, than to yourself. They do not choose the pain of being reminded, by a sight of your distress, how soon the case may be their own. Or, if they visit you, you find them miserable comforters. But I have to speak to you of One, who is able to comfort you in all seasons, and under all circumstances; whose favour is better than life. And will you still refuse to hear His voice? What hard thing does the Lord require of you? Only to come to Him, for that peace and rest, to which you have hitherto been strangers. But though you are invited, I know that of yourselves you will not come; you will not, and, therefore, you cannot. Be assured, however, the invitation does not mock you; and if you finally refuse it, the fault will lie at your own doors. But may I not hope that you will refuse no longer? The preaching of the Gospel is His appointment, and has a great effect, when accompanied with His Holy Spirit, to make a willing people in the day of His power.

There are others, however, to whom this invitation speaks more directly. The convinced sinner is heavy laden with the guilt of sin, and wearied with ineffectual strivings against it. He is weary of the yoke and burden of the law, when he can neither answer its commands with cheerful and acceptable obedience, nor see any way of escaping the penalty which is due to transgressors. He sighs earnestly and anxiously for pardon and liberty. If he has an interval of comparative peace and hope, it is more derived from some occasional fervour and liveliness in the frame of his spirit, than from the exercise of faith; and, therefore, as that fervour abates, (and it will not always remain at the same height) his fears return. If, in such a favoured moment, he feels little solicitation, or trouble, from the evil propensities of his heart, he is willing to hope they are subdued, and that they will trouble him no more; but his triumph is short, the next return of temptation revives all his difficulties, and he is again brought into bondage. For nothing but the knowledge of the Saviour, and the supplies of His Spirit, can give stable peace to the mind, or victory over sin. A repetition of these disappointments and changes, fixes a heavy burden and distress upon the mind. But here is help provided exactly suitable to the case. Comply with this invitation, Come to Him, and He will surely give you rest.

But what is it to come to Christ? It is, to believe in Him, to apply to Him, to make His invitation and promise, our ground and warrant for putting our trust in Him. On another occasion, He said, He that cometh to me shall never hunger, and he that believeth in me shall never thirst ([John 6:35](#)). The expressions are of the same import. When He was upon earth, many who came to Him, and even followed Him for a season, received no saving benefit from Him. Some came to Him from motives of malice and ill will, to ensnare or insult Him. Some followed Him for loaves and fishes. And of others, who were frequently near

Him, He complained, Ye will not come to me, that ye might have life ([John 5:40](#)) But they who were distressed and came to Him for relief, were not disappointed. To come to Him, therefore, implies a knowledge of His power, and an application for His help. To us He is not visible, but He is always near us. And as He appointed His disciples to meet Him in Galilee ([Matthew 28:16](#)) , previous to His ascension, so He has promised to be found of those who seek Him, and wait for Him, in certain means of His own institution. He is seated upon a Throne of Grace; He is to be sought in His Word, and where His people assemble in His name; for He has said, There will I be in the midst of them ([Matthew 18:20](#)) . They, therefore, who read His Word, frequent His ordinances and pray unto Him with a desire that they may know Him, and be remembered with the favour which He bears to His own people ([Psalm 106:4](#)) , answer the design of my text. They come to Him, and He assures them that, whoever they are, He will in no wise cast them out. If they thus come to Him, they will of course come out from the world and be separate ([II Cor. 6:17](#)) . If they apply to Him for refuge, they will renounce all other refuge and dependence, and trust in Him alone; according to the words of the Prophet, Asshur shall not save us; we will not ride upon horses: neither will we say any more to the works of our hands, Ye are our gods: for in Thee the fatherless (the helpless and comfortless) findeth mercy ([Hosea 14:3](#))

II.

The promise is, I will give you * rest. The word signifies both rest and refreshment. He gives a relief and cessation from former labour and bondage; and super-adds a peace, a joy, a comfort, which revives the weary spirit, and proves itself to be that very satisfaction which the soul had been ignorantly, and in vain, seeking, amongst the creatures, and objects of sense.

* Compare [I Corinthians 16:18](#) ; [II Corinthians 7:13](#) ; Philemon verse 7

This rest includes a freedom from the forebodings and distressing accusations of a guilty conscience; from the long and fruitless struggle between the will and the judgment; from the condemning power of the law; from the tyranny of irregular and inconsistent appetites; and from the dominion of pride and self, which make us unhappy in ourselves, and hated and despised by others. A freedom, likewise, from the cares and anxieties, which, in such an uncertain world as this, disquiet the minds of those who have no solid scriptural dependence upon God; and especially a freedom from the dread of death, and of the things which are beyond it. In these and other respects, the believer in Jesus enters into a present rest. He is under the guidance of infinite wisdom, and the protection of almighty power; he is permitted to cast all his cares upon the Lord ([I Peter 5:7](#)) , and is assured that the Lord cares for him. So far as he possesses by faith the spirit and liberty of his high calling, he is in perfect peace. The Prophet Jeremiah has given a beautiful description and illustration of this rest of a believer ([Jeremiah 17:5-8](#)) ; which is rendered more striking, by being contrasted with the miserable state of those who live without God in the world. Thus saith the LORD ,

Cursed is the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the LORD . For he shall be like the heath in the desert, and shall not see when good cometh, but shall inhabit the parched places of the wilderness, in a salt land not inhabited. But, blessed is the man that trusteth in the LORD , and whose hope the LORD is. For he shall be like a tree planted by the waters, and that spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall not see when heat cometh, but her leaf shall be green, and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit.

But besides rest , there is refreshment. There are pleasures and consolations, in that intercourse and communion with God, to which we are invited by the Gospel; which, both in kind and degree, are unspeakably superior to all that the world can bestow, and such as the world cannot deprive us of. For they have no necessary dependence upon outward situation or circumstances; they are compatible with poverty, sickness, and sufferings. They are often most sensibly sweet and lively, when the streams of creature comfort are at the lowest ebb. Many have been able to say with the Apostle, As the sufferings of Christ (those which we endure for His sake, or submit to from His hand) abound in us, so our consolation in Christ also aboundeth ([II Corinthians 1:5](#)) . The all-sufficient God, can increase these communications of comfort from Himself, to a degree beyond our ordinary conception; so as not only to support His people, under the most exquisite pains, but even to suspend and overpower all sense of pain, when the torment would otherwise be extreme. And He has sometimes been pleased to honour the fidelity of His servants, and to manifest His own faithfulness to them, by such an interposition. Our own martyrology affords one well-attested instance—that of Mr. Bainham, who suffered in the reign of Queen Mary. When he was in the fire, he addressed himself to his persecutors, to this effect: “You call for miracles in proof of our doctrine, now, behold one; I feel no more pain from these flames, than if I was laid upon a bed of roses.” But in ordinary cases, and in all cases, they who taste how good the Lord is to them that seek Him, how He cheers them with the light of His countenance, and what supports He affords them in the hour of need, can without regret, part with the poor perishing pleasures of sin, and encounter all the difficulties they meet with in the path of duty. Whatever their profession of His name, and their attachment to His cause, may have cost them, they will acknowledge that it has made them ample amends.

Come therefore unto Him, venture upon His gracious Word, and you shall find rest for your souls! Can the world out-bid this gracious offer? Can the world promise to give you rest, when you are burdened with trouble? When your cisterns fail, and your gourds wither? Or when you are terrified with the approach of death, when your pulse intermits, when you are about to take a final farewell of all you ever saw with your eyes, and an awful, unknown, untried, unchangeable eternity is opening upon your view. Such a moment most certainly awaits you; and when it arrives, if you die in your senses, and are not judicially given up to hardness and blindness of heart, you will assuredly tremble, if you never trembled before.

Oh! be persuaded; may the Lord Himself persuade you to be timely wise, to seek Him now, while He is yet near. Lest that dreadful threatening should be your portion: Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh ([Proverbs 1:24, 26](#))

— O —

Sermon XV

Messiah's Easy Yoke

[Matthew 11: 29, 30](#)

Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart:

and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

Though the influence of education and example, may dispose us to acknowledge the Gospel to be a revelation from God; it can only be rightly understood, or duly prized, by those persons who feel themselves in the circumstances of distress, which it is designed to relieve. No Israelite would think of fleeing to a city of refuge ([Joshua 20:2. 3](#)), till, by having unwittingly slain a man, he was exposed to the resentment of the next of kin, the legal avenger of blood; but then, a sense of his danger, would induce him readily to avail himself of the appointed method of safety. The skill of a physician may be acknowledged, in general terms, by many; but he is applied to, only by the sick ([Matthew 9:12](#)). Thus our Saviour's gracious invitation to come to Him for rest, will be little regarded, till we really feel ourselves weary and heavy laden. This is a principal reason why the Gospel is heard with so much indifference. For though sin be a grievous illness, and a hard bondage, yet one effect of it is, a strange stupidity and infatuation, which renders us (like a person in a delirium) insensible of our true state. It is a happy time, when the Holy Spirit, by His convincing power, removes that stupor, which, while it prevents us from fully perceiving our misery, renders us likewise indifferent to the only mean of deliverance. Such a conviction of the guilt, and desert of sin, is the first hopeful symptom in a sinner's case; but it is necessarily painful and distressing. It is not pleasant to be weary and heavy laden; but it awakens our attention to Him who says, Come unto me, and I will give you rest, and makes us willing to take His yoke upon us.

Oxen are yoked to labour. From hence the yoke is a figurative expression to denote servitude. Our Lord seems to use it here, both to intimate our natural prejudices against His service, and to obviate them. Though He submitted to sufferings, reproach, and death, for our sakes; though He invites us, not because He has need of us, but because we have need of Him, and cannot be happy without Him, yet our ungrateful hearts think unkindly of Him. We conceive of Him as a hard Master; and suppose, that if we engage ourselves to Him, we must bid farewell to pleasure, and live under a continual constraint. His rule is deemed too strict, His laws too severe; and we imagine that we could be more happy upon our own plans, than by acceding to His. Such unjust, unfriendly, and dishonourable thoughts of Him, whose heart is full of tenderness, whose bowels melt with love, are strong proofs of our baseness, blindness, and depravity; yet still He continues His invitation, Come unto me—as if He had said, “Be not afraid of me. Only make the experiment, and you shall find, that what you have accounted my yoke is true liberty; and that in my service, which you have avoided as burdensome, there is no burden at all; for my ways are ways of pleasantness,

and all my paths are peace.” I have a good hope, that many of my hearers can testify from their own happy experience, that (according to the beautiful expression in our liturgy) His service is perfect freedom.

If we are really Christians, Jesus is our Master, our Lord, and we are His servants. It is in vain to call Him, Lord, Lord ([Luke 6:46](#)), unless we keep His commandments. They who know Him will love Him; and they who love Him, will desire to please Him, not by a course of service of their own devising, but by accepting His revealed will, as the standard and rule, to every part of which, they endeavour to conform in their tempers, and in their conduct. He is, likewise, our Master in another sense; that is, He is our great Teacher; if we submit to Him as such, we are His disciples or scholars. We cannot serve Him acceptably, unless we are taught by Him. The philosophers of old had their disciples, who imbibed their sentiments, and were therefore called after their names, as the Pythagoreans and Platonists, from * Pythagoras and * Plato. The general name of Christians, which was first assumed by the believers at Antioch ([Acts 11:26](#)) (possibly by divine directions) intimates that they are the professed disciples of Christ. If we wish to be truly wise, to be wise unto salvation, we must apply to Him. For in this sense, the disciple or scholar, cannot be above his Master ([Luke 6:40](#)) We can learn of men no more than they can teach us. But He says, Learn of me; and He cautions us against calling anyone “master,” upon earth. He does, indeed, instruct His people by ministers and instruments; but unless He is pleased to super-add His influence, what we seem to learn from them only, will profit us but little. Nor are the best of them so thoroughly furnished, nor so free from mistake, as to deserve our implicit confidence. But they whom He descends to teach, shall learn what no instruction, merely human, can impart. Let us consider the peculiar, the unspeakable, advantages of being His scholars.

* Pythagoras - Greek philosopher and mathematician (approx. 569 –475 BC)

* Plato - Greek philosopher (approx 429–347 BC)

(1.)

In the first place, this great Teacher can give the capacity, requisite to the reception of His sublime instructions. There is no respect of excelling in human arts and sciences, without a previous, natural ability, suited to the subject. For instance, if a person has not an ear and taste for music, he will make but small proficiency under the best masters. It will be the same with respect to the mathematics, or any branch of science. A skilful master may improve and inform the scholar, if he be rightly disposed to learn; but he cannot communicate the disposition. But Jesus can open and enliven the dullest mind; He teaches the blind to see, and the deaf to hear. By nature we are intractable, and incapable of relishing divine truth, however advantageously proposed to us, by men like ourselves. But happy are His scholars! He enables them to surmount all difficulties. He takes away the heart of stone, subdues the most obstinate prejudices, enlightens the dark understanding, and inspires a genius, and a

taste, for the sublime [resplendent, noble] and interesting lessons He proposes to them. In this respect, as in every other, there is none teacheth like Him ([Job 36:22](#))

(2.)

He teaches the most important things . The subjects of human science are, comparatively, trivial and insignificant. We may be safely ignorant of them all. And we may acquire the knowledge of them all, without being wiser, or better, with respect to the concerns of our true happiness. Experience and observation abundantly confirm the remark of Solomon, That he who increases knowledge increases sorrow. The eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear with hearing ([Ecclesiastes 1:8, 18](#)) . Unless the heart be seasoned and sanctified by grace, the sum total of all other acquisitions, is but vanity and vexation of spirit ([Ecclesiastes 2:17](#)) . Human learning will neither support the mind under trouble, nor weaken its attachment to worldly things, nor control its impetuous passions, nor overcome the fear of death. The confession of the learned * Grotius, towards the close of life spent in literary pursuits, is much more generally known, than properly attended to. He had deservedly a great name and reputation as a scholar; but his own reflection upon the result of his labours, expresses what he learnt, not from his books, and ordinary course of his studies, but from the Teacher I am commending to you. He lived to leave his testimony for the admonition of the learned, or to this effect. Ah, vitam profus perdidit nihil agendo laboriose. “Alas! I have wasted my whole life, in taking much pains to no purpose.” But Jesus makes His scholars wise unto eternal life, and reveals that knowledge to babes, to persons of weak and confined abilities, of which, the wisdom of the world can form no idea.

* Hugo Grotius (1583-1645) [Hugo, Huigh or Hugeianus de Groot] was a towering figure in philosophy, law, political theory and associated fields during the seventeenth century and for hundreds of years afterwards.

(3.)

Other teachers, as I have already hinted, can only inform the head ; but His instruction influences the heart. Moral philosophers, as they are called, abound in fine words and plausible speeches, concerning the beauty of virtue, the fitness of things, temperance, benevolence, and equity. And their scholars learn to talk after them. But their fine and admired sentiments, are mere empty notions, destitute of life and efficacy, and frequently leave them as much under the tyranny of pride, passion, sensuality, envy, and malice, as any of the vulgar whom they despise for their ignorance. It is well known, to the disgrace of the morality which the world applauds, that some of their most admired sentimental writers, and teachers, have deserved to be numbered among the most abandoned and despicable of mankind. They have been slaves to the basest and most degrading appetites, and the tenor of their lives has been a marked contradiction to their fine-spun theories. But Jesus Christ effectually teaches His disciples to forsake and abhor whatever is contrary to rectitude or purity; and inspires them with love, power, and a sound mind. And if they do not talk of

great things, they are enabled to perform them. Their lives are exemplary and useful, their deaths comfortable, and their memory is precious.

(4.)

The disciples of Jesus are, or may be, always learning. His providence and wisdom have so disposed things, in subservience to the purposes of His grace, that the whole world around them is a great school, and the events of every day, with which they are connected, have a tendency and suitability, if rightly improved [used to profit], to promote their instruction. Heavenly lessons are taught and illustrated by earthly objects; nor are we capable of understanding them at present, unless the mode of instruction be thus accommodated to our situation and weakness. The Scripture ([John 3:12](#)) points out to us a wonderful and beautiful analogy between the outward visible world of nature, and that spiritual state which is called the Kingdom of God; the former is like a book written in cypher, to which the Scripture is the key, which when we obtain, we have the other opened to us. Thus wherever they look, some object presents itself, which is adapted, either, to lead their thoughts directly to Jesus, or to explain or confirm some passage in His Word. So, likewise, the incidents of human life, the characters we know, the conversations we hear, the vicissitudes which take place in families, cities, and nations; in a word, the occurrences, which furnish the history of every day, afford a perpetual commentary on what the Scriptures teach, concerning the heart of man, and the state of the world as subject to vanity, and lying in wickedness; and thereby the great truths, which it behoves us to understand and remember, are more repeatedly and forcibly exhibited before our eyes, and brought home to our bosoms. It is the peculiar advantage of the disciples of Christ, that their lessons are always before them, and their Master always with them.

(5.)

Men who are otherwise competently qualified for teaching, in the branches of science they profess, often discourage and intimidate their scholars, by the impatience, austerity, and distance of their manner. They fail in that condescension and gentleness, which are necessary to engage the attention and affection of the timid and the volatile; or, gradually to soften and to shame the perverse. Even Moses, though eminent for his forbearance towards the obstinate people committed to his care, and though he loved them and longed for their welfare, was, at times, almost wearied by them ([Numbers 11:11, 12](#)) But Jesus, who knows beforehand the weakness, the dullness, and the refractoriness [obstinacy; stubbornness] of those whom He deigns to teach, to prevent their fears, is pleased to say, Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly. With what meekness did He converse among His disciples, while He was with them upon earth! He allowed them, at all times, a gracious freedom of access. He bore with their mistakes, reprov'd and corrected them with the greatest mildness, and taught them as they were able to bear, with a kind accommodation to their prejudices; leading them on, step by step, and waiting for the proper season of unfolding to them, those more difficult

points, which, for a time, appeared to them to be hard sayings. And though He be now exalted upon His glorious Throne and clothed with majesty, still His heart is made of tenderness, and His compassions still abound. We are still directed to think of Him, not as one who cannot be touched with a feeling of our infirmities, but as exercising the same patience and sympathy towards His disciples now, which so signally marked His character, during His state of humiliation. The compliment of the orator to a Roman emperor, though excessive and absurd, when addressed to a sinful worm, that they who durst speak to him, were ignorant of his greatness; and they who durst not, were equally ignorant of his goodness, is a just and literal truth, if applied to our meek and gracious Saviour. If we duly consider His greatness alone, it seems almost presumptuous in such creatures as we are, to dare to take His holy name upon our polluted lips; but then, if we have a proportional sense of His unbounded goodness and grace, every difficulty is overruled, and we feel a liberty of drawing near to Him, though with reverence, and with the confidence of children, when they speak to and affectionate parent.

A person may be meek, though in an elevated situation of life; but Jesus was likewise lowly. There was nothing in His external appearance, to intimidate the poor and the miserable from coming to Him. He was lowly or humble. Custom, which fixes the force and acceptance of words, will not readily allow us to speak of humility, as applicable to the great God. Yet it is said, He humbled Himself to behold the things that are in heaven, and in earth ([Psalm 113:6](#)) . Humility, in strictness of speech, is an attribute of magnanimity; and indifference to the little distinctions by which weak and vulgar minds are effected. In the view of the High and Holy One who inhabits eternity ([Isaiah 57:15](#)) , all distinctions that can obtain among creatures vanish; and He humbles Himself no less to notice the worship of an angel, than the fall of a sparrow to the ground. But we more usually express this idea by the term condescension . Such was the mind that was in Christ ([Philippians 2:5](#)) . It belonged to His dignity, as Lord of all, to look with an equal eye upon all His creatures. None could recommend themselves to Him, by their rank, wealth or abilities, the gifts of His own bounty; none were excluded from His regard, by the want of those things which are in estimation among men. And to stain the pride of human glory, He was pleased to assume an humble state. Though He was rich, He made Himself poor ([II Corinthians 8:9](#)) , for the sake of those whom He came into the world to save. In this respect, He teaches us by His example. He took upon Him the form of a servant ([Philippians 2:7](#)) , a poor and obscure man, to abase our pride, to cure us of selfishness, and to reconcile us to the cross.

The happy effect of His instructions upon those who receive them, is, Rest to their souls. This has been spoken to before; but as it is repeated in the text, I shall not entirely pass it over here.

He gives rest to our souls

— By restoring us to our proper state of dependence upon God. A state of reconciliation and peace, and deliverance from guilt and fear. A state of subjection; for until our wills are duly subjected to the will of God, we can have no rest.

— By showing us the vanity of the world, and thereby putting an end to our wearisome desires and pursuits after things uncertain, frequently unattainable, always unsatisfying.

— By a communication of sublimer [more resplendent, more noble] pleasures and hopes, than the present state of things can possibly afford. And, lastly,

— By furnishing us with those aids, motives, and encouragements, which make our duty desirable, practicable, and pleasant.

How truly then may it be said, that His yoke is easy, and His burden light! It is such a burden, as wings are to a bird, raising the soul above the low and grovelling attachments, to which it was once confined. Only they who are capable of contrasting it, with the distractions and miseries, the remorse and forebodings, of those who live without God in the world, can rightly judge of the value of this rest.

But we are all by profession, His scholars. Ought we not seriously to enquire, what we have actually learned from Him? Surely the proud, the haughty, the voluptuous, and the worldly, though they have heard of His name, and may have attended on His institutions, have not hitherto sat at His feet, or drank of His Spirit. It requires no long train of examination to determine whether you have entered into His rest, or not. Or, if you have not yet attained it, whether you are seeking it in the ways of His appointment. It is a rest for the soul, it is a spiritual blessing, and therefore does not necessarily depend upon external circumstances. Without this rest, you must be restless and comfortless, in a palace if you have it, you may be, at least comparatively, happy in a dungeon Today, if not before today, while it is called today, hear His voice; and while He says to you by His Word, Come unto me, and learn of me, let your hearts answer, Behold we come unto Thee, for Thou art the LORD our God ([Jeremiah 3:22](#))

— O —

Sermon XVI

The Lamb of God, the Great Atonement

[John 1:29](#)

Behold the Lamb of God,
which taketh away the sin of the world!

Great and marvellous are the works of the LORD God almighty! We live in the midst of them, and the little impression they make upon us, sufficiently proves our depravity. He is great in the very smallest; and there is not a plant, flower, or insect, but bears the signature of infinite wisdom and power. How sensibly then should we be affected by the consideration of the Whole, if sin had not blinded our understandings, and hardened our hearts! In the beginning, when all was dark, unformed, and waste, His powerful Word produced light, life, beauty, and order. He commanded the sun to shine, and the planets to roll. The immensity of creation is far beyond the reach of our conceptions. The innumerable stars, the worlds, which however large in themselves, are, from their remoteness, but barely visible, to us are of little more immediate, and known use, than to enlarge our idea of the greatness of their Author. Small, indeed, is the knowledge we have of our own system; but we know enough to render our indifference inexcusable. The glory of the sun must strike every eye, and in this enlightened age, there are few persons, but have some ideas of the magnitude of the planets, and the rapidity, and regularity of their motions. Farther, the rich variety which adorns this lower creation, the dependence and relation of the several parts, and their general subservience to the accommodation of man, the principal inhabitant, together with the preservation of individuals, and the continuance of every species of animals, are subjects, not above the reach of common capacities, and which afford almost endless and infinite scope for reflection and admiration. But the bulk of mankind regard them not. The vicissitudes of day and night, and of the revolving seasons, are, to them, matters of course; as if they followed each other without either cause or design. And though the philosophers, who, professedly, attach themselves to the study of the works of nature, are overwhelmed by the traces of a wisdom and arrangement, which they are unable to comprehend; yet few of them are led to reverential thoughts of God, by their boasted knowledge of His creatures. Thus men live without God in the world, though they live, and move, and have their being in Him, and are incessantly surrounded, by the most striking proofs of His presence and energy. Perhaps an earthquake, or a hurricane, by awakening their fears, may force upon their minds a conviction of His power over them, and excite an occasional momentary application to Him; but when they think the danger over, they relapse into their former stupidity.

What can engage the attention, or soften the obduracy, of such creatures? Behold, one wonder more, greater than all the former; the last, the highest effect of divine goodness! God has so loved rebellious, ungrateful sinners, as to appoint them a Saviour in the person of His only Son. The prophets foresaw His manifestation in the flesh, and foretold the happy

consequences —that His presence would change the wilderness into a fruitful field, that He was coming to give sight to the blind, and life to the dead; to set the captive at liberty; to unloose the heavy burden; and to bless the weary with rest. But this change was not to be wrought merely by a word of power, as when He said, Let there be light, and there was light ([Genesis 1:3](#)) It was great, to speak the world from nothing; but far greater, to redeem sinners from misery. The salvation, of which He is the Author, though free to us, must cost Him dear. Before the mercy of God can be actually dispensed to such offenders, the rights of His justice, the demands of His law, and the honour of His government, must be provided for. The early institution and long continued use, of sacrifices, had clearly pointed out the necessity of an atonement; but the real and proper Atonement could only be made by MESSIAH. The blood of slaughtered animals could not take away sin, nor display the righteousness of God in pardoning it. This was the appointed, covenanted work of MESSIAH, and He alone could perform it. With this view He had said, Lo I come ([Psalm 40:7](#)) . And it was in this view, when John saw Him, that he pointed Him out to his disciples, saying, Behold the Lamb of God!

Three points offer to our consideration,

I. The title here given to MESSIAH, The Lamb of God.

II. The efficacy of His sacrifice, He takes away sin.

III. The extent of it, The sin of the world

I.

He is the Lamb of God. The paschal lamb, and the lambs which were daily offered, morning and evening, according to the law of Moses, were of God's appointment; but this Lamb was, likewise, of His providing. The others were but types [prophetic symbols]. Though many, they were all insufficient to cleanse the offerers from guilt ([Hebrews 10:1](#)) ; and they were all superseded, when MESSIAH, by the one offering of Himself, once for all, made an end of sin, and brought in an everlasting righteousness, in favour of all who believe in His name.

This title, therefore, The Lamb of God, refers to His voluntary substitution for sinners, that by His sufferings and death, they who deserved to die, might obtain eternal life through Him, and for His sake. Mankind were universally chargeable with transgression of the law of God, and were in a state of alienation from Him. A penalty, in case of disobedience, was annexed to the law they had broken; to which, they, as offenders, were therefore obnoxious. Though it would be presumptuous in such worms as we are, to determine, upon principles of our own, whether the sovereign Judge of the universe could, consistently with His own glory, remit this penalty without satisfaction, or not; yet, since He has favoured us with a revelation of His will upon this point, we may speak more confidently, and affirm that it was not consistent with His truth and holiness, and that of His moral government to do it, because this is His own declaration. We may now be assured, that the forgiveness of one

sinner, and, indeed, of one sin, by an act of mere mercy, and without any interposing consideration, was incompatible with the inflexibility of the law, and the truth and justice of the Lawgiver. But mercy designed the forgiveness of innumerable sinners, each of them charged with innumerable sins. And the declaration, that God is thus merciful, was to be recorded and publicly known, through a long succession of ages, and to extend to sins not yet committed. An act of grace so general and unreserved, might lead men (not to speak of superior intelligences) to disparaging thoughts of the holiness of God, and might even encourage them to sin with hope of impunity, if not connected with some provision, which might show, that the exercise of His mercy was in full harmony with the honour of all His perfections. How God could be just, and yet justify those whom His own righteous constitution condemned, was a difficulty too great for finite understandings to solve ([Romans 3:26](#)) But herein is God glorious. His wisdom propounded, and His love afforded, the adequate, the only possible expedient. He revealed to our first parents His purpose, which in the fulness of time He accomplished, of sending forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem sinners from the curse of the law ([Galatians 4:4, 5](#)), by sustaining it for them. Considering the dignity of His person, and the perfection of His obedience, His sufferings and death for sins not His own, displayed the heinousness of sin, and the severe displeasure of God against it, in a much stronger light, than the execution of the sentence upon the offenders could possibly do. It displays, likewise, the justice of this sentence, since neither the dignity, nor the holiness of the Surety, could exempt Him from suffering; and that though He was the Beloved of God, He was not spared. This is what I understand by atonement and satisfaction for sin.

II.

The efficacy of this Atonement is complete. The Lamb of God, thus slain, takes away sin; both with respect to its guilt, and its defilement. The Israelites, by looking to the brazen serpent ([Numbers 21:9](#)), were saved from death and healed of their wounds. The Lamb of God is an object, proposed not to our bodily sight, but to the eye of the mind, which indeed, in fallen man, is naturally blind; but the Gospel message, enlivened by the powerful agency of the Holy Spirit, is appointed to open it. He who thus sees the Son, and believes on Him ([John 6:40](#)), is delivered from guilt and condemnation, is justified from all sin. He is warranted to plead the sufferings of the Lamb of God in bar of his own; the whole of the Saviour's obedience unto death, as the ground and title of his acceptance unto life. Guilt or obnoxiousness to punishment being removed, the soul has an open way of access to God, and is prepared to receive blessings from Him. For as the sun, the fountain of light, fills the eye that was before blind, the instant it receives sight; so God, who is the Fountain of Goodness, enlightens all His intelligent creatures according to their capacity, unless they are blinded by sin, and rendered incapable of communion with Him. The Saviour is now received and enthroned in the heart, and from His fulness, the life of grace is derived and maintained.

Thus not only the guilt, but the love of sin, and its dominion, are taken away, subdued by grace, and cordially [sincerely] renounced by the believing, pardoned sinner. The blood, which frees him from distress, preserves a memory of the great danger and misery, from which he has been delivered, warm upon his heart; inspires him with gratitude to his Deliverer; and furnishes with an abiding constraining motive, for cheerful and universal obedience.

III.

The designed extent of this gratuitous removal of sin, by the oblation of the Lamb of God, is expressed in a large and indefinite manner. He takes away the sin of the world. Many of my hearers need not be told, what fierce and voluminous disputes have been maintained, concerning the extent of the death of Christ. I am afraid the advantages of such controversies, have not been answerable to the zeal of the disputants. For myself, I wish to be known, by no name, but that of a Christian; and implicitly to adopt no system but the Bible. I usually endeavour to preach to the heart and the conscience, and to wave [avoid], as much as I can, all controversial points. But as the subject now lies directly before me, I shall embrace the occasion, and simply, and honestly, open to you the sentiments of my heart concerning it.

If it be inferred that He actually designed and intended the salvation of all men, because the death of Christ is here said to take away the sin of the world, or, (as this Evangelist expresses it in another place) the whole world ([I John 2:2](#)), such an inference would be contradicted by fact. For it is certain that all men will not be saved ([Matthew 7:13, 14](#)) It is to be feared, that the greater part of those, to whom the Word of His salvation is sent, perish in their sins. If, therefore, He cannot be disappointed of His purpose, since many do perish, it could not be His fixed design, that all men should be finally and absolutely saved.

The exceeding great number, once dead in trespasses and sins, who shall be found on His right hand, at the great Day of His appearance, are frequently spoken of in appropriate and peculiar language. They are styled His sheep ([John 10:11, 16](#)), for whom He laid down His life; His elect ([Mark 13:27](#)), His own ([John 13:1](#)); those to whom it is given to believe in His name ([Philippians 1:29](#)), and, concerning whom, it was the Father's good pleasure to predestinate them to the adoption of children ([Eph. 1:5](#)) By nature, they are children of wrath, even as others ([Ephesians 2:3](#)); and no more disposed in themselves to receive the truth, than those who obstinately and finally reject it. Whenever they become willing they are made so, in a day of divine power ([Psalm 110:3](#)); and wherein they differ, it is grace that makes them to differ ([I Corinthians 4:7](#)) Passages in the Scriptures to this purpose, are innumerable; and though much ingenuity has been employed to soften them, and to make them speak the language of an hypothesis, they are so plain in themselves, that he who runs may read. It is not the language of conjecture, but of inspiration, that they whom the Lord God did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son ([Romans 8:29](#)). And though some serious persons perplex themselves with needless and

painful reasonings, with respect to the sovereignty of God in His conduct towards mankind, they all, if truly spiritual and enlightened, stand upon this very ground, in their own experience. Many, who seem to differ from us in the way of argumentation, perfectly accord with us, when they simply speak of what God has done for their souls. They know, and acknowledge as readily as we, that they were first found of Him when they sought Him not; and that otherwise, they neither should, nor could, have sought Him at all; nor can they give any better reason than this, why they are saved out of the world. That it pleased the LORD to make them His people ([I Samuel 12:22](#))

But, on the other hand, I cannot think the sense of the expression is sufficiently explained, by saying, That the world, and the whole world, is spoken of, to teach us, that the sacrifice of The Lamb of God was not confined, like the Levitical offerings, to the nation of Israel only; but that it is available for the sins of a determinate number of persons, called the Elect, who are scattered among many nations, and found, under a great variety of states and circumstances in human life. This is, undoubtedly, the truth, so far as it goes; but not, I apprehend, fully agreeable to the Scriptural manner or representation. That there is an election of grace, we are plainly taught; yet, it is not said, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save the Elect, but that He came to save sinners, to seek and to save them that are lost ([I Timothy 1:15](#); [Luke 19:10](#)). Upon this ground, I conceive that ministers have a warrant to preach the Gospel to every creature, and to address the conscience of every man in the sight of God: and that every person who hears this Gospel, has thereby a warrant, an encouragement, yea, a command, to apply to Jesus Christ for salvation. And that they who refuse, thereby exclude themselves, and perish, not because they never had, nor possibly could have any interest in His atonement, but, simply, because they will not come unto Him that they may have life. I know something of the cavils and curious reasonings which obtain upon this subject, and I know I may be pressed with difficulties, which I cannot resolve to the full satisfaction of enquiring and speculative spirits. I am not disheartened, by meeting with some things, beyond the grasp of my scanty powers, in a book, which I believe to be inspired by Him, whose ways and thoughts are higher than ours, as the heavens are higher than the earth ([Isaiah 55:8, 9](#)) But, I believe, that vain reasonings, self-will, an attachment to names and parties, and a disposition to draw our sentiments from human systems, rather than to form them by a close and humble study of the Bible, with prayer for divine teaching, are the chief sources of our perplexities and disputes.

The extent of Atonement is frequently represented, as if a calculation had been made, how much suffering was necessary for the Surety to endure, in order to exactly expiate the aggregate number of all the sins, of all the Elect; that so much He suffered precisely, and no more; and that when this requisition was completely answered, He said, It is finished, bowed His head, and gave up the ghost ([John 19:30](#)) But this nicety of computation does not seem analogous to that unbounded magnificence and grandeur, which overwhelms the attentive

mind, in the contemplation of the divine conduct of the natural world. When God waters the earth, He waters it abundantly ([Psalm 65:10](#)) . He does not restrain the rain to cultivated, or improvable spots, but, with a profusion of bounty worthy of Himself, His clouds pour down water, with equal abundance, upon the barren mountain, the lonely desert, and the pathless ocean. Why may we not say with the Scripture, that Christ died to declare the righteousness of God ([Romans 3:25, 26](#)) , to manifest that He is just in justifying the ungodly, who believe in Jesus? And for anything we know to the contrary, the very same display of the evil and demerit of sin, by the Redeemer's agonies and death, might have been equally necessary, though the number of the Elect were much smaller, than it will appear to be, when they shall all meet before the throne of glory. If God had formed this earth for the residence of one man only; had it been His pleasure to afford him the same kind and degree of light which we enjoy; the same glorious sun, which is now sufficient to enlighten and comfort the millions of mankind, would have been necessary for the accommodation of that one person. So, perhaps, had it been His pleasure to save but one sinner, in a way that should give the highest possible discovery of His justice, and of His mercy, this could have been done by no other method, than that which He has chosen for the salvation of the innumerable multitudes, who will, in the Great Day, unite in the song of praise, to the Lamb who loved them, and washed them from their sins in His own blood. As the sun has a sufficiency of light for the eyes, (if there were so many capable of beholding it) equal in number to the leaves on the trees, and the blades of grass that grow upon the earth; so in Jesus, the Sun of Righteousness, there is plenteous Redemption, He is rich in mercy to all that call upon Him ([Psalm 130:7](#) ; [Romans 10:12](#)) ; and He invites sinners, without exception, to whom the Word of His salvation is sent, even to the ends of the earth, to look unto Him, that they may be saved ([Isaiah 45:22](#))

Under the Gospel dispensation, and by it, God commands all men, everywhere, to repent ([Acts 17:30](#)) . All men, therefore, everywhere, are encouraged to hope for forgiveness, according to the constitution prescribed by the Gospel; otherwise repentance would be both impracticable and unavailing. And therefore, the command to repent, implies a warrant to believe in the name of Jesus, as taking away the sin of the world. Let it not be said, that to call upon men to believe, which is an act beyond their natural power, is to mock them. There are prescribed means for the obtaining of faith, which it is not beyond their natural power to comply with, if they are not wilfully obstinate. We have the Word of God for our authority. God cannot be mocked ([Galatians 6:7](#)) , neither doth He mock His creatures. Our Lord did not mock the young Ruler, when He told him, that if he would sell his possession upon earth, and follow Him, he should have treasure in Heaven ([Luke 18:22](#)) Had this Ruler no power to sell his possessions? I doubt not, but that he himself, thought he had power to sell them if he pleased. But while he loved his money better than he loved Christ, and preferred earthly treasures to heavenly, he had no will to part with them. And a want of will, in a

moral agent, is a want of power in the strongest sense. Let none presume to offer such excuses to their Maker, as they would not accept in their own concerns. If you say of a man, he is such a liar that he cannot speak a word of truth; so profane that he cannot speak without an oath; so dishonest that he cannot omit one opportunity of cheating or stealing; do you speak of his disability to do good, as an extenuation, and because you think it renders him free of blame? Surely you think the more he is disinclined to do good; and habituated to evil, the worse he is. A man that can speak lies and perjury, that can deceive and rob, but is such an enemy to truth and goodness, that he can do nothing that is kind or upright, must be a shocking character indeed! Judge not more favourably of yourself if you can love the world and sensual pleasure, but cannot love God. If you can fear a worm like yourself, but live without the fear of God; if you can boldly trample upon His laws, but will not, and therefore cannot humble yourself before Him, and seek His mercy, in the way of His appointment. We cannot ascribe too much to the grace of God ; but we should be careful , that under a semblance of exalting His grace , we do not furnish the slothful and unfaithful with excuses for their wilfulness and wickedness ([Matthew 25:16](#)) . God is gracious; but let man be justly responsible for his own evil, and not presume to state his case so, as would, by just consequence, represent the holy God as being the cause of sin, which He hates and forbids.

The whole may be summed up in two points, which I commend to your serious attention; which it must be the business of my life to enforce, and which, I trust, I shall not repent of having enforced, either at the hour of death, or in the Day of Judgment, when I must give an account of my preaching, and you of what you have heard in this place.

(1.)

That salvation is, indeed, wholly of grace. The gift of a Saviour, the first dawn of light into the heart, all the supports and supplies needful for carrying on the work, from the foundation to the top-stone, all is of free grace.

(2.)

That now the Lamb of God is preached to you, as taking away the sin of the world, if you reject Him, which may the Lord forbid! I say, if you reject Him, your blood will be upon your own head. You are warned, you are invited. Dare not to say, Why doth He yet find fault, for who hath resisted His will? ([Romans 9:19](#)) . If He will save me, I shall be saved; if not, what can I do? God is merciful, but He is also holy and just; He is almighty, but His infinite power is combined with wisdom, and regulated by the great designs of His government. He can do, innumerable things, which, He will not do. What He will do (so far as we are concerned) His Word informs us, and not one jot or tittle thereof shall fail ([Matthew 5:18](#))

— O —

Sermon XVII

Messiah Despised, and Rejected of Men

[Isaiah 53:3](#)

He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrow, and acquainted with grief.

The heathen moralists, ignorant of the character and perfections of God, the true dignity and immorality of the soul, and the root and extent of human depravity, had no better foundation, for what they call virtue, than pride; no higher aim in their regulations, than the interests of society, and the conduct of civil life. They expressed, indeed, occasionally, some sentiments of a superior kind; but these, however just and valuable upon the principles of revelation, were delusive and impracticable upon their own. And * Brutus, one of the most admired characters of antiquity, confessed, just before he put an end to his own life, that having long been enamoured of virtue as a real good, he found it, at last, to be but an empty name. But though they had so little satisfaction, or success, in the pursuit of virtue, they were so pleased with the idea they formed of it, as generally to supposed, that if virtue could become visible, it would necessarily engage the esteem and admiration of mankind.

* Marcus Junius Brutus - Roman politician (85 – 42 BC)

There was, however, one remarkable exception to this opinion. The wisdom of * Socrates, seems to have been, in many respects, different from that of the bulk of their philosophers. Socrates having expressed his idea of a perfect character, a truly virtuous man, ventured to predict the reception such a person, if such a one could ever be found, would meet with from the world. And he thought that his practice would be so dissimilar to that of other men; his testimony against their wickedness so strong, and his endeavours to reform them, so importunate and unwelcome, that, instead of being universally admired, he would be disliked and hated. That mankind were too degenerate, and too obstinate, to bear, either the example, or the reproof, of such a person; and would most probably revile and persecute him, and put him to death as an enemy to their peace. * Socrates - Greek philosopher (469–399 BC)

In this instance, the judgment of Socrates accords with the language of the Old, and with the history of the New Testament. MESSIAH was this perfect character. Isaiah describes Him as such. Isaiah likewise foresaw how He would be treated, and foretold that He would be numbered with transgressors ; despised and rejected, by the very people who were eye-witnesses of His upright and benevolent conduct. And thus, in fact, it proved. When Jesus was upon earth, true virtue and goodness were displayed; and thereby, the wickedness of man became signally conspicuous. For they, among whom He was conversant, preferred a robber and a murderer to Him ([John 18:40](#)) They preferred Barabbas, who had been justly doomed to die for enormous crimes; and they nailed Jesus to the cross in his stead.

When MESSIAH appeared, the Jews professed to blame the wickedness of their forefathers, who had opposed and slain the prophets. If they regretted the ill-treatment the servants

of God had formerly received, might it not be hoped that they would reverence His Son? ([Matthew 21:37](#)), concerning whom, under this character of MESSIAH, their expectations were raised by the Scriptures which were read in their synagogues every Sabbath-day?

But He was despised and rejected of men. Angels sang praises at His birth, but men despised Him. He took not upon Him the nature of angels, but of man; yet men rejected him. Sinful, helpless men, rejected and despised their only Saviour. He came to His own, but His own received Him not. How lamentable and fatal was their obstinacy! Pretended messiahs were eagerly regarded and followed by them ([John 5:43](#)), but the true MESSIAH was despised and rejected of men!

Let us consider the clauses of our text separately, in the order in which we read them,
I.

He was despised and rejected of men. It would be a great mistake to imagine that the Jews were the only people capable of this ingratitude and obstinacy. If any person here thinks, 'Surely I would not have despised Him, had I seen His wonderful works, and heard Him speak as never man spake;' possibly that thought may prove you to be of the very same spirit with those who, while they thirsted for His blood, ignorantly presumed that, if they had lived in the days of their fore-fathers, they would not have joined with them in persecuting the prophets ([Matthew 23:31](#)). The prejudices which operated so strongly against our Lord's mission and ministry, were not peculiar to the people of one age, or country, but such as are deeply rooted in the nature of fallen man. The same principles which influenced the Jews to oppose and despise His person, still influence multitudes to slight and oppose the doctrine which He taught, and which He commanded His disciples to preach, and to perpetuate to the end of the world. In proof of this, it will be sufficient to assign some of the principal causes of the contempt and hatred which He met with from the men of that generation.

(1.)

They despised Him for, what they accounted, the meanness of His appearance. Though rich in Himself, He became poor for our sakes, and His poverty made Him contemptible in their eyes. They expected MESSIAH would appear with external pomp and power. But when they saw Him, they scorned Him, saying, Is not this the carpenter's son? ([Matthew 13:55](#)) He who had not money to pay the tribute demanded of Him ([Matthew 17:27](#)), nor a house wherein to lay His head, was of small esteem with those who were covetous, proud of worldly distinctions, and fond of the praise and admiration of men.

(2.)

Their contempt was heightened when this poor man publicly asserted His proper character and claim, demanded their attention and homage, and styled Himself in a peculiar sense the Son of God, the resurrection and the Life ([John 5:18](#); [11:25](#)). For this seeming inconsistency between the appearance He made, and the honours He affirmed, they treated

Him as a demoniac and a madman ([John 10:20](#)) Their language strongly expressed their sentiments of Him, when they asked Him with disdain, Art thou greater than our father Abraham? Whom makest thou thyself? ([John 8:53](#))

(3.)

They objected to Him the low state and former characters of His followers . Some of them were of low rank in life. The most of those who constantly attended Him were poor fishermen. Others had been of bad repute, publicans and open sinners. For this they reproached Him, and thought they were fully justified in their contempt, while they could say, Have any of the rulers or Pharisees believed on Him? ([John 7:48](#))

(4.)

They were farther exasperated against Him, by the authority and severity with which He taught. It is true, He was gentle and meek to all who felt their need of His help, or sincerely desired His instruction. He received them without exception, and treated them with the greatest tenderness. But He vindicated the honour of the law of God, from the corrupt doctrine and tradition of their professed teachers. He exposed and unmasked the hypocrisy of their most admired characters, and compared the men who were in the highest reputation, for wisdom and sanctity, to whited sepulchres, warning the people against them as blind guides and deceivers.

(5.)

These blind guides strengthened the prejudices of their blind followers against Him, by misrepresentation. They attempted to avail themselves of the Scripture, when they thought it would serve their purpose. They, eagerly, made the most of a prevailing mistake, that Jesus was born in Galilee, because He was brought up in Nazareth from His infancy. This they urged as a proof that He could not be the MESSIAH , whom the prophets had declared was to be born at Bethlehem in Judea. When He healed diseases on the Sabbath day, they represented the effects of His compassion, as a breach of that strict observance of the Sabbath, which was enjoined by the law of Moses, and that therefore He could not be of God ([John 9:16](#)) . And when they were not able to deny the reality of His wonderful works, they ascribed them to the agency of Satan ([Matthew 12:24](#)) We, at this distance of time, can easily perceive the folly, and madness of their attempts. But the Scribes and Pharisees were the public, authorized doctors and teachers of the people, and were supported by the ecclesiastical and civil power; or, as we should now express it, by church and state. The people were not apt to suspect their leaders, whom they thought wiser, and better than themselves. Or, if sometimes they hesitated, were impressed by the majesty of His words, or the evidence of His miraculous works, and constrained to say, Is not this the Son of David? ([Matthew 12:23](#)) , they were soon intimidated and silenced by canons and laws. For it was carefully enacted, in order to keep them in subjection, that whoever acknowledged Him should be put out of the synagogues ([John 9:22; 12:42](#)) ; that is, according to our modern language, excommunic-

ated. This among the Jews, as it has often since been among Christians, was a punishment which drew after it terrible consequences. A man must be in good earnest, or rather taught and supported by the grace of God, who could resist such arguments as these.

These things are easily applicable to the church history of succeeding times. The Gospel of Christ has often been, and is to this day, rejected and despised upon similar grounds. Its simplicity and plainness, and the manner of its proposal, adapted to the use and capacity of the vulgar, offend those who are wise in their own conceit, and proud of their understanding and taste. At the same time they are equally disgusted by the sublimity [high spiritual and moral worth] of its doctrines, which will not submit to the test of their vain reasonings, and can only be received by humble faith. The faithfulness and freedom which its ministers are enjoined to use, give great offence likewise. And because they cannot comply with the humours of those, who wish them to prophesy smooth things, and deceits, they are accounted censorious, and uncharitable, and disturbers of the public peace. Again, the dislike and opposition it frequently meets with from persons of great titles and high stations, deter multitudes from pursuing those inquiries, which some conviction of the truth would prompt them to, were they not discouraged by the fear of consequences. How often has the dread of the displeasure of doctors, bishops, universities, councils, and popes, or an ignorant, slavish deference to their judgments or decisions, prevented people from following that light, which had begun to force itself upon their consciences? How few among those of reputation for wisdom and learning, how few of the great, and opulent, have encouraged, or espoused, the doctrine of the cross? It is, therefore, more properly, a subject for lamentation, than for wonder, that this way is despised, and almost everywhere spoken against ([Acts 28:22](#)) Farther, as the bulk of those who embrace it are of low condition, so, many of them, are as free to confess to the praise of the grace of God, as others can be to urge it to their reproach, that till they knew and received this despised Gospel, their characters and practices were vile. Lastly, what unhappy subtlety has been employed, in a way of reason and argument, with an appeal to detached and perverted passages of Scripture, to misrepresent the work of the Holy Spirit, as folly, hypocrisy, or enthusiasm [fanaticism]; and even to charge the Gospel itself with giving encouragement to licentious conduct? In short, the spirit of the world, the arts and influence of designing men, are so powerful, that what our Lord said in Judea, holds equally true in Christendom, Blessed is he who is not offended in Me! ([Matthew 11:6](#))

I have reserved, to a distinct paragraph, the mention of one cause why the Gospel is frequently despised and reproached. Because though it be no less unjust or unreasonable, than those which I have recited, it is more immediately incumbent upon all who name the name of Christ, to prevent it as much as possible ; I mean , the scandal which arises from the miscarriages of those who profess it. Offences of this kind must come, but woe to them by whom they come ([Matthew 18:7](#)) . There were pretended Christians, even in the apostles'

times, who were enemies to the cross of Christ ([Philippians 3:18](#)), and by their evil conduct, caused the ways of truth to be evil spoken of. And, therefore, we cannot be surprised that there are such persons now. But you that love the LORD, hate evil ([Psalm 97:10](#)) There are many who watch for your halting, and are ready to say, There! there! so we would have it. It will be in vain for ministers to declare that the doctrines of grace are doctrines according to godliness, unless our testimony is supported by the tempers and conduct of the people: the world will probably judge, rather by what they see in you, than what they hear from us. Nor will it suffice that they cannot say you are an adulterer, a drunkard, a miser, or a cheat. If you espouse our doctrine, they will expect you to be humble, meek, patient, and benevolent; to find integrity in all your dealings, and a punctual discharge of your duty in every branch of relative life. What must the world think of our principles, if they who avow them are fretful, envious, censorious, discontented, slothful, or unfaithful; or, if they are niggardly and hard-hearted, or voluptuous and dissolute, or implacable and revengeful! They who thus lay stumbling-blocks before the blind ([Leviticus 19:14](#)), and confirm the prejudices of the ignorant, will have much to answer for.

II.

It is farther said, He was a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief. He was surrounded with sorrows on every side, and grief was His intimate, inseparable companion. Surely, this consideration, if any, will animate us to endure the cross, and to despise the shame we may be exposed to for His sake. The illustration of this subject will offer more fully in the next sequel. It shall suffice, at present, to offer three causes for His continual sorrows.

(1.)

The outward course of life, to which He submitted for the sake of sinners, exposed Him to want, weariness, contempt, and opposition; and though His resignation, and patience were perfect, yet He was truly a man, and partaker of our nature with all its affections and sensibilities, which do not imply sin. His feelings, therefore, were human, similar to our own in similar circumstances, and were often painfully exercised. Once and again, we read that He was hungry and had no food; He was thirsty and was nearly refused a little water to drink, when wearied with His journeying in the heat of the day ([Matthew 4:2](#); [21:18](#); [John 4:9](#)). His character was aspersed, His person despised, His words insidiously wrested, His actions misrepresented. He was misunderstood even by His friends, betrayed by one disciple, denied by another, and forsaken by the rest ([John 7:5](#)) It is hardly possible for His followers to meet with any outward trial, which may not remind them, of some part of the history of their Lord and Master, who left them an example of suffering, that they should cheerfully follow His steps ([1 Peter 2:21](#))

(2.)

His perfect knowledge and foresight of those sufferings, which we, emphatically, call His Passion. How often does He speak of them, and describe the circumstances as if they

were actually present? Futurity, is, in mercy, concealed from us. It would often bereave us from all present comfort, if we knew, what the next year, or, perhaps, what the next day would bring forth. If some of you, could have foreseen, many years ago, what you have since been brought through, you would probably have sunk under the apprehension; or, the stoutest of us, might sink now, if we were certainly to know what may be yet before us. But Jesus, long before He made atonement for our sins, had counted the cost. And though His love determined Him to save us, the prospect which was continually present to His view, of the approaching unutterable agonies of His soul, of all that He must endure from God, from the powers of darkness and from wicked men, when He should be made a curse for us to redeem us from the curse of the law ([Galatians 3:13](#)) ; I say, this tremendous prospect, was, doubtless, a perpetual source of sorrow.

(3.)

The frame of His spirit. Whoever has a measure of the mind that was in Christ, must be proportionally burdened and grieved, like righteous Lot in Sodom ([II Peter 2:8](#)) , with the wickedness around him, if he lives in society. Who that has any regard for the honour of God, or the souls of men, can bear to see what passes every hour; how the authority of God is affronted, His goodness abused, and His mercy despised, without emotions of grief and compassion? If we are spiritually-minded, we must be thus affected; and we should be more so, if we were more spiritual. But the holiness of MESSIAH, and, consequently, His hatred of sin, was absolutely perfect. His view of the guilt and misery of sinners, was likewise comprehensive and clear. How must He be therefore grieved by the wickedness and insensibility of those with whom He daily conversed! especially as He not only observed the outward conduct of men, but had an intimate knowledge of the evil heart, which is hidden from us. In this sense, His sufferings and sorrows began with His early years, and continued throughout the whole of His life. He undoubtedly could say, with an emphasis peculiar to Himself, I beheld the transgressors, and was grieved ; rivers of waters ran down my eyes, because men keep not Thy law ([Psalm 119:136, 158](#))

We call ourselves the servants and followers of Him who was despised of men, and encompassed with sorrows. And shall we then seek great things for ourselves? ([Jeremiah 45:5](#)) as if we belonged to the present world, and expected no portion beyond it? Or shall we be tremblingly alive to the opinion of our fellow-creatures, and think it a great hardship, if it be our lot to suffer shame for His sake, who endured the cross and despised the shame for us? Rather may we account such disgrace our glory, and every loss and suffering, that we may endure for Him, a gain. While on the other hand, we learn with the Apostle Paul, to esteem every gain and honour this world can afford, to be but loss, and dung, in comparison of the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord ([Philippians 3:8](#))

— O —

Sermon XVIII

Voluntary Suffering

[Isaiah 50:6](#)

I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair:

I hid not my face from shame and spitting.

That which often passes amongst men for resolution, and the proof of a noble, courageous spirit, is, in reality, the effect of a weak and little mind. At least, it is chiefly owing to the presence of certain circumstances, which have a greater influence upon the conduct, than any inherent principle. Thus may persons who appear to set death and danger at defiance in the hour of battle, while they are animated by the examples of those around them, and instigated by a fear of the punishment or shame they would incur if they deserted their post; upon a change of situation, as for instance, on a bed of sickness, discover no traces of the heroism for which they were before applauded, but tremble at the leisurely approach of death, though they were thought to despise it under a different form. It was not true fortitude, it was rather a contemptible pusillanimity [cowardice], that determined the celebrated * Cato to destroy himself. He was afraid of Caesar; his dread of him, after his victories, was so great, that he durst not look him in the face; and, therefore, he killed himself to avoid him. We may confidently ascribe the pretended gallantry of modern duellists to the same meanness of sentiment. They fight, not because they are not afraid of death, but because they are impelled by another fear, which makes a greater impression upon a feeble, irresolute mind. They live upon the opinion of their fellow-creatures, and feel themselves too weak to bear the contempt they should meet with, from the circle of their acquaintance, if they should decline acting upon the false principles of honour which pride and folly have established. They have not resolution sufficient, to act the part which conscience and reason would dictate, and, therefore, hazard life, and every thing that is dear to them, as men, rather than dare to withstand the prevalence of an absurd and brutal custom.

* Marcus Porcius Cato Uticensis (95–46 BC), known as Cato the Younger, was a politician and statesman in the late Roman Republic.

A patient enduring of affliction, and especially of disgrace and contempt, to which the characters the world most admire are confessedly unequal, is a much surer proof of true fortitude, than any of those actions which the love of praise, the fear of man, or even a mercenary attachment to lucre, are capable of producing. True Magnanimity is evidenced by the real importance of the end it proposes, and by the steadiness by which it pursues the proper means of attaining that end; undisturbed and unwearied by difficulty, danger, or pain, and equally indifferent to the censure or scorn of incompetent judges. This greatness of mind is essential and peculiar to the character of the Christian. I mean the Christian who deserves the name. His ends are great and sublime, to glorify God, to obtain nearer communion with Him, and to advance in conformity to His holy will. To attain these ends, he em-

employs the means prescribed by the Lord, he waits at Wisdom's gates ([Proverbs 8:34](#)), and walks in the paths of dependence and obedience. He, therefore, cannot conform to the prevailing maxims and pursuits of the many, and is liable to be hated and scorned for his singularity. But he neither courts the smiles of men, nor shrinks at the thought of their displeasure. He loves his fellow-creatures, and is ready to do them every kind office in his power; but he cannot fear them, because he fears the Lord God.

But this life the Christian lives by faith in the Son of God ([Galatians 2:20](#)) Jesus is the source of his wisdom and strength. He, likewise, is his Exemplar. He is crucified to the world by the cross of Christ; and a principal reason of his indifference to the opinion of the world, is the consideration of the manner in which his Lord was treated by it. He is the follower of Him who said, I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting. We may observe from the words, that the humiliation of MESSIAH was voluntary, and that it was extreme.

I.

With respect to His engagement, as the Mediator between God and sinners, a great work was given Him to do, and He became responsible; and, therefore, in this sense, bound, and under obligation. But His compliance was, likewise, voluntary, for He gave Himself up freely to suffer, the just for the unjust. Could He have relinquished our cause, and left us to the deserved consequence of our sins, in the trying hour, when His enemies seized upon Him, then legions of angels, had they been wanted, would have appeared for His rescue ([Matthew 26:53](#)). But if He was determined to save others, then His own sufferings were unavoidable. Men, in the prosecution of their designs, often meet with unexpected difficulties in their way; which, though they encounter with some cheerfulness, in hope of surmounting them, and carrying their point at last, are considered as impediments; but the sufferings of MESSIAH, were essentially necessary to the accomplishment of His great designs, and precisely determined, and present to His view beforehand, so that (as I lately observed) there was not a single circumstance that happened to Him, unawares. He knew that no blood but His own could make atonement for sin, that nothing less than His humiliation could expiate our pride; that if He did not thus suffer, sinners must inevitably perish; and, therefore, (such was His love!) He cheerfully and voluntarily gave His back to the smiters, and His cheeks to them that plucked off the hair. Two designs of vast importance filled His mind, the completion of them was that joy set before Him, for the sake of which He made Himself of no reputation, endured the cross, and despised the shame. These were, the glory of God, and the salvation of sinners.

(1.)

The highest end of His mediation was to display the glory of the divine character in the strongest light, to afford to all intelligent creatures ([Ephesians 3:10](#)), the brightest manifestation they are capable of receiving, of the manifold wisdom of God, His holiness, justice,

truth, and love, the stability and excellence of His moral government, all mutually illustrating each other, as combined and shining forth in His person, and in His mediatorial work. Much of the glory of God may be seen, by an enlightened eye, in creation; much in His providential rule and care over His creatures; but the brightness of His glory ([John 1:18](#) ; [Hebrews 1:3](#)) , the express and full discovery of His perfections, can only be known by Jesus Christ, and the revelation which God has given of Himself, to the world, by Him. And, accordingly, we are assured, that the angels, whose knowledge of the natural world is, doubtless, vastly superior to ours, desire to look into these things; and that the manifold wisdom of God is supereminently made known to principalities and powers, in heaven, by the dispensation of His grace to the Church redeemed from the earth.

(2.)

Subordinate to this great design, closely connected with it, and the principal effect for which it will be admired and magnified to eternity, is the complete and everlasting salvation of that multitude of miserable sinners, who, according to the purpose of God, and by the working of His mighty power, shall believe in this Saviour; and who, renouncing every other hope, shall put their trust in Him, upon the warrant of the promise and command of God, and yield themselves to be His willing and devoted people. Many are their tribulations in the present life, but they shall be delivered out of them all; they shall overcome, they shall be more than conquerors, by the blood of the Lamb, and by the Word of His testimony ([Revelation 12:11](#)) ; and then they shall shine, like the sun, in the Kingdom of Heaven. The consummation of their happiness, is a branch of the joy which was set before Him. For their sakes, that they might be happy, that He may be admired in them, and by them, to the glory of God, who is all in all, He voluntarily substituted Himself to sufferings and death. He endured the cross, and He despised the shame. He gave His back to the smiters, His cheeks to them that plucked off the hair, He hid not His face from shame and spitting.

II.

But are we reading a prophecy, or the history of His extreme humiliation? It is a prophecy; how literally and exactly it was fulfilled, we learn from His history by the Evangelists. With what cruelty, with what contempt was He treated, first by the servants in the hall of the High Priest, afterwards by the Roman soldiers! Let us consider Him, who endured the contradiction of sinners against Himself ([Hebrews 12:3](#)) These words of the Apostle suggest some preliminary observations, to prepare our minds for receiving a due impression, from the several particulars mentioned here.

When the Apostle would dispose believers by an argument or motive (which, if we fully understood it, would render all other arguments unnecessary) to endure sufferings and crosses patiently; he says, Consider Him —he uses a word which is properly a mathematical term, denoting the ratio or proportion between different numbers, or figures: —compare

yourselves with Him, and His sufferings with your own, —consider who He is, no less than what He endured.

In the apprehensions of men, insults are aggravated, in proportion to the disparity between the person who receives, and who offers them. A blow, from an equal, is an offence, but will be still more deeply resented from an inferior. But if a subject, a servant, a slave, should presume to strike a king, it would justly be deemed an enormous crime. But Jesus, the King of kings, and Lord of lords, whom all the angels of God worship, made Himself so entirely of no reputation, that the basest of the people, the servants, the common soldiers, were not afraid to make Him the object of their derision, and to express their hatred in the most sarcastic and contemptuous manner. It is said that He endured the contradiction of sinners. So, perhaps, do we; but we are sinners likewise, and deserve much more than we suffer, if not immediately from the instruments of our grief, yet from the Lord, who has a right to employ what instruments He pleases, to afflict us for our sins. This thought quieted the spirit of David, when his own son rose up against his life, and his own servant cursed him to his face ([II Samuel 16:11](#)) But Jesus was holy, harmless, and undefiled —He had done nothing amiss; yet the usage He met with was such, as has seldom been offered to the vilest malefactor. Their cruel and scornful contradiction was, likewise, expressly and directly against Himself, whereas His people only suffer from unreasonable and wicked men, for His sake, and for their professed attachment to Him. In the most violent persecutions, they who could be prevailed on to renounce His name, and His cause, usually escaped punishment, and were frequently favoured and rewarded. And this is still the ground of the world's displeasure; fierce and bitter as their opposition may seem, the way to reconciliation is always open; they are not angry with us farther than we avow a dependence upon Him, and show ourselves determined to obey Him, rather than men. If we could forsake Him, their resentment would be disarmed, for they mean no more than to intimidate us from His service. I do not think that they who make peace with the world upon these terms, are esteemed by them for their compliance, but they are seldom disturbed any longer. It is plain, therefore, that if we suffer as Christians, it is for His sake. He likewise suffered for our sake, but how wide is the difference between Him and us! We, when the trial is sharp, are in danger of flinching from the cause of our best friend and benefactor, to whom our obligations are so innumerable, and so immense; whereas He gave Himself up to endure such things for us, when we were strangers and enemies! He was not only treated with cruelty, but with every mark of the utmost detestation and scorn, which wanton, unfeeling, unrestrained barbarity could suggest.

(1.)

They began to spit upon Him in the High Priest's hall. The Roman soldiers likewise did spit upon Him, when they had contemptuously arrayed Him in a scarlet robe, and bowed the knee before Him, in mockery of His title of King. Great as an insult of this kind would

be deemed amongst us, it was considered as still greater, according to the customs prevalent in the eastern countries. There, to spit, even in the presence of a person, though it were only upon the ground, conveyed the idea of disdain and abhorrence. But the lowest of the people spit in the face of the Son of God. No comparison can fully illustrate this indignity. There is some proportion between the greatest earthly monarch, and the most abject slave. They did not spit upon Alexander, or Caesar, but upon the Lord of glory.

(2.)

They buffeted and beat Him on the face, and when He meekly offered His cheeks to their blows, they plucked off the hair. The beard was in those times accounted honourable; and when David and his servants were shaven by the command of Hanun, they were ashamed to be seen. But Jesus was not shaven. With savage violence they tore off the hair of His beard ([II Samuel 10:5](#)) ; while He, like a sheep before His shearers, was dumb and quietly yielded Himself to their outrages.

(3.)

His back they tore with scourges, as was foretold by the Psalmist — The plowers plowed upon my back, they made long their furrows ([Psalm 129:3](#)) The Jewish council condemned Him to death for blasphemy, because He said He was the Son of God. Stoning was the punishment prescribed by the law of Moses, in such cases ([Leviticus 24:16](#)) But this death was not sufficiently lingering and tormenting to gratify their malice. To glut their insatiable cruelty, they were therefore willing to own their subjection to the Roman power to be so absolute, that it was not lawful for them to put anyone to death ([John 18:31](#)) , according to their own judicial law; and thus wilfully, though unwittingly, they fulfilled the prophecies. They preferred the punishment which the Romans appropriated to slaves who were guilty of flagitious [shamefully wicked] crimes, and therefore insisted that He should be crucified. According to the Roman custom, those who were crucified, were previously scourged. Thus when they had mocked Him, and made Him their sport, by putting a crown of thorns upon His head, and a reed in His hand for a sceptre, in derision of His Kingly Office, He was stripped and scourged. It was not infrequent for the sufferers to expire under the severity and torture of scourging. And we may be certain that Jesus experienced no lenience from their merciless hands. The plowers plowed His back. But more and greater tortures were before Him. He was engaged to make a full atonement for sin, by His sufferings; and as He had power over His own life, He would not dismiss His spirit until He could say, It is finished.

And now, to use the words of Pilate, Behold the man! ([John 19:5](#)) Oh! for a realizing impression of this extreme humiliation and suffering, that we may be duly affected with a sense of His love to sinners, and of the evil of our sins, which rendered it necessary that the Surety should thus suffer! Behold the Lamb of God, mocked, blindfolded, spit upon, and scourged! Let us add to all this the consideration of His praying for His tormenters ([Luke 23:34](#)) , and we have an example of perfect magnanimity.

Shall we therefore refuse to suffer shame for His sake, and be intimidated by the frowns or contempt of men, from avowing our attachment to Him! Ah! Lord, we are, indeed, capable of this baseness and ingratitude. But, if Thou art pleased to strengthen us with the power of Thy Spirit, we will account such disgrace our glory. Then we will not hang down our heads and despond, but will rather rejoice and be exceeding glad, if the world revile us and persecute us, and speak all manner of evil against us, provided it be falsely ([Matthew 5:11](#)) , and provided it be for Thy sake!

Shall we continue in sin ([Romans 6:1](#)) , after we know what it cost Him, to expiate our sins? God forbid! When Mark Antony addressed the citizens of Rome, to animate them to avenge the death of Caesar, he enlarged upon Caesar's character, his great actions, his love to the Roman people, and the evidence he had given of it, in the donations and bequests he had appointed them in his will, the particulars of which he specified. When he had thus engaged their admiration and gratitude, and they discovered emotions of regret and sensibility, that Caesar, the greatest character in Rome, who had fought and triumphed for them, and had remembered them in his will, should be slain, Antony drew aside the cloth, and showed them his dead body, covered with wounds and blood. This sight rendered it needless to say more. The whole assembly united as one man, to search out, and to destroy his murderers. The application is obvious. May our hearts, from this hour, be filled with a determined, invariable resentment against sin, the procuring cause of the humiliation and death of our best Friend and Benefactor!

— O —

Sermon XIX

Messiah Suffering and Wounded for Us

[Isaiah 53:4, 5](#)

Surely He hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows:

He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities:

the chastisement of our peace was upon Him;

and with His stripes we are healed.

When our Lord was transfigured, Moses and Elijah appeared in glory and conversed with Him. Had we been informed of the interview only, we should probably have desired to know the subject of their conversation, as we might reasonably suppose it turned upon very interesting and important topics. The Scripture makes little provision for the indulgence of our curiosity, but omits nothing that is necessary for our instruction: and we learn thus much from it, that they discoursed, not upon the trifling things which the world accounts great, such as the rise and fall of empires; but they spake of the sufferings of Jesus, and of the decease which He should accomplish at Jerusalem. They spake of His Exodus ([Luke 9:31](#)) (as the word is) His departure out of life, the issue and completion of His engagement for sinners, that is, His crucifixion and death. This is the grand theme of heaven and heaven-born souls. We lately considered the cruel insults that MESSIAH submitted to from the servants in the High Priest's hall, and from the Roman soldiers. The passage I have now read, leads our meditations to the foot of the cross. May the Holy Spirit realize the scene to our hearts! The cross of Christ displays the divine perfections with peculiar glory. Here the name of God is revealed, as a just God, and a Saviour. Here the believer contemplates in one view, the unspeakable evil of sin, and the unsearchable riches of mercy. This gives him the most affecting sense of the misery which he has deserved, while at the same time he receives the fullest assurance that there is forgiveness with God, and discovers a sure foundation whereon he may build his hope of eternal life, without fear of disappointment. From the moment the Apostle Paul was enlightened to understand this mystery of redeeming love, he accounted his former gain but loss; his former supposed wisdom, no better than folly, and became determined to know nothing to depend upon nothing, to glory in nothing, but Jesus Christ, and Him crucified ([I Corinthians 2:2](#))

A representation of the Redeemer's sufferings, capable of exciting tears and moving the passions, may be by the powers of oratory; and similar emotions have often been produced by a romance or a tragedy, though the subject is known, beforehand, to be entirely fictitious. But light in the understanding, is necessary to convince and influence the heart. Unless the mind be deeply penetrated with the causes, which rendered MESSIAH'S death necessary, the most pathetic description of the fact, will leave the will and the affections unchanged. I hope many of my auditory [many in my audience] can assign these causes. You have felt yourselves personally concerned in an event which took place long before your birth; and

if you are asked, Why was Jesus mocked, buffeted, and spit upon? and why were His enemies permitted to nail Him to the cross? you answer, Surely He hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows —and you can likewise say, By His stripes we are healed.

The words lead us to consider the cause, and the effect.

I.

The cause of the Redeemer's sufferings, implied in the word our, —He bore the griefs and sorrows which were our desert. Such is the language, the confession, the grateful acknowledgement of all who believe in His name. They who are delivered by grace from the spirit and power of this evil world, and who live by His death; and, likewise they, who see they must perish, unless saved by Him, are authorized to consider Him as mindful of them, and making provision for them, in the day of His trouble. They who were actually healed by looking at the brazen serpent, according to God's appointment, had a sufficient proof in themselves, that it was erected, and placed in view of the camp on their account ([Numbers 21:9](#)) He bore our griefs. —It does not follow that sinners must have been crucified, if the Saviour had not been crucified on their behalf. But as this was a painful and terrible punishment, it may teach us, that without His interposition we were justly liable to extremity of misery in the present life. That we who have offended God, should enjoy health, peace, or satisfaction for a single hour; that we do not draw every breath in the most excruciating pain; that we derive any comfort from creatures; that we are not a burden and terror to ourselves, and mutually to each other; that our state, while upon earth, is, in any respect, better than an image of hell, must wholly be ascribed to Him. A sinner, as such, is under the curse of the law, and this curse includes every species of misery that can affect us either in mind, body, or estate. But He was appointed, from the beginning, to sustain and exhaust the curse for us. And, therefore, the earth, though so long inhabited by wretches in a state of bold rebellion against their Maker, is filled with the fruits and evidences of His long-suffering patience and mercy. Therefore He still affords us rain and fruitful seasons ([Acts 14:7](#)), indulges us with a variety of temporal blessings, and gives us power to take comfort in them. This consideration greatly enhances the value of temporal good things to His people. They receive them as from His hand, as tokens of His love and pledges of His favour, sanctified to their use by His blood and promise. Cheered by such thoughts as these, His poor people often enjoy their plain fare with a pleasure, of which, the expensive and dissipated sensualist has no conception. And how does it add to the relish of all earthly comforts, to think, while we are using them,

There's not a gift His hand bestows,
But cost His heart a groan!

So likewise, the remembrance of what He bore for them alleviates the pressure of all their sufferings and affords them a ground whereon they may rejoice, yea, glory in tribulation also ([Romans 5:3](#))

But His crucifixion, and the whole of His sufferings from wicked men, cannot give us a just idea of what He endured for us. Grievous as they were, considered in themselves, they were light if compared with the agonies of His soul. These extorted the blood from His body (Luke 22:44), before the hand of man touched Him. And when He uttered His most dolorous cry upon the cross, it was not for the anguish of His bodily wounds, but His soul felt, for a season, a separation from the presence and comforts of God. Therefore He said, Why has Thou forsaken Me? (Matthew 27:46). It is true His holy nature was not capable of some part of the impenitent sinner's portion. Remorse of conscience, the stings of the never-dying worm, the horrors and rage of despair, could not touch Him, who had no personal sin, and whose love and faith were always perfect. But a sword pierced His soul, and it pleased the Father, not only to permit Him to be bruised by the cruelty of His enemies, but to bruise Him Himself (Isaiah 53:10)

The ground of all this was laid in His voluntary substitution of Himself, from before the foundation of the world, to obey and suffer in behalf of His people. This point will offer more directly from the passage we are next to consider. At present, let us briefly notice the expressions before us.

(1.)

He was wounded. This word, which signifies pierced or stabbed, refers to His crucifixion. This punishment, being unknown to the Jews till they were brought under the Roman power, they had, therefore, no express name for, in their language. Yet it is plainly described by the Psalmist, who, speaking by the Spirit of Prophecy, in the person of MESSIAH, says, They pierced my hands and my feet (Psalm 22:16). And it was typified under the law of Moses (Deuteronomy 21:23; Galatians 3:13; I Corinthians 5:7; John 3:14), by the curse annexed to hanging upon a tree, which was the nearest death to this; by the Paschal lamb, which was roasted; and by the brazen serpent. It was a fit death for a sinner, painful and ignominious. How circumstantial were the prophecies, how apposite [how strikingly appropriate and relevant] the types [prophetic symbols], how exactly was all fulfilled, and how wonderful was it that the Jews should be led to depart from their own customs and purposes, in order to their accomplishments, though they intended nothing less! But it was the determined counsel and appointment of God (Acts 2:23), who overrules all the designs of men, and all that to us appears contingent, to the purposes of His own will and glory.

(2.)

He was bruised. If we distinguish wounded from bruised, the latter may be referred to the sorrows of His soul, (for it is expressly said, It pleased the LORD to bruise Him) that distress broke His heart, filled Him with dismay, caused Him to be sore amazed and very heavy, and to say to His disciples, My soul is exceedingly sorrowful even unto death (Matthew 26:38) No words can be more selected and emphatical, than those which the Evangelists use, in describing His consternation in the Garden of Gethsemane. How can this His dejection

and terror be accounted for, by those who deny that His sufferings and death were a proper atonement for sin; and who suppose, that when He had given to men a perfect rule of life, and commended it to them by His own example, He died, merely to confirm the truth of His doctrine, and to encourage His followers to faithfulness under sufferings! Many of His followers, who were thus witnesses for the truth, and patterns of faithfulness to us, have met death in its most terrible forms with composure, yea, with pleasure, yea, with transports of joy. But is the disciple above his Lord? If Christians have triumphed in such circumstances, why did Christ tremble? Not surely because their courage and constancy were greater than His. The causes were entirely different. The martyrs were given up to them who only could kill the body, but Jesus suffered immediately from the hand of God. One stroke of His mighty hand can bruise the spirit of man, more sensibly than the united power of all creatures. Jesus died. They that believe in Him, are said to sleep in Him ([I Thessalonians 4:14](#)) To them death comes disarmed of its sting, wearing a friendly aspect, and bringing a welcome message of dismissal from every evil. But the death of Jesus was death indeed, death in all its horrors, the death which sinners had deserved to suffer as transgressors of the law.

(3.)

The chastisement, or, the punishment of our peace, was upon Him. That chastisement, or punishment, on the account of which, sinners obtain peace with God. It properly signifies here, a punishment for instruction or example. Punishments are inflicted, either for the correction of an offender, or for the prevention of evil, or for example to others. The two former reasons could not apply to our Lord. He had committed no evil, He was perfect before, and in suffering. But standing in the place of sinners, and engaged to expiate their offences, He was made a public example of the misery and distress which sin demerited [deserved]. Thus justice was vindicated in the exercise of mercy, and sinners believing in His name, are exempted from punishment, for His sake, in a way which affords not the least encouragement or extenuation to sin. And thus our peace is procured.

II.

The effect of His sufferings for sins not His own. He bore our griefs, and carried our sorrows: He was wounded and bruised for us, the chastisement of our peace was upon Him, that by His stripes we may be healed. The Hebrew word here, and the Greek word, the Apostle Peter uses in this quotation of this passage, which we render stripes ([I Peter 2:24](#)), is, properly, the mark, which stripes or wounds leave upon the body, or, as we say, scars. The scars in His hands, feet, and side, and, perhaps, other marks of His many wounds, remained after His resurrection. And John saw Him in vision, before the Throne, as a lamb that had been slain. All these expressions and representations, I apprehend, are designed to intimate to us, that though the death of MESSIAH is an event long since past, yet the effects and benefits are ever new, and, to the eye of faith are ever present. How admirable is this expedient, that the wounds of one, yea, of millions, should be healed, by beholding the

wounds of another! Yet this is the language of the Gospel, Look and live. Look unto Me and be ye saved. Three great wounds are ours, guilt, sin, and sorrow; but by contemplating His welts or scars, with an enlightened eye, and by rightly understanding who was thus wounded, and why; all these wounds are healed.

You who live by this medicine, speak well of it. Tell to others, as you have opportunity, what a Saviour you have found. It is usual for those who have been relieved, in dangerous and complicated diseases, by a skilful physician, to commend him to others who are labouring under the like maladies. We often see public acknowledgments to this purpose. If all the persons, who have felt the efficacy of a dying Saviour's wounds apprehended by faith, were to publish their cases, how greatly would His power and grace be displayed! They are all upon record, and will all be known in the great Day of His appearing. Some of them are occasionally published, and may be read in our own tongue. And though they are not all related with equal judgment, nor attended with circumstances equally striking, yet there is a sufficiency, in this way, to leave the world without excuse. Not to mention modern accounts of this kind, (though many might be mentioned which are indisputably true, and superior to the cavils of gainsayers) the Confessions of * Austin may be appealed to, as a proof that the Gospel is not a system of notions only, but has a mighty power to enlighten the bewildered mind, to subdue the obstinate will, to weaken the force of long-confirmed habits of evil, to relieve from distressing fears, and to effect a real, universal, permanent, and beneficial change of sentiment and conduct, such as no similar instance can be found, in the history of mankind, to have been produced by any other principles. But if you are a true Christian, in the circle of your connections, you will, sometimes, have a fair opportunity of giving a reason of the hope that is in you. Pray for grace and wisdom to improve such seasons; and if you speak the truth in simplicity and love, you know not but the Lord may give His blessing to your testimony, and honour you as an instrument of good. And to convert one sinner from the error of his way, is an event of greater importance, than the deliverance of a whole kingdom from temporal evil. * Austin (St. Augustine) - Roman philosopher and theologian (354AD - 430AD)

Yet, remember, if you espouse this cause, a certain consistency of character will be expected from you, without which, you had better be silent, than speak in its defence, or profess yourself a sharer in the privileges of the Gospel. There are too many persons who treat the great truths, we profess, as mere opinions, points of speculation, which form the shibboleth of a party. There are others, who think an attachment to them, the sure sign of an enthusiastic [sure sign of a fanatical], deluded imagination. And there are others, again, who misrepresent them as unfavourable to morality, and affording a cloak and an encouragement to licentiousness. Beware, lest, by an improper conduct, you lay stumbling-blocks in the way of the blind, strengthen the prejudices of the ignorant, and give weight to the calumnies of the malicious. The people of the world are quick-sighted to the faults of religious profess-

ors, and though they affect to despise their principles, they are tolerable judges what that conversation is, which only these principles can produce, and always expect it from those who avow them. They will make allowances for others, and admit human infirmity as a plea for their faults, but they will not extend their candour to you. If your zeal for the truth, and your regular attendance upon the ministers who preach it, are not accompanied by a spirit of humility, integrity, and benevolence; if you are passionate, peevish, discontented, censorious, or proud; if they observe that you are greedy of gain, penurious, close-fisted, or hard-hearted; or even if you comply with their customs and spirit, mingle with them in their amusements, and do not maintain a noble singularity by avoiding every appearance of evil; they will not only despise you in their hearts, but they will take the occasion of despising and speaking evil of the truth itself, on your account. But if you are all of a piece, and are truly solicitous to adorn your profession, by walking agreeable to the rules of the Gospel, and filling up your relations in life to the glory of God, and the good of your fellow-creatures; by thus well-doing, you will put to silence the ignorance of foolish men ([I Peter 2:15](#)), and in a great measure, stop their mouths, if you cannot change their hearts. And though they may affect to rail at you, or to ridicule you, they will be constrained to feel a secret reverence for you in their consciences.

But are there any hearts of stone amongst us, who are still unaffected by the love and sufferings of the Son of God; who are still crucifying Him afresh, and living in sin, though they hear and know what it cost Him to make an atonement for sin? Yet now hear— now look —behold the Lamb of God! The Lord in mercy open the eyes of your mind. I address you once more. I once more conjure you by His agony and bloody sweat, by His passion, cross, and death, to seek Him that your souls may live. Can you be proof against these arguments? Nay, then, should you live and die thus obstinate, you must perish indeed.

— O —

Sermon XX

Sin Charged upon the Surety

[Isaiah 53:6](#)

All we like sheep have gone astray: we have turned every one to his own way,
and the LORD hath laid upon Him the iniquity of us all.

Comparisons, in the Scripture, are frequently to be understood with great limitation: perhaps, out of many circumstances, only one is justly applicable to the case. Thus, when our Lord says, Behold, I come as a thief ([Revelation 16:15](#)), —common sense will fix the resemblance to a single point, that He will come suddenly, and unexpectedly. So when wandering sinners are compared to wandering sheep, we have a striking image of the danger of their state, and of their inability to recover themselves. Sheep, wandering without a shepherd, are exposed, a defenceless and easy prey to wild beasts and enemies, and liable to perish for want of pasture; for they are not able either to provide for themselves, or to find the way back to the place from whence they strayed. Whatever they suffer, they continue to wander, and if not sought out, will be lost. Thus far the allusion holds. But sheep, in such a situation, are not the subjects of blame. They would be highly blameable, if we could suppose them rational creatures; if they had been under the eye of a careful and provident shepherd, had been capable of knowing him, had wilfully and obstinately renounced his protection and guidance, and voluntarily chosen to plunge themselves into danger, rather than to remain with him any longer. Thus it is with man. His wandering is rebellious. God made him upright, but he has sought out to himself many inventions ([Ecclesiastes 7:29](#)) God has appointed for man a safe and pleasant path, by walking in which, they shall find rest to their souls; but they say, We will not walk therein ([Jeremiah 6:16](#)) They were capable of knowing the consequences of going astray, were repeatedly warned of them, were fenced in by wise and good laws, which they presumptuously broke through. And when they wandered from Him, they were, again and again invited to return to Him, but they refused. They mocked His messages and His messengers, and preferred the misery they had brought upon themselves, to the happiness of being under His direction and care. Surely He emphatically deserves the name of the Good Shepherd, who freely laid down His life, to restore sheep of this character!

My text, therefore, expresses the sentiment of those, and of those only, who are acquainted with the misery of our fallen state, feel their own concern in it, and approve of the method which God has provided for their deliverance and recovery. It contains a confession of their own guilt, and an acknowledgement of His mercy.

I.

A confession of guilt and wretchedness. Sin has deprived us both of the knowledge and presence of God. In consequence of this, we wander, every one to his own way. All are under the power of sin, and all equally strangers to the paths of peace and safety. The paths which

sinner's choice for themselves are diverse from each other, as inclination or circumstances vary; but however different in appearance, if persisted in, they terminate at last in the same point. They all lead to destruction. We may observe on this head,

(1.)

It is a sufficient proof of our depravity, that we prefer our own ways to the Lord's; nor can He inflict a heavier judgment upon us, in this life, than to give us up entirely to the way of our own hearts. He made us to be happy; but as He made us for Himself, and gave us a capacity, and a vastness of desire, which only He Himself can satisfy, the very constitution and frame of our nature render happiness impossible to us, unless in a way of dependence upon Him, and obedience to His laws. The lamb that grazes in the meadow, and the fish that swims in the stream, are each in their proper element. If you suppose them to change places, they must both perish. But the brute creation have no propensity to such changes as would destroy them. The instincts, implanted in them by their great Creator, are conducive to their welfare; and to these instincts they are uniformly faithful. If you can conceive the beasts impatient to leave the shore, and improve their situation by rushing into the ocean; and the fishes equally earnest to forsake the waters, in quest of new and greater advantages upon the dry land, it may illustrate the folly of fallen man, who turned aside by a deceived heart, refuses life, and seeks death in the error of his ways. For the will of God (if I may so speak) is our proper element; and if we depart from it, our sin unavoidably involves our punishment. We naturally indulge hard thoughts of God, and think the rule He has enjoined us, too strict and severe, intended to restrain us from real good, and propose, to ourselves, some unknown advantages, by transgressing it. Thus Satan persuaded Eve, and we derive from her. And though we know that she only gained misery by the experiment, we rashly repeat it for ourselves. The Scripture assures us, that the ways of God are pleasant, but we will not be persuaded. Experience proves that the way of transgressors is hard, but we resist the conviction, and hurry on in a round of continual disappointment. Are the proud, the covetous, the voluptuous, or the ambitious, happy? I appeal to their conscience.

(2.)

There is only one right way, but a thousand ways of being wrong. If you are not following Him, who has said, I am the way, the truth, and the life ([John 14:6](#)), you are wandering, you are far from God; for none can come to the Father but by Him: and far from peace, for there can be no true peace in the mind, unless He bestows and maintains it. The profane and the self-righteous, the open sinner and the hypocrite, the lover of pleasure and the lover of gold, the formal papist and formal protestant, though they seem to travel different roads, though they pity or censure each other, will meet at last, (unless the grace of God prevent) in the same state of final and hopeless misery. It is grievous to a spiritual and benevolent mind, to see those who are all wrong, disputing among themselves, which of them is right. Each one is ready to think himself wise, if the folly, in which he allows himself, be not pre-

cisely of the same kind with that which he condemns in his neighbour. But the Scripture is the invariable rule to which it is your duty and interest to be conformed now; for it is given by the inspiration and authority of God, and is the standard, by which you must be judged at last. Whatever character you bear amongst men, if you have not faith and holiness, you certainly are not in the way of life. For it is written, He that believeth not shall be damned ([Mark 16:16](#)); and again, it is written, Without holiness, no man shall see the Lord ([Hebrews 12:14](#))

(3.)

As wandering sheep are liable to innumerable dangers, which, they can neither foresee nor prevent, such is our condition, until, by the power of the Holy Spirit, we are stopped, and turned, and brought into the fold of the good Shepherd. Oh! the misery of man while living without God in the world! He is exposed every hour to the stroke of death, which would at once separate him from all that he loves, and plunge him into the pit, from whence there is no redemption. And at present, he is perpetually harassed with cares and fears, with wants and woes, without guidance or refuge; and yet so blinded as to think himself safe, and that his crooked, wandering ways, will lead him to happiness!

II.

An acknowledgement of mercy. Where sin abounded, grace has much more abounded. Man sinned, and MESSIAH suffered. The LORD hath laid, or caused to meet upon Him, the iniquity of us all, that is, the punishment due them. The evils we had deserved, were in pursuit of us; but Jesus interposed, and they all seized upon Him, and He endured them, that we might be spared. Do we ask upon what grounds? It was on the ground of His voluntary substitution for sinners, as their Covenant Head and Representative.

So much, correspondent to this appointment obtains amongst men, as may show that the idea accords with our notion of justice. If a man be unable to pay a debt, and the creditor should exact the payment from a third person who was no way concerned, it would, with reason, be deemed a very oppressive action. But if it be known that this person became freely bound and responsible for the debtor, he is allowed to be justly liable. But in the present case, I make no appeal to human customs. It is a divine appointment, and, therefore, is, and must be right. It was a great design, the triumph of infinite wisdom, the highest effect of the love of God. It is revealed, not to be submitted to our discussion, or that we may sit in judgment upon the propriety of the measure, but it demands our highest admiration and praise; and, like the sun, brings with it that light, by which the whole system of our knowledge is illuminated. For till we know this great truth, and are able to see its influence upon everything we are related to, whatever attainments we may boast, we are, in fact, encompassed with thick darkness, with darkness which may be felt. For the accomplishment of this design, the Son of God was so manifested in the nature of man, that He, and they who believe in Him, participate in a real, though mystical union, and are considered one. He, their living

Head. They, His body - consisting of many members; each of them represented by Him, accepted in Him, and deriving from His fulness, their life, their light, their strength, and their joy.

(1.)

He was thus appointed and constituted before the world began; according to the holy Counsel and Covenant settled from everlasting for the redemption of sinners ([Proverbs 8:20-31](#); [Titus 1:2](#)) . For the fall of man, which rendered His interposition necessary, was not an unexpected contingency, but was foreseen and provided for, before man was created upon the earth, yea, before the foundations of the earth were laid.

(2.)

After man had sinned, this glorious Head and Surety made known the certainty and benefit of His mediation, and engagement, on the behalf of sinners, according to the good pleasure of His wisdom, and as the case required. Otherwise, upon the entrance of sin, the full execution of the sentence of the law, denounced against the offenders, might, perhaps, have immediately followed. But He revealed Himself. He showed mercy to Adam, covenanted with Noah, walked with Abraham, conversed with Moses, dwelt with His Church in the wilderness, and was known by the name the Holy One of Israel ([Isaiah 54:5](#); [Psalm 23:1](#)) . David ascribes to the Shepherd of Israel, the name of Jehovah; and Isaiah declares, that the LORD of Hosts is the husband of the Church. These characters of Shepherd, and Bridegroom, and Husband, are appropriated to MESSIAH in the New Testament. He therefore is Jehovah, the LORD of Hosts, whom Abraham, David, and Isaiah, worshiped, or His appearance upon earth would be evidently to the disadvantage of those who believe in Him. If He were not God, He would be a creature, for there is no medium. And consequently, our Shepherd would be infinitely inferior to that almighty Shepherd, who was the refuge, the trust, and the salvation of His people, before MESSIAH was manifested in the flesh.

(3.)

In the fulness of time, He veiled His glory. He who was in the form of God, and thought it not robbery to be equal with God, took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made of a woman, made under the law ([Philippians 2:6, 7](#); [Galatians 4:4](#)) . Then the union between Him, and the people whom He came into the world to save, was completed. Because the children were partakers of flesh and blood, He likewise took part of the same ([Hebrews 2:14](#)) . The Word, who in the beginning was God, and was with God, was made flesh ([John 1:1](#)) . And in our nature, though He knew no sin, He was treated as a sinner for us, to declare the righteousness of God, in His forbearance and goodness to all who had been saved in former ages, and in the forgiveness and salvation of all who should trust in Him to the end of time. He suffered once, once for all, the just for the unjust, to bring us to God. And now God is revealed, not only as merciful, but as just, in justifying him which believeth in Jesus. God is well pleased in Him, and for His sake, with all who accept Him. Their sins are expiated by

His sufferings ([Romans 4:6](#); [Jeremiah 23:6](#)) , and His perfect righteousness, the whole of His obedience unto death, is the consideration or ground, on which they are accounted righteous.

By virtue of this union, likewise, He is their life. They receive of His fulness, as the branches derive their life and fruitfulness from the tree whereon they grow ([John 15:1](#)) ; therefore the Apostle said, I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me ([Galatians 2:20](#)) . This is the great mystery of Christianity, which words alone cannot explain; it is a divine appointment, hidden from those who are wise and prudent in their own sight, but revealed to all, who, with the simplicity of children, are desirous of being taught of God, and wait patiently upon Him, in the use of His prescribed means, for the light and influence of His Holy Spirit.

From this subject, the substitution of MESSIAH for sinners, we may learn,

(1.)

How to estimate the evil of sin. That sin is a great evil, is evident by its effects. It deprived Adam of the life and presence of God, and brought death, and all natural evil into the world. It caused the destruction of the old world by water. It is the source of all the misery with which the earth is now filled, it will kindle the last great conflagration; yea, it has, already kindled that fire, which shall never be quenched. But in no view does the sinfulness of sin appear so striking , as in this wonderful [astonishing; amazing] effect —the suffering and death of MESSIAH That notwithstanding the dignity of His person, and the perfection of His obedience to the law, and that though He prayed in His agonies, that if it were possible the cup might pass from Him ([Luke 22:42](#)) , yet, if sinners were to be saved, it was indispensably necessary that He should drink it. This shows the evil of sin in the strongest light. And in this light it is viewed by all who derive life from His death, and healing from His wounds. We may be afraid of the consequences of sin, from other considerations; but it is only by looking to Him who was pierced for our transgressions, that we can learn to hate it ([Zechariah 12:10](#))

(2.)

The complete justification of those who believe in Him. They are delivered from all condemnation ([Romans 8:1](#)) . Every charge against them is overruled by this plea, that Christ has died, and is risen on their behalf, and ever liveth to make intercession for them. And though they are still in a state of discipline, for the mortification of sin yet remaining in them; and though for the trial, exercise, and growth of their faith, it is still needful that they pass through many tribulations, yet none of these are strictly and properly penal. They are not the tokens of God's displeasure, but fatherly chastisements, and tokens of His love, designed to promote the work of grace in their hearts, and to make them partakers of His holiness ([Hebrews 12:6-11](#)) Though necessary at present, they will not be necessary long; and, therefore, the hour is at hand when all tears shall be wiped away from their eyes, and

they shall weep no more. His true servants, in the midst of the storms by which they are tossed on the tempestuous sea of this life, are no less safe, and, notwithstanding their imperfections, are no less beloved, than those who have already escaped out of the reach of every evil, and are now before the Throne.

(3.)

The reason why believers are not wearied, nor overpowered, by all the difficulties of their service, nor by all the arts and efforts of their enemies. They are one with Christ. He who has all power in heaven and in earth, is engaged for their support. When they faint, He revives them; when they are wounded, He heals them; when their foot slips, He upholds them. He has said, because I live, ye shall live also. Therefore who can prevail against them, when their life is hidden with Christ in God? ([Colossians 3:3](#)) And further, the knowledge of their Saviour's love, and of the holy, awful, yet amiable and endearing character of God displayed in His mediation, is the source of their love, gratitude, and cheerful obedience. It is this makes hard things easy, and bitter things sweet. The love of Christ constrains them ([II Corinthians 5:14](#)) They look to Him and are enlightened. And when they consider who He is, in what way, and at what price He redeemed them, and what He has prepared for them; when they attend to His gracious Word, Fear none of these things, thou shalt suffer; be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life ([Revelation 2:10](#)) ; they, out of weakness, are made strong; they are inspired with fresh courage; they take up their cross with cheerfulness, and can adopt the language of the Apostle, None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear, so that I may finish my course with joy ([Acts 20:24](#))

— O —

Sermon XXI

Messiah Derided Upon the Cross

[Psalm 22:7, 8](#)

All they that see me laugh me to scorn:

they shoot out the lip, they shake the head saying, He trusted on the LORD that he would deliver him:

let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him.

Fallen man, though alienated from the life of God, and degraded with respect to many of his propensities and pursuits, to a level with the beasts that perish, is not wholly destitute of kind and compassionate feelings towards his fellow-creatures. While self-interest does not interfere, and the bitter passions of envy, hatred, malice, and revenge, are not roused into exercise, he has a degree of instinctive sympathy with them in their sufferings, and a disposition to assist them, if he can do it without much detriment to himself. The source of these social feelings, we express, by the term humanity; which seems to imply a consciousness that they properly belong to our nature, and that we ought, at least, to be always, and universally affected in this manner, when occasions offer. But while the heart is under the government of self, our humanity is very partial and limited. And it is to be ascribed to the goodness of God, rather than to any real goodness in man, that it is not wholly extinguished. Were this the case, and were the native evils of the heart left to exert themselves in their full strength, and without control, earth would be the very image of hell, and there could be no such thing as society. But to prevent things from running into utter confusion, God mercifully preserves in mankind, some social dispositions. They are, however, so weak in themselves, so powerfully counteracted by the stronger principles of our depravity, and so frequently suppressed by obstinate habits of wickedness; that in the present state of things, we may almost as justly define man, (whatever impropriety there may seem in the expression) by saying, He is an inhuman creature, as by ascribing to him the benevolent properties of humanity.

The rage, cruelty, and savage insensibility, with which sin and Satan have poisoned our nature, never appear in so strong a light, as when they assume a religious form; when ignorance, bigotry, and blind zeal, oppose the will and grace of God, under a pretence of doing Him service. By this infatuation, every hateful passion is sanctified, and every feeling of humanity stifled. Thus, though the sufferings of the most atrocious malefactors, usually excite pity in the spectators, and often draw tears from their eyes; yet, the agonies of God's persecuted servants, under the most exquisite tortures which malice could invent, have frequently raised no other emotions, than those of derision and scorn. My text leads us to consider the highest instance of this kind. The 22nd Psalm, undoubtedly, refers to MESSIAH. It begins with the very words which He uttered upon the cross; nor could David speak of himself, when he said, They pierced my hands and my feet. He was God's servant in the

most eminent sense, and the service He performed, was an uninterrupted course of benevolence to the souls and bodies of men. He spent His life in going about doing good ([Acts 10:38](#)), nor could His enemies fix a single stain upon His conduct. Yet they thirsted for His blood; and, because He came into the world to save sinners, they accomplished their cruel designs. We have already seen how He was treated by the servants and by the soldiers, when condemned by the Jewish council, and by the Roman governor. This prophecy was fulfilled when He hung upon the cross. There have been persons in our own days, whose crimes have excited such detestation, that the populace would probably have torn them in pieces, before, and even after their trial, if they could have had them in their power. Yet when these very obnoxious persons have been executed, according to their sentence, if, perhaps, there was not one spectator who wished them to escape, yet neither was one found, so lost to sensibility, as to insult them in their dying moments. But when Jesus suffers, all that see Him laugh Him to scorn; they shoot out the lip, they shake the head; they insult His character, and His hope. The Evangelists furnish us with an affecting comment upon this passage. They inform us, by whom He was thus scorned and derided; they mention some circumstances, which strongly mark the peculiar and excessive contempt, with which He was treated; and they take notice of the especial scope and object of their insults, namely, the gracious purpose He had often expressed towards sinners, and the strong confidence He had avowed in God His Father.

I.

The persons who scorned and derided Him, were various, and of different characters.

(1.)

The Chief Priests, Elders, and Rulers of the people. When these, who were held in ignorant admiration by the multitude, set the example, we do not wonder that it was generally followed. They had been His most avowed and determined enemies, they had long conspired to take away His life, and in the appointed hour their plots were permitted to succeed. They now rejoiced in their success. By their office as teachers and expounders of the law, they ought to have pointed Him out to the people as the object of their reverence and hope; but having rejected Him themselves, they employed all the authority and influence to make Him the object of general contempt. And lest the extremity of His torments should awaken sentiments of commiseration in the multitude, they were the first, and the loudest, in reviling Him, as He hung upon the cross.

(2.)

The populace derided Him. They had been instigated by the priests to demand His death of Pilate, when he was desirous of dismissing Him, and, rather, to insist that Barabbas should be spared ([Matthew 27:20](#)) The populace, though no less ignorant, were less malicious than their leaders. At different times, when they heard His public discourses, and saw His wonderful works, they had been staggered and constrained to say, Is not this the Son of

David? and not many days before, the popular cry had been strongly in His favour ([Matthew 21:10, 11](#)) ; though quickly after, it was, Crucify Him, crucify Him ([Luke 23:21](#)) As the sea, though sometimes smooth, is always disposed to obey the impulse of the wind, so the common people, though easily roused to oppose the truth, would, perhaps, be quiet, if they were left to themselves; but there are seldom wanting artful and designing men, who by a pretended regard for religion, and by misrepresentations, work upon their passions and prejudices, and stir them up to a compliance with their purposes. The priests by degrees, wrought the populace up, first to reject MESSIAH, and then, to join their leaders, in mocking and deriding Him.

(3.)

The Roman soldiers , who had contemptuously clothed Him with a scarlet robe, and bowed the knee before Him in derision, continued to mock Him when He was hanging upon the cross. The Romans to whom many monarchies were become subject and tributary, affected to despise the name of king. They held the Jewish nation in peculiar contempt. Therefore, the title KING of the JEWS , affixed to His cross, afforded them a subject for the keenest sarcasm.

(4.)

Yea, such is the hardness of the human heart, that one of the malefactors ([Luke 23:39](#)) , who was crucified by His side, unaffected with his own guilt, and insensible of the just judgment of God, and of the account he was soon to render at His awful tribunal, seemed to seek some relief in the midst of his agonies, by joining with the priests and people, in railing on the innocent Jesus, who was suffering before his eyes. Thus He was the object of universal derision. They who were at the greatest distance in character and sentiment, who differed from, despised and hated each other, on other accounts, united as one man, in expressing every possible mark of hatred and scorn against Him, who had done nothing amiss.

II.

They showed their scorn in the most pointed and cruel manner. Not only they, who had clamoured for His death, derided Him, but others, who were only passing by upon their ordinary occasions, could not pass on till they had stopped a while to insult Him, wagging their heads, and reminding Him of what He had formerly said, and charging Him with the supposed folly and arrogance of His claims. They jested upon His wants; when He said, I thirst , they gave Him vinegar to drink, mingled with gall. They jested upon His words; when He uttered His dolorous complaint, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me? some of them, with a malicious turn, (which possibly was applauded for wit by others) from the sound of the beginning of the sentence, took occasion to suggest, that by saying Eli, Eli, He called for Elias, the Prophet, to come to His assistance. Alas! of what dreadful malignity and obduracy [stubbornness] is the heart of man capable? How may we conceive the heavenly host to have been affected with this scene, when they beheld

their Lord, the object of their worship and supreme love, thus treated by sinners? But it behoved Him thus to suffer ([Luke 24:46](#)), for He had undertaken to expiate the sins of many of His murderers, and to offer such satisfaction to pardon the vilest offenders who should trust in His name, in all future ages. Therefore there was no voice, arrest, or interposition from the heavenly world —thus He must be tormented, thus He must be scorned, and suspended as a spectacle to angels and to men, till He had paid the full price of redemption, and could say, It is finished. Then, and not till then, He bowed His head, and breathed His spirit into His Father's hands. There were, however, attestations to his dignity, in this His lowest state. He showed, by His gracious answer to the penitent malefactor, that He had still upon earth authority to forgive sin, and to save to the uttermost. And the sun withdrew his light, and the rocks rent, though daring sinners derided and mocked.

III.

The bulk of the people bore their part in this tragedy, through precipitation and ignorance. In His prayer for their forgiveness (a prayer which was signally answered after His ascension) He mentioned the only extenuation their wickedness could possibly admit, They knew not what they did. It was otherwise, with those who were principally concerned in procuring His death. Long before, when they could not deny the reality of His miracles, they ascribed them to the agency of Beelzebub. By this malicious, wilful opposition to the strongest evidence of fact, against the conviction of their own minds, and by their violent, determined rejection of His mission, they committed the unpardonable sin. They spoke and sinned against the Holy Spirit. This sin no one can have committed, while he is fearful lest he has committed it, for it essentially consists, in a deliberate and wilful refusal of the only means of salvation. It is the sign of final absolute impenitence. They who had thus ascribed His miracles to Beelzebub, expressed the same height of enlightened malice against Him in His dying agonies, and there was a poignancy in their insults, of which the ignorant multitude were not capable.

(1.)

They reproached His great design for which He came into the world. He saved others, himself he cannot save ([Matthew 27:42](#)) How different is the force of the same words, according to the intention of the speaker! When they said, His blood be upon us and upon our children! (verse 25) they spoke the very language of the hearts of those who love Him, and who derive all their hopes, and all their happiness, from the application of His blood to their consciences. But, to themselves, it proved the most dreadful imprecation. So, it will be the grateful acknowledgment of His people in time, and to eternity, that when He was resolved to save them, the difficulties in the way were so great, that neither His prayers, nor His tears, nor His unspotted innocence, could prevail to save Himself. But for this, His love to sinners, His enemies reviled Him. Nor would they have offered to believe, if He would

come down from the cross, as they supposed there was the least probability of such an event; for they had often rejected evidence, equal to what they now demanded.

(2.)

They reproached Him for His trust and confidence in God. He had said that God was His own Father ([John 5:18](#)) And they understood Him to use the expression in so high a sense, as thereby to make Himself equal to God. Had they misunderstood Him; had He not really intended what they laid to His charge, surely He would have explained Himself. This was the very ground of their proceeding against Him before the council, and the formal reason of the sentence of death they pronounced against Him. How often did He appeal to the testimony of the Scriptures, and of John, whom they durst not but acknowledge to have been a Prophet, and to His own mighty works, in support of His claim? But having fastened Him upon the cross, they triumphed and unwittingly expressed their exultation, in the very words which David had foretold should be used to MESSIAH. So exactly were the Scriptures fulfilled, by those who used their utmost endeavours to evade them, and to prevent their accomplishment.

But what is all this to us? It is very much to us. Christ could suffer but once, yet we read of those who crucify Him afresh. His Gospel represents His personal ministry, declares His character, reveals His love, produces the same effects in those who receive it, and they who oppose it, are considered as opposing Him, and are influenced, by the same spirit, which instigated the unbelieving Jews. It is to be hoped that many reject and scorn it through ignorance, as the multitude did of old; and that the intercession of Him, who prayed for those that knew not what they did, will prevail for their conversion. Whenever their eyes are opened, they will be pricked to the heart ([Acts 2:37](#)) , and will then gladly enquire of those, whom now they despise, What they must do to be saved?

But it is to be feared, there are, in Christian countries many persons who too nearly resemble the spirit and conduct of the Jewish rulers; whose opposition proceeds from rooted enmity to the truth persisted in against light that has sometimes forced upon their minds, and who, though convinced, will not be persuaded. They, who despise, calumniate and scorn the believers of the Gospel, would certainly offer the like treatment to the Author of it, if He was within their reach. They are ill-treated for His sake, and He considers it as an affront to Himself. Thus He said to Saul of Tarsus, when breathing out threatening against His disciples, Why persecutes thou Me? They who reject his ministers, reject Him ([Luke 10:16](#)) They who speak disdainfully of His dying Himself to save others; they who reproach or ridicule the humble confidence of His people; who censure and revile their hopes and comforts derived from His good Word, as enthusiasm [fanaticism] or hypocrisy; who have no compassion for their distresses, but rather wound them as with a sword in their bones, saying unto them, Where is now your God? ([Psalm 115:2](#)) , are certainly treading, if not altogether with equal vehemence, in the footsteps of the Jewish rulers. May the Lord, in mercy, show

them the danger of their path, and give them a timely apprehension of the destruction to which it leads! That they may humble themselves to do His will, implore His pardon, espouse His cause, and experience the comforts and privileges of that Gospel, which they have hitherto reviled and scorned.

— O —

Sermon XXII

Messiah Unpitied, and Without a Comforter

[Psalm 69:20](#)

Reproach [Rebuke] hath broken my heart; and I am full of heaviness:
and I looked for some to take pity, but there was none;
and for comforters, but I found none.

The greatness of suffering cannot be certainly estimated by the single consideration of the immediate, apparent cause; the impression it actually makes upon the mind of the sufferer, must likewise be taken into the account. That which is a heavy trial to one person, may be much lighter to another, and, perhaps, no trial at all. And a state of outward prosperity, in which, the eye of the bystander can see nothing wanting to happiness, may be, (and I doubt not, often is) a state of torment to the possessor. On the other hand, we know that the consolations, with which it has sometimes pleased God to cheer His suffering servants, have enabled them to rejoice in the greatest extremities. They have triumphed upon the rack, and while their flesh was being consumed by the fire. The Lord has had many followers, who, for His sake, have endured scourgings, and tortures, and terrible deaths, not only without reluctance or dismay, but without a groan. But He, Himself, was terrified, amazed, and filled with anguish when He suffered for us. Shall we say, The disciples, in such cases, have been superior to their Master; when yet they acknowledged, that they derived all their strength and resolution, from Him? This difference, cannot be well accounted for, by those who deny that His sufferings were a proper atonement for sin, and who can see no other reason for His death, than that by dying He was to seal the truth of His doctrine, and to propose Himself to us as an example of constancy and patience. But the great aggravation of MESSIAH'S sufferings was, the suspensions of those divine supports, which enable His people to endure the severest afflictions to which He calls them. Perhaps some persons who acknowledge our Lord's true character, may, upon that ground, think His agonies less insupportable, since He was not a mere man, but God in the human nature. It was, indeed, the dignity of His person that gave influence and efficacy to all that He did and suffered for sinners. It is likewise true that the weight laid upon Him was more than any mere creature could sustain. I would speak, with reverence and reserve, upon a point which is too high for our weak minds fully to comprehend. But in whatever way the nature of man, which He assumed, was upheld by His eternal power and Godhead, we may venture to affirm, that He derived no sensible comfort from it. For we have His own testimony that, in this sense, God had forsaken Him. The divine nature could neither bleed nor suffer. He was truly and properly a man; and as a man, He suffered, and He suffered alone. Many of His servants have rejoiced while they were tormented, because God overbalanced all they felt, with the light of His countenance; but the Saviour Himself, deprived of this light, experienced to the uttermost all that sin deserved, that was not inconsistent with the perfection of His character.

My text expresses, so far as human words and ideas can reach, His exquisite distress, when He bore our sins in His own body, upon the tree. Reproach broke His heart, and when He looked for pity and comfort He found none.

I.

Reproach hath broken my heart. We must not confine our thoughts here, to the reproach of His enemies. The passage in the Messiah [Oratorio] expresses it, agreeably to the version of the Psalms used in our liturgy, Thy rebuke. Though He knew no sin, He was made sin for us. He was accounted and treated as a sinner. Now a sinner is, deservedly, the greatest object of contempt in the universe, and, indeed, the only object of deserved contempt. Thus He incurred the reproach of the law and justice of God. The Holy Father, viewing the Son of His love in this light, as charged with the sins of His people, forsook Him. God infinitely hates sin, and will have no fellowship with it; and of this He gave the most awful proof, by forsaking His beloved Son; when He took upon Him to answer for the sins of men. Then the sword of the Almighty awoke against Him, and He spared Him not ([Zechariah 13:7](#))

This rebuke broke His heart. Let broken-hearted sinners look, by faith, upon a broken-hearted Saviour. The phrase denotes woe and dejection inconceivable, with a failure of all resource. Anything may be borne while the spirit, the heart, remains firm; but if the heart itself be broken, who can endure? A wounded spirit, who can bear? ([Proverbs 18:14](#))

It is not surprising, therefore, that He says, I am full of heaviness. In the Evangelists, we read, that He began to be sore amazed, and very heavy ([Matthew 26:37, 38](#); [Mark 14:33](#)) ; and He said to His disciples, My soul is exceeding sorrowful even unto death. The most emphatic words are used, to describe His sensation of the bitter conflict of His soul, in the garden of Gethsemane, when as yet the hand of man had not touched Him. He began to be amazed [ekthambeo], or astonished. This word properly signifies, to be struck with terror and surprise, by some supernatural power, such as Belshazzar felt, when he suddenly saw the hand-writing against him upon the wall ([Daniel 5:6](#)) And to be very heavy [ademoneo —the strongest of the three words used in the New Testament for ‘depression‘], sated with grief, full, so as to be incapable of more. Some critics explain the word, as importing such an oppression of mind, as quite unfits a person for converse or society (compare [Job 30:29](#)) He said, I am exceeding sorrowful — surrounded, encompassed with sorrows [perilypos - encompassed with grief - [Matthew 26:38](#)] . It is added, He was in an agony [agonia - severe mental struggle and emotions, anguish - [Luke 22:44](#)] —a consternation of mind, such as arises from the prospect of some impending, unavoidable evil ; like the suspense of mariners upon the point of shipwreck, who tremble, equally at the view of the raging waves behind them, and the rocky shore before their eyes, on which they expect, in a few moments, to be dashed. The evils He was to bear, and to expiate, were now collecting to a point, and formed a dark tremendous storm just ready to break upon His devoted head; and the prospect filled His soul with unutterable horror, so that His sweat was, as it were, great drops of blood

falling down to the ground. Many have sweat under the extremity of pain, or terror; but His agonies, and the effect of them, were peculiar to Himself. His sweat was blood.

This is not a subject for declamation. It rather becomes us to adore in humble silence, the manifestation of the goodness and severity of God ([Romans 11:22](#)), in the Redeemer's sufferings, than to indulge in conjecture and the flights of imagination. What is expressly revealed we may assert, contemplate, and admire. His soul was made an offering for sin ([Isaiah 53:10](#)) We know but little of the extreme malignity of sin, because we have but faint views of the majesty, holiness, and goodness of God, against whom it is committed. Yet a single sin, if clothed with all its aggravations, and the guilt of it brought home with power to the heart, is sufficient to make the sinner a terror to himself. Adam had sinned but once, when he lost all comfort and confidence in God, and sought to hide himself. We have but slight thoughts of the extent of sin. Not only positive disobedience, but want of conformity to the law of God, is sinful. Every rising thought which does not comport with that reverence, dependence, and love, which is due to God, from creatures constituted, furnished, and indebted, as we are, is sinful. The sins of one person, in thought, word, and deed, sins of omission, and commission, are innumerable. What then is contained in the collective idea, in what the Scripture calls, the sin of the world? What then must be the atonement, the consideration, on the account of which the great God is no less righteous than merciful, in forgiving the sins, which His inviolable truth, and the honour of His government engage Him to punish. And they are punished, though forgiven. They were charged upon Jesus, they exposed Him to a rebuke which broke His heart. They filled Him with heaviness. When therefore, we are assured that the justice of God is satisfied, with respect to every sinner of the race of mankind, who, in obedience to the divine command, makes the sufferings of the Saviour his plea for pardon, and trusts in Him for salvation; and that upon this one ground they are freed from all condemnation, and accepted as children; when we are told, that the glory of the divine perfections is displayed in the highest, by this method of saving millions, who deserved to perish; we safely infer the greatness of the cause, from the greatness of the effect. The sufferings of Christ, which free a multitude of sinners from the guilt of innumerable sins, must have been inconceivably great indeed!

II.

Under this accumulated distress, though His will was perfectly submissive to the will of God, and His determination fixed to endure all that the case required; yet, as He was truly a man, He felt like a man. His fortitude was very different from a stoical hardness of spirit. All the affections of pure humanity, whatever does not imply sin (such as impatience under suffering, and an undue premature desire for deliverance), operated in Him, as they might do in one of us. It was no impeachment of His innocence, or of His willingness, that He wished, if it were possible, for some relief or alleviation of His misery. He looked, as we do, when we are in heaviness, for some to have pity on Him, and to comfort Him, but there was

none. Though the pity of our friends is often ineffectual, and can afford us no real assistance, yet it gives a little relief to have those about us, to whom we can open our minds; who will sympathize with us, and compassionately attend to our complaints, if they can do no more. And to be neglected and forsaken in extremity, especially by those who have expressed great friendship, or are under great obligations to us, will be felt as an aggravation of the most distressing case that can be imagined. But thus it was with MESSIAH. He had to complain, not only of the cruelty of His enemies, but of the insensibility and inconstancy, of those, who had professed the most cordial attachment to Him. The impression this made upon Him, as a man, was such that it is distinctly specified in the prophetic enumeration of the ingredients, which composed the bitter cup of His sufferings.

He was not only apprehended by cruel men, but betrayed into their hands by one whom He had admitted into the number of His select apostles, who had been employed in His service, favoured with access to Him in His more retired hours, and was present with the rest when he kept His last Passover, and took His solemn and affectionate leave of them, before He entered upon His Passion. It was not an avowed enemy, but one of the twelve who dipped with Him in the dish, that was guilty of this enormous ingratitude and treachery. How keen are our resentments, if those, to whom we have shown great kindness, are discovered to have studied our ruin while they wore the mask of friendship? Though MESSIAH was incapable of any sinful perturbation of mind, He was very capable of being painfully affected, by the conduct of Judas; He had reason to look for pity from him, but He found none.

When He entered the Garden of Gethsemane, He commanded, may I not say, He entreated, His disciples to tarry there and watch with Him. And to engage their utmost attention, He spoke plainly to them of His distress, saying, My soul is exceeding sorrowful even unto death. Yet when He returned to them, the first, the second, yea, the third time, He found them sleeping. How tender, yet how forcible was His expostulation, Could ye not watch one hour! ([Matthew 26:40](#)). What! could they know that their Lord was in an agony, wrestling with strong cries and tears, and yet sleep! as regardless of His sorrows, as of their own approaching danger! Were our dearest friends to show themselves equally insensible, when we were in extreme anguish, would not their indifference wound our spirits? He also was a man. And we may conceive it some addition to His grief, that when He looked to them for pity and comfort, He found none.

When He was apprehended, notwithstanding their former protestation of zeal and love, they all forsook Him and fled ([Matthew 26:56](#)) They sought their own safety, and left Him in the hands of His enemies. The Apostle Paul was thus deserted, and his expressions intimate that he felt it. At my first answer, no man stood by me, all men forsook me ([II Timothy 4:16](#)). He had imbibed, likewise, the spirit of his Master, and prayed that it might not be laid to their charge. And though the Lord Jesus pitied and excused the weakness of His disciples,

and permitted them to take care of themselves, it was in them, an instance, how little He could depend upon those, who were under the strongest obligations to Him.

But Peter followed his Lord to the hall of the High Priest, and there saw Him, with his own eyes, insulted, arraigned, and unjustly condemned. Might He not expect that Peter, the most active and earnest of all His followers, would have pitied Him at least at such a time? Alas! instead of pitying Him, Peter denied Him; he denied with oaths and imprecations, that he had any knowledge of Him, whom he had seen transfigured upon the mount, and whom he had seen agonizing in the garden. We read, That the Lord turned and looked upon Peter ([Luke 22:61](#)). Who can conceive the energy of that look! It was full of meaning, and Peter well understood it. Surely, though a look of tenderness and compassion, it conveyed the expostulation of an injured benefactor, no less forcibly, than if all who were present had heard him say, "Peter, is this the pity I am to expect from thee?"

When He was nailed to the cross, He was surrounded only by enemies. These, as we have seen, far from pitying, or attempting to comfort Him, derided and mocked Him. How have some of us felt for our friends in their dying hours, though we have seen every possible attention paid to them, and everything provided and done for them, that could administer to their relief and comfort! But they, who have the faith which realizes unseen things, have their best Friend expiring in tortures, and insulted by His murderers, in His last moments.

But had all His disciples been near Him, and had all His enemies been His friends, still, in His situation, He would have been alone. The loss of the light of God's countenance, will, to the soul that has enjoyed it, create a universal solitude, and render every earthly good tasteless, in proportion as that soul is united to Him in love; and still more, if there be super-added a sense of His displeasure. They, who have never tasted that the Lord is good, not having known the difference, can have no conception of this subject. Their minds are, at present, occupied with earthly things; and while they are thus engaged with trifles, they cannot believe, though they are repeatedly told it, that to an immortal spirit, a separation from the favour of God involves in it the very essence of misery. But should death surprise them in their sins, tear them from all that they have seen and loved, and plunge them into an unknown, unchangeable world, then (alas! too late!) they will be sensible of their immense, irreparable loss, in being cut off from the fountain of life and comfort. A suspension of this Divine presence, with an awful sense and feeling of what those, for whom He made Himself responsible, deserved, was the most dreadful part of the Redeemer's sufferings. —He was perfectly united to the will and love of His Heavenly Father, and by the perfect holiness of His nature, incapable of tasting satisfaction in any thing else, if His presence were withdrawn. But when He endured the curse of the law for us, He looked to God for pity and comfort, but He found none.

In this glass [magnifying glass of God's Word] we are to contemplate the demerit of sin. But there are some sufferings due to the impenitent sinner, of which MESSIAH was not

capable. I mean the consciousness of personal guilt, the gnawing of a remorseful conscience, and the rage of despair. If we add the idea of eternity to the whole, we may form some faint judgment of what they are delivered from, who believe in Him, and what misery awaits those who presume to reject Him. Awful thought, to reject the only Saviour. If they refuse His mediation, they must answer in their own persons. Then they will find no pity, no comforter. For who, or what, can comfort, when the LORD God Omnipotent arises to punish? What will your pleasures, your wealth, or friends, do for you, when the hand of the Lord shall touch you to the quick? What smile can you expect will support you, against the terror of His frown?

Should any of you hear the Messiah [Oratorio] performed again, then and there, if not before, may God impress upon your heart the sense of this passage. Then you will understand, that the sufferings of the Son of God, are, by no means, a proper subject for the amusement of a vacant hour.

— O —

Sermon XXIII

No Sorrow Like Messiah's Sorrow

[Lamentations 1:12](#)

Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by?

Behold, and see, if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow!

Although the Scriptures of the Old Testament, the law of Moses, the Psalms, and the Prophecies ([Luke 24:44](#)), bear an harmonious testimony to MESSIAH; it is not necessary to suppose that every single passage has an immediate and direct relation to Him. A method of exposition has frequently obtained [frequently been in vogue], of a fanciful and allegorical cast [contrivance], under the pretext of spiritualizing the Word of God. Ingenious men, and sometimes men not very ingenious, have endeavoured to discover types [prophetic symbols] and mysteries in the plainest of historical parts, where we have no sufficient evidence that the Holy Spirit intended to teach them. And, upon very slight grounds, a proof has been attempted of the great doctrines of the Gospel, which may be proved much more safely and solidly from the passages of Scripture in which they are plainly and expressly revealed. But, by taking this course, instead of throwing real light upon the places they have, in this manner, attempted to explain; they have perplexed their hearers and readers, and led them to question whether there be any fixed and determinate sense of Scripture, that may be fully depended upon. It is true, when we have the authority of an inspired expositor to lead us, we may follow him without fear; but this will not warrant us to strike out a path for ourselves, and trust to our conjectures, where we have not such an infallible guide. The epistle to the Hebrews is a key to explain to us many passages, in a higher sense, than perhaps we should have otherwise understood them. But it is best for us to keep within safe bounds, and to propose our own sentiments with great modesty, when they are not supported by New Testament authority; lest we should incur the censure of being wise, above what is written. I may, without scruple, affirm, that the history of Sarah and Hagar, is an allegory referring to the two Covenants, because the Apostle Paul has affirmed it before me ([Galatians 4:24](#)); but if I attempted to spiritualize the history of Leah and Rachel, likewise, you would not be bound to believe me, without proof. I may preach the Gospel of Christ, from a text which mentions the manna, or the brazen serpent, because, our Lord has expounded these things, as typical of Himself ([John 3:14](#); [John 6:31, 35](#)). But I must not be confident that every resemblance, which I think I can trace, is the true sense of the place; because, I may imagine many resemblances and types [symbols] which the Scripture does not authorize.

There is, however, a useful way of preaching, by accommodation, that is, when the literal sense is first clearly stated to apply the passage, not directly to prove a doctrine, as if really contained in it, but only to illustrate the doctrine expressly taught in other parts of the Scripture. Thus, for instance, if the question of Jonadab to Amnon ([II Samuel 13:4](#)), were chosen for the subject of discourse, Why art thou, being a king's son, lean from day

to day? The history of the context directly proves the malignity of sinful inordinate desire, and the misery of those who are under its dominion; that it poisons every situation in life, and renders the sinner incapable of satisfaction, though he were a king's son. The form of the question might then lead, to observe, That believers are king's sons, to show what are the great privileges of their adoption; and to enquire, how it comes to pass that many persons, so highly privileged, are lean, that is, uncomfortable, weak, and languishing in their profession? These points might, not improperly, be introduced, by way of accommodation, though they are not, directly deducible from the literal sense of the question.

The text I have just read to you ([Lamentations 1:12](#)) , has led me to this digression. I find it in the series of the passages in the Messiah [Oratorio], but I am not sure that, in the literal sense, it immediately refers to Him. It is a pathetic exclamation by which the Prophet Jeremiah expresses his grief, or rather the grief of Jerusalem, when the sins of the people had given success to the Chaldean army, and the temple and the city were destroyed. Jerusalem is poetically considered as a woman, lately reigning a queen among the nations, but now a captive, dishonoured, spoiled, and sitting upon the ground. She entreats the commiseration of those who pass by, and asks, If there be any sorrow like unto her sorrow? Such a question, has often been in the heart, and in the mouth of the afflicted, especially in an hour of impatience. We are all, in our turns, disposed to think our own trials peculiarly heavy, and our own cases singular. But to them who ask this question, we may answer, Yes —there has been a sorrow greater than yours, greater than the sorrow of Jeremiah, or of Jerusalem. They who have heard of the sorrows of Jesus, will surely, upon the hearing of this question, be reminded of Him, whether it was the intention of the Prophet to personate Him, or not. If we conceive of Him hanging upon the cross, and speaking in this language to us, Was ever any sorrow like my sorrow? must not we reply with admiration and gratitude, “No Lord, never was love, never was grief like Thine.”

The expostulation, and the question, are equally applicable to the sufferings of MESSIAH. The former, indeed, is not inserted in the Oratorio , but I am not willing to leave it out. The highest wonder ever exhibited to the world, to angels, and men, is the Son of God, suffering and dying for sinners. Next to this, hardly anything is more astonishing to an enlightened mind —than the gross and stupid insensibility with which the sufferings of the Saviour are treated, and the indifference with which this wonderful event is regarded by creatures who are so nearly concerned in it. If they believe in Him, they will be healed by His wounds, and live by His death. If they finally reject Him, they must perish; and their guilt, and misery will be greatly aggravated by what they have heard of Him! But sin has so blinded our understandings, and hardened our hearts, that we have, naturally, no feeling, either for Him, or for ourselves.

I.

Is the expostulation suited to any person here? Can I, with propriety, say, to some who are now present, Has this subject been, hitherto, nothing to you? Then, surely, you have not heard of it before; and, therefore, now you do hear of it, you will, you must, be affected. If you were to read in the common newspapers, that a benevolent and excellent person had fallen into the hands of murderers, who had put him to death in the most cruel manner, would it not be something to you? Could you avoid impressions of surprise, indignation, and grief? Surely, if this transaction were news to you, it would engross your thoughts. But alas! you have rather heard of it too often, till it has become to you as a worn-out tale. I am willing to take it for granted, that you allow the fact. You believe that Jesus Christ suffered under Pontius Pilate, was condemned by the Jews, and crucified by the Romans. And is it possible this should be nothing to you? Is it too insignificant to engage, or deserve your attention? And yet, perhaps, you have wept at a representation, or a narrative, which, you knew, was wholly founded in fiction. How strange? What! the sorrows of Jesus nothing to you! when you admit that He suffered for sinners, and will probably admit that you are a sinner. No longer, then, boast of your sensibility! Your heart must be a heart of stone. Yet thus it is with too many; your tempers, your conduct, give evidence that, hitherto, the death of Jesus has been nothing to you. You would not have acted otherwise, at least you would not have acted worse, if you had never heard of His name. Were His sufferings anything to you, is it possible that you would live in the practice of those sins, for which no atonement could suffice, but His blood? Were you duly affected by the thought of His crucifixion, is it possible that you could crucify Him afresh, and put Him to open shame, by bearing the name of a Christian, and yet living in a course unsuitable to the spirit and precepts of His Gospel? But if you are indifferent to His grief, is it nothing to you on your own account? What! is it nothing to you whether you are saved or perish? whether you are found at His right, or His left hand, in the great Day of His appearance? or whether He shall then say to you, Come ye blessed, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you; or, Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire? ([Matthew 25:34, 41](#)). There is no medium, no alternative. If you refuse this, there remains no other sacrifice for sin. This lamentable indifference to the Redeemer's sorrows, is a full proof of the baseness and wickedness of the human heart; and it is felt as such, when the Holy Spirit convinces of sin. Natural conscience, may excite a painful conviction, of the sinfulness of many actions. But this stupid unbelief of the heart is, if I may so speak, the sin of sins, it is the root and source of every evil, and yet so congenial to our very frame as we are depraved creatures, that God alone can make the sinner feel it ([John 16:9](#)); and when he does feel it, the sense of it wounds and grieves him, more than all his other sins.

II.

With respect to the question, if we rightly understand what has been observed from the Scripture history, in the six preceding sermons, concerning the particulars of His Passion;

we may answer, without hesitation, Never was suffering or sorrow like that which MESSIAH endured, in the Day of the Lord's fierce anger. It is possible that history, which is little more than a detail of the cruelty and wickedness of mankind, may furnish us with instances of many persons who have suffered excruciating torments, and have been mocked and insulted in their agonies: But,

(1.)

Was there ever a character, of His dignity and excellence, treated in such a manner? Job considered his former state as a great aggravation of his sufferings. He enlarges upon the respect which had been shown him in his prosperity. When I went out to the gate, through the city, the young men saw me and hid themselves, the aged arose and stood up. When the ear heard me, then it blessed me; and when the eye saw me, it gave witness to me ([Job 29: 8, 11](#)) But afterwards speaking of fools, of base men, of the vilest of the earth, he adds, Now I am their song, yea, their by-word. They abhor me, and spare not to spit in my face. They mar my path, they set forward my calamity, they come upon me as a wide breaking in of waters ([Job 30:8-14](#)). But Jesus was the Lord of glory. He whom all the angels of God worshipped, was buffeted and spit upon by the lowest rabble. If a great king was degraded from his throne, and exposed to the derision of slaves, this would be a small thing, compared with the humiliation of Him, who, in His own right, was King of kings, and Lord of lords.

(2.)

Was there ever so innocent a sufferer? When Aaron lost his two sons, he held his peace ([Leviticus 10:3](#)). A little before, he had been guilty of making the golden calf. The remembrance of this offence, composed his mind under his great trial. He saw that he deserved a still heavier punishment, and was silent. In like manner, David, when his rebellious son Absalom conspired against his life, was patient; he remembered the adultery and murder he had committed; and, though he mourned under his afflictions, he durst not complain ([II Samuel 16:11](#)). The malefactor upon the cross submitted to his sentence, because he was a malefactor, saying, And we indeed justly ([Luke 23:41](#)) It is thus with all who know themselves. Under their severest afflictions, they admit the propriety of the Prophet's question, Why should a living man complain? ([Lamentations 3:39](#)) And they acknowledge, It is of the LORD's great mercy, they are not utterly consumed (verse 22) But Jesus was holy, harmless, and undefiled; He had fulfilled the whole law, and had nothing amiss, yet He yielded Himself as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He opened not His mouth ([Isaiah 53:7](#))

(3.)

Did ever any sufferer experience, in an equal degree, the Day of God's fierce anger? In the greatest of our sufferings, in those which bear the strongest marks of the Lord's displeasure, there is always some mitigation, some mixture of mercy. At the worst, we have still reason to acknowledge that, He hath not dealt with us after our own sins, nor according to

the full desert of our iniquities ([Psalm 103:10](#)) If we are in pain, we do not feel every kind of pain at once, yet, we can give no sufficient reason why we should not. If we are exercised with poverty and losses, yet something worth the keeping, and more than we can justly claim, is still left to us, at least our lives are spared, though forfeited by sin. If we are in distress of soul, tossed with tempest and not comforted, we are not quite out of the reach of hope. Even if sickness, pain, loss, and despair, should all overtake us in the same moment, all is still less than we deserve. Our proper desert is hell, an exclusion from God, and confinement with Satan and his angels, where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. Everything short of this is a mercy. But Jesus, though He had no sin of His own, bore the sins of many. His sufferings were indeed, temporary, limited in their duration, but otherwise extreme. Witness the effects, His heaviness unto death, His consternation, His bloody sweat, His eclipse [His humiliating end] upon the cross, when deprived of that Presence, which was his only, and His exceeding, joy. On these accounts, no sorrow was like unto His sorrow!

The unknown sorrows of the Redeemer, are a continual source of support and consolation to His believing people. In His sufferings, they contemplate His atonement, His love, and His example, and they are animated by the bright and glorious issue: For He passed from death to life, from suffering to glory.

(1.)

His atonement, apprehended by faith, delivers them from guilt and condemnation, gives them peace with God, and access to Him with liberty as children ([Romans 5:1, 2](#)) Being thus delivered from their heavy burden, and from the power of Satan, and having a way open for receiving supplies of grace, and strength, according to their day, they are prepared to take up their cross, and to follow Him.

(2.)

His love, in submitting to such sorrows for their sakes, attaches their hearts to Him. Great is the power of love! It makes hard things easy, and bitter sweet. Some of us can tell, or rather, we cannot easily tell, how much we would cheerfully do, or bear, or forbear, for the sake of the person whom we dearly love. But this noblest principle of the soul, can never exert itself with its full strength, till it is supremely fixed upon its proper object. The love of Christ has a constraining force indeed! ([II Corinthians 5:14](#)) . It is stronger than death. It overcomes the world. And we thus love Him, because He first loved us; because He loved us, and gave Himself for us ([I John 4:19](#) ; [Galatians 2:20](#))

(3.)

His example. The thought that He suffered for them, arms them with the like mind. They look to Him and are enlightened. By His cross they are crucified to the world, and the world to them. They no longer court its favour, or are afraid of its frown. They know what they must expect, if they will be His servants, by the treatment He met with; and they are content. He, who endured the contradiction of sinners against Himself, for them, is worthy

that they should suffer, likewise, for Him. It is their desire neither to provoke the opposition of men, nor to dread it. They commit themselves to Him, and are sure that He will not expose them to such sufferings, as He endured for them. So, likewise, under all the trials and afflictions, which they endure, more immediately, from the hand of the Lord, a lively thought of His sorrows reconciles them to their own. Thus by His stripes they are healed, and are comforted by having fellowship with Him in His sufferings.

(4.)

Lastly, if more were necessary, (and, sometimes, through remaining infirmity and surrounding temptation, every consideration is no more than necessary) they know that their Lord passed through sufferings to glory. And they know (for they have His own gracious promise) that if they suffer with Him, they shall also reign with Him ([John 12:26](#); [Romans 8:18](#)) They are sure, that the sufferings of the present life, are not worthy to be compared with the joy which will then be revealed; and that when Christ, who is their life, shall appear, they also shall appear with Him in glory ([Colossian 3:4](#)) ; and therefore they are comforted in all their tribulation, and can say, None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I may finish my course with joy ([Acts 20:24](#))

— O —

Sermon XXIV

Messiah's Innocence Vindicated

[Isaiah 53:8](#)

He was taken from prison and from judgment,
and who shall declare his generation?

For he was cut off out of the land of the living;
for the transgression of my people was he stricken.

Let not plain Christians be stumbled because there are difficulties in the prophetic parts of the Scriptures, and because translators and expositors sometimes explain them with some difference, as to the sense. Whatever directly relates to our faith, practice, and comfort, may be plainly collected from innumerable passages, in which all the versions, and all sober expositors agreed. That there are some differences, will not appear strange, if we consider the antiquity of the Hebrew language, and that the Old Testament is the only book extant, which was written during the time that it was the common language of the people. For this reason we meet with many words which occur but once; and others, which do not occur frequently, are evidently used in more than one sense. If we suppose that a time should come, when the English language should be no longer spoken, and no more than a single volume in it be preserved, we may well conceive that posterity might differ, as to the sense of many expressions, notwithstanding the assistances they might obtain, by comparing the English with the French, Dutch, and other languages, which were in use at the same period. Such assistance, we derive from the Chaldee, Syriac, Greek, and other ancient versions of the Old Testament, sufficient to confirm us in the true sense of the whole, and to throw light upon many passages otherwise dark and dubious; and yet, there will remain a number of places, the sense of which, the best critics have not been able to fix with certainty. Farther, the prophecies are usually expressed in the style of poetry, which, in all languages, is remote from the common forms of speaking. The grand evidence to a humble mind, that the Holy Scripture was originally given by inspiration of God, and that the version of it, which by His good Providence we are favoured with, is authentic, is, the effect it has upon the heart and conscience, when enlightened by the Holy Spirit. And without this internal, experimental evidence, the learned are no less at a loss than the vulgar.

An acquaintance with the Hebrew, will, perhaps, suggest a meaning in this verse (the latter part of which is taken into the Messiah [Oratorio]) which may not readily occur to an English reader. But, the purport of it, is plainly expressed, in many other passages. The text is not merely a repetition of what was spoken before, concerning the Redeemer's sufferings; rather the declaration, of what was to follow them, begins here. It is the opening of a bright and glorious subject. He was taken, He was taken up, like Enoch and Elijah, from prison, and from judgment, and who can declare His generation? or, (as the word properly signifies) His age? Who can declare His state, the establishment and duration of His dignity,

influence, and government? For though He was cut off, made an excision and a curse, from amongst men, it was not upon His own account, but for the transgression of my people, that He was smitten.

God was manifested in the flesh ([I Timothy 3:16](#)) and, in the flesh, He suffered as a malefactor. Undoubtedly the divine nature is incapable of suffering; but the human nature, which did suffer, was assumed by Him who is over all, God, blessed for ever ([Romans 9:5](#)) But He was justified in the Spirit; and sufficient care was taken, that in His lowest humiliation, though He was condemned and reviled, His character should be vindicated. I shall, therefore, consider, at present, the testimonies given to His innocence. Though He was cut off out of the land of the living, it was only as a substitute for others. He was stricken, for the transgression of His people.

(1.)

The first attestation, and which of itself is fully sufficient to establish this point, is that of Judas. He was one of the twelve apostles who attended our Lord's person, and who were admitted to a nearer and more frequent intercourse with Him than the rest of His disciples. Though our Lord knew that his heart was corrupt, and that he would prove a traitor, He does not appear to have treated him with peculiar reserve; or, to have kept him more at a distance than the other apostles; for when He told them, One of you shall betray me, they had no particular suspicion of Judas. He, therefore, was well acquainted with the more retired hours of his Master's life. He had been often with Him in Gethsemane, before he went thither to betray Him to His enemies. When he had acted this treacherous part, if he, who had been frequently present when Jesus conversed most freely in private, with His select followers, had known anything amiss in His conduct, we may be sure he would gladly have disclosed it, for his own justification.

Christian societies have usually been reviled and slandered by those who have apostatized from them; their mistakes, if they were justly chargeable with any, have been eagerly published and exaggerated; and many things, often laid to their charge, which they knew not. But Judas, on the contrary, was compelled by his conscience, to return his ill-gotten gain to the chief priests and elders, and to confess, I have sinned, in that I have betrayed the innocent blood ([Matthew 27:4](#)) Considering the time of making this declaration, when he saw that he was already condemned, and the persons to whom he made it, even to those who had condemned Him, it cannot be denied that he was an unsuspected and competent witness to His innocence. And the answer of the chief priests, implied, that, though their malice could be satisfied with nothing less than the death of this innocent person, they were unable to contradict the traitor's testimony.

(2.)

Though Pilate, likewise, condemned MESSIAH to death, to gratify the importunity of the Jews, he repeatedly declared his firm persuasion of His innocence. And he did it with

great solemnity. He took water, and washed his hands, publicly, before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person ([Matthew 27:24](#)) He laboured for His release, though the fear of man prevailed upon him at last, as it has upon many, to act in defiance to the light and conviction of his conscience. And from him we learn that Herod, notwithstanding he mocked Him and set Him at naught, considered the accusations of His enemies to be entirely groundless ([Luke 23:15](#)) . And farther, when the Jews proposed such an alteration of the title affixed to His cross, as might imply that the claims our Lord had made were unjust and criminal, Pilate utterly refused to comply with their demand.

(3.)

The thief upon the cross, with his dying breath, said, This man hath done nothing amiss. If his competency as a witness should be disputed, because it is probable he had known but little of Him, I admit the objection. Be it so, that this malefactor had little personal knowledge of our Lord. Then his opinion of His innocence must have been founded upon public report; and, therefore, it seems he spoke not for himself only; but his words may be taken as a proof, that the people at large, though they suffered themselves to be influenced by the chief priests, to demand His death, and to prefer Barabbas a robber and a murderer to Him, were generally conscious that He had done nothing amiss. Many of those who now said, Crucify Him, Crucify Him, had, not long before, welcomed Him with acclamations of praise, saying, Hosanna to the Son of David. This inconsistency, and inconstancy, is not altogether surprising to those who are well acquainted with the weakness and wickedness of human nature in its present state; and who consider the effects which the misrepresentations and artifice of persons of great name, and in high office, have often produced in the minds of the ignorant and superstitious. Thus, at Lystra, through the persuasion of the Jews, the Apostle Paul was stoned and left for dead by the very people who, a little before, could with difficulty be restrained from paying him divine honours ([Acts 14:12, 19](#))

(4.)

Though the salvation of men, and the honour of the law of God, required that when MESSIAH undertook to make an atonement for our sins, He should be thus given up to the rage and cruelty of His enemies, suffer all the infamy due to the worst and vilest transgressors, and be deserted by God and man; yet, His Heavenly Father , bore a signal and solemn testimony to His character. The frame of nature sympathized with her suffering Lord. The heavens were clothed with sackcloth; the sun withdrew his shining; the sanctuary was laid open, by the rending of the veil of the temple from the top to the bottom; the earth trembled greatly; the rocks were rent; the graves opened; and the dead arose. These events, in connection with what had passed before, extorted an acknowledgement of His innocence from the Roman centurion, who was appointed to attend His execution.

Thus it appears, that Judas who betrayed Him; the Jewish council, which could not find sufficient ground, even though they employed false and suborned witnesses, to pass sentence

upon Him; Herod, who derided Him; Pilate, who condemned Him; the malefactor, who suffered with Him; and the commander of the soldiers who crucified Him, all combined in a declaration of His innocence: God Himself confirming their word, by signs and wonders in heaven, and upon earth.

It may seem quite unnecessary to prove the innocence of Him, who in His human nature was absolutely perfect, and in whom, the presence and fulness of God dwelt. And it is, indeed, unnecessary to those who believe in His name. It is, however, a pleasing contemplation to them, and has an important influence upon their faith and hope. In this they triumph, that He who knew no sin Himself, was made sin, was treated as a sinner for them, that they might be made the righteousness of God in Him. The High Priest of our profession needed not, as those who typified His office of old, to offer up sacrifice, first for His own sins, and then for the sins of the people, for He was perfectly holy, harmless, and undefiled. And had He not been a lamb without spot or blemish, He could not have been accepted on our behalf. It was the perfection of His voluntary obedience to the law of our nature, under which He submitted to be made, which, conjoined with the excellence of His character as the Son of God, made Him meet [qualified], able, and worthy, to expiate our transgressions. By the one offering —of Himself, once offered, He has made an end of sin, brought in an everlasting righteousness, and having appeared with His own blood within the veil, in the presence of God for us, and ever living to make intercession for all who come unto God by Him. In Him, all the seed of Israel shall be justified and shall glory ([Isaiah 45:17, 25](#)) In Him the true Israel, the partakers of the faith of Abraham shall be saved, saved to the uttermost, saved with an everlasting salvation; they shall not be ashamed, nor confounded, world without end.

But who that knows these things, can sufficiently commiserate the fatal effects of that unbelief, which blinds and hardens the hearts of multitudes! especially that more learned, and informed, and, therefore more inexcusable unbelief, which characterizes the modern patrons of scepticism. They read and admire ancient history. There is no old story so frivolous, or improbable, but it is sufficient to engage their attention, and to exercise their acumen, if it be found in * Herodotus, or * Livy. They spare no pains, they perplex themselves, and weary their readers, with their attempts to decipher an ancient inscription, or to fix the date, or reconcile the circumstances of a supposed event, which after all, perhaps, never took place, but in the imagination of the writer. Their implicit deference to such uncertain authorities as these, often verges upon the border of extreme credulity. The Bible is an ancient history likewise, and if it was only received upon the footing of the rest, as merely a human composition, the facts which it relates, and the manner in which they are related, the admirable simplicity of narration in some parts, the unrivalled sublimity [excellence, grandeur, beauty] of description in others; the justness and discrimination of characters; the views it unfolds, of the workings of the human heart, and the springs of action, so exactly

conformable to experience and observation, might surely recommend it to their notice. And possibly, if it did claim no higher authority than a human composition, men, who have any just pretensions to taste, would admire it, no less, than they now undervalue it. But because it does not flatter their pride, nor give indulgence to their corrupt propensities, they are afraid to study it, lest the internal marks of its divine original, should force unwelcome convictions upon their minds. Therefore they remain willingly ignorant of its contents, or the knowledge they discover of it is so very superficial, that a well-instructed child of ten years of age may smile at the mistakes of critics and philosophers. That such a book is extant, is undeniable. How can they account for its production? A view of what they have actually done, will warrant us to assert that the wisest men of antiquity, neither would have written such a book if they could; nor were they able, had they been ever so willing. And yet we have as good evidence, that the New Testament was written by plain and unlearned men, as we have for any fact recorded in history. How could such men, invent such a book! And how could they, without seeming directly to design it, but incidentally, as it were, represent that persons of such various characters, who concurred in putting Jesus to death, should all equally concur in establishing the testimony of His innocence! * Herodotus - Greek historian of the 5th Century.

* Livy - Titus Livius (59 BC – AD 17), a Roman historian

True Christians, when they suffer unjustly, may learn, from the example of their Lord, to suffer patiently. The Apostle presses this argument upon servants ([I Peter 2:18-21](#)) —who in those days were chiefly bond-servants, or slaves. He, therefore, evidently supposes that the knowledge of the Gospel was sufficient to qualify people, in the lowest situations of human life, with a fortitude and magnanimity of spirit of which philosophy could scarcely reach the conception. In effect, to be much taken up with the interests of self, to live upon the breath of others, to be full of resentment for every injury, and watchful to retaliate it, these are the properties and tokens of a little and narrow mind. It requires no energy, no sacrifice, no resolution, to acquire such a disposition; for it is natural to us, and powerful and habitual, in the weakest and least respectable characters. But to act uniformly as the servants of God, satisfied with His approbation, under the regulation of His will, and, for His sake cheerfully to bear whatever hardships a compliance with duty may expose us to, enduring grief, suffering wrongfully, and acting in the spirit of benevolence and meekness, not only to the good, but also to the froward; this indicates a true nobleness of soul. And to this, we are called, by our profession; for thus Christ suffered. He did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth; yet He was reviled, but He reviled not again. He suffered, though innocent; but He threatened not. He was crucified by wicked men; but He prayed for them, while they were nailing Him to the cross. This was an eminent branch of the mind that was in Christ, and it ought to be a distinguishing feature in the character of His people. For, is the disciple above his Lord? or should the conduct of the disciple contradict that of his Lord? Undoubtedly, so far as we

are partakers in the doctrine of His sufferings, and have real fellowship with Him in His death, we shall resemble Him. If we say, we abide in Him, we ought to walk even as He walked ([I John 2:6](#)) . But they, who, calling themselves Christians, are full of the spirit of self-justification, contention, and complaint; while they profess to believe in Him, deny Him by their works. The Apostles, Peter and John, deeply affected by their obligations to Him, and by the exquisite pattern of meekness and tenderness which He had set before them, departed from the presence of the council, not swelling with anger, nor hanging down their heads with grief, but rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His sake ([Acts 5:41](#)) And He deserves no less from us, than He did from them. It was for us, no less than for them, that He endured reproach, and was content to die as a malefactor, though He was innocent.

— O —

Sermon XXV

Messiah Rising from the Dead

[Psalm 16:10](#)

For Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell,
neither wilt Thou suffer Thine Holy One to see corruption.

That the Gospel is a divine revelation may be summarily proved from the character of its Author. If an infidel was so far divested of prejudice and prepossession, as to read the history of Jesus Christ, recorded by the Evangelists, with attention, and in order to form his judgment of it, simply and candidly, as evidence should appear; I think he must observe many particulars in his spirit and conduct, so very different from the prevailing sentiments of mankind, as to convince him, that man, in his present state, could not possibly have conceived the idea of such a character. Poets, and historians, have often employed their powers in delineating, what appeared to them, the great, and the excellent, in human conduct. But how different are the pictures of their admired heroes, sages and legislators, from the portrait of the Saviour, as it is drawn, with the utmost simplicity, by plain, unlettered men, who, without art or affectation, only describe what they profess to have seen and heard. I fix, at present, upon a single consideration, which, perhaps, cannot be expressed more properly, or forcibly, than in the words of an ingenious * writer, now living —

“ He [Jesus Christ] is the only founder of a religion, in the history of mankind, which is totally unconnected with all human policy and government, and, therefore, totally uncondusive to any worldly purpose whatever. All others, Mahomet, Numa, and even Moses himself, blended their religious institutions with their civil, and by them, obtained dominion over their respective people; but Christ neither aimed at, nor would accept of any such power. He rejected every object ([John 18:36](#)) which all other men pursue, and made choice of those which others fly from and are afraid of. He refused power, riches, honours, and pleasure; and courted poverty, ignominy, tortures, and death. Many have been the enthusiasts and impostors, who have endeavoured to impose on the world, pretended revelations; and some of them from pride, obstinacy, or principle, have gone so far, as to lay down their lives, rather than retract: but I defy history to show one, who ever made his own sufferings and death ([John 12:24, 32, 33](#)), a necessary part of his original plan, and essential to his mission. This Christ actually did, He foresaw, foretold, declared their necessity, and voluntarily endured them ([John 12:33, 34](#)). ”

* Soame Jenyns (1704-1787) - “Internal Evidence of the Christian Religion”

The death of our Lord was, indeed, essential to His plan; as such, it was constantly in His view, and He often spoke of it. Probably it was the whole of His enemies’ plan, and when they saw Him dead, buried, and the sepulchre sealed, they triumphed in their success, and expected to hear of Him no more. But the Scriptures, which were read in their synagogues every Sabbath day, foretold His resurrection from the dead. The text before us, if there were

no other, is a sufficient proof of this, to those who acknowledge the authority of the New Testament, since it is expressly applied to Him by the Apostles, Peter and Paul.

The word in the Hebrew text before us, rendered, in our version, Soul, is used in different senses. According to the connection in which it stands, it signifies breath, life, soul, or spirit; and sometimes dead body. The corresponding Greek word, where the Apostle quotes this verse ([Acts 2:27](#)), has, likewise, various significations. And the original words answering to Hell, signify both the invisible world; or the state of the dead, and sometimes the grave. Notwithstanding this seeming diversity, we are at no loss here for the precise sense. Scripture is the best interpreter of itself. It is evidently the Apostle's design to prove that the Psalmist foresaw and foretold the resurrection of that body which was taken down dead from the cross, and laid in Joseph's tomb. With this body our Lord arose on the third day, according to the Scriptures.

Though MESSIAH was, for our sakes, treated as a malefactor, all who were immediately concerned in His death, were constrained (as we have seen) to declare His innocence. But He was worthy of a more solemn and authoritative justification. Accordingly, He was declared to be the Son of God, with power, by His resurrection from the dead ([Romans 1:4](#))

The Apostle expounds Thine Holy One, by the word flesh ([Acts 2:26](#)). The human nature, the body formed by the immediate power of God, and born of a virgin, was holy.—It was, A holy thing ([Luke 1:35](#)) Perfect and pure, and therefore naturally not mortal, though subject to death for us. In this nature, the Son of God was charged with sins not His own; He became willingly responsible for many ([Matthew 20:28](#)). Whatever was necessary on the behalf of sinners, to render their forgiveness consistent with the honour of the law, justice, truth, and government of God, was exacted of Him, and He performed, and paid, to the utmost. He made a full atonement for sin; and though He had power over His life, He hung hour after hour in agonies upon the cross, till He said, It is finished. Then, He resigned His spirit into the hands of His Heavenly Father. He was afterwards buried. But having finished His whole undertaking, destroyed death, and him that had the power of it, and opened the way to the Kingdom of Heaven, in favour of all who should believe in Him, it was not possible that He should be detained in the grave ([Acts 2:24](#)) He had power, likewise, to resume the life He had laid down for His sheep; and He arose the third day, to exercise all power and authority in heaven and in earth.

His resurrection, therefore, is the grand principal fact, upon which the truth and importance of Christianity rests. For though Christ died, if He had not risen again, your faith, and our preaching, would be in vain. We should be yet in our sins ([I Corinthians 15:17](#)) And though it was not necessary that His resurrection should have been so publicly known, at the time, as His crucifixion, the evidence for it is strong and decisive. No one point of ancient history is capable of such clear, accumulated proof. The apostles frequently saw Him, conversed with Him, ate and drank with Him, and were assured, that it was He, by many infallible

proofs. They could not be deceived themselves, nor could they have any temptation to deceive others. They declared His resurrection to the very people who put Him to death; and they confirmed it by many indisputable miracles, which they performed in His name. They persevered in this testimony, in defiance of the malice of the Jews, and the scorn of the heathens. And by this doctrine of a crucified risen Saviour, though unsupported by the patronage of human power, yea, though opposed by it, in every place, they effected that change in the moral world wherever they went, which the philosophers had not been able to produce, by all their instructions, in a single instance; turning men, whom they found under the strongest prejudices of education and habit, from darkness to light, and from the worship of dumb idols to serve the living and true God ([I Thessalonians 1:9](#))

But there are proofs of this point which depend not upon arguments or history, which require neither learning, genius, nor study to comprehend; but are equally adapted to persons of all capacities, and in all circumstances. These are the effects which this doctrine produces on the hearts of those who truly receive it upon the authority of Scripture, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, whose office it is to open the eyes of the mind, to take of the things of Jesus, (what the Scripture reveals of His person, offices, and glory) and to present them, with infallible light and evidence, to those who humbly yield themselves to His teaching. These are made partakers of the power of His resurrection ([Philippians 3:10](#)) It delivers them from guilt and fear, animates them with confidence towards God, weans them from the love and spirit of this evil world, inspires them with great and glorious hopes, and delivers them from the fear of death. They are risen with Christ, by faith, and seek the things which are above ([Colossians 3:1](#)) . where they know their Lord and Saviour is seated in glory.

I do but touch upon these particulars at present, because the subject will come under our consideration again, from a subsequent passage in the Oratorio . Yet I would not wholly omit leading your reflections to them, though what I briefly offer now, may make, what I shall then offer (if my life is prolonged to proceed so far), appear under the disadvantage of a repetition of the same thoughts. Indeed, I know not how to place the proof of this capital doctrine in a light entirely new. The most satisfactory proofs are the most obvious; and it would be folly to substitute weaker in their place, for the sake of novelty. But if I should live to resume the subject, some of you, who are now present, may not live to hear me. So far as concerns the fact, I may hope that the most, or all of you, are believers, and that you are already persuaded in your minds that the Lord is risen indeed! ([Luke 24:34](#)) I am not preaching to Jews, or Mohammedans, but to professed Christians. But permit me to ask, What influence this truth has upon your hopes, your tempers, and your conduct? The powers of darkness know that Christ is risen. They believe, they feel, they tremble. I hope none of you will be content with such a faith as may be found in fallen angels. As surely as He is risen, He will at length return to judge the world. Behold He cometh in the clouds, and every

eye shall see Him! They who are prepared to meet Him, and who long for His appearance, have reason to rejoice that He once died, and rose again!

Many are the advantages which true Christians derive from a spiritual and enlightened knowledge of this doctrine. I will mention a few.

(1.)

As MESSIAH was delivered, that is delivered up, as a hostage to the demands of justice, for our offences, so they know that He was raised again for our justification ([Romans 4:25](#)) By virtue of that union, which subsists between MESSIAH, as the Head of His Body the Church, and all His members; that is, all in the successive ages of the world, who believe in Him by a faith of divine operation: He is their legal representative; He and they are considered as one. His sufferings, His whole humiliation and obedience unto death, is so imputed to them, that they, thereby, are exempted from condemnation; and though not from all sufferings, yet, from all that is properly penal, or, strictly, a punishment. What they suffer, is only in a way of discipline or chastisement; and to them a token, not of wrath, but of love. On the other hand, as He by His resurrection, was vindicated, justified from the reproaches of His enemies, declared to be the Son of God with power, and raised to glory; they have fellowship with Him herein. God exalted Him to glory, and gave Him a name above every name, that their faith and hope might be in God ([I Peter 1:21](#)) They are not only pardoned, but accepted in the Beloved. And after this state of discipline is ended, they shall be treated as if they had never sinned. For if sins are sought for, in that day they shall not be found. If any charge should be brought against them, it shall be overruled — by this comprehensive unanswerable plea — Christ that died, yea, rather, that is risen again; appears in the presence of God, acknowledges them as His own, and makes intercession for them ([Romans 8:33, 34](#)). Among men, a criminal may obtain a pardon, may escape the sentence he has deserved, and yet be left in a destitute and miserable condition. But justification is God's manner of pardoning sinners, according to the sovereignty and riches of His grace in the Son of His love. Those whom He pardons, he also justifies; and whom He justifies, He also glorifies. And even now in this life, though it doth not yet appear what they shall be, though their present privileges are far short of what they hope for, and though eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of man, to conceive what God hath prepared for them ([I Corinthians 2:9](#)); yet even now are they the children of God ([I John 3:2](#)) —and in the midst of their trials and infirmities, though conscious of much defect, and many defilements, in their best hours and services; and though they have not forgotten their iniquities and provocations, when they lived without God in the world, yet, according to the measure of their faith, exercised upon their Saviour, who was raised for their justification, they can rejoice in the knowledge of their acceptance, and rely upon Him for their perseverance; and they dare approach the great, holy, heart-searching God, as to a Father, and pour out their hearts before Him with greater freedom than they can use to their dearest earthly friends.

And while they feel and confess themselves unworthy of the smallest of His mercies, they are not afraid to ask for the greatest blessings His bounty can bestow, even to be set as a seal upon His heart, and upon His arm, to be filled with all His communicable fulness, and to claim Him as their everlasting portion.

(2.)

The resurrection of Christ from the dead, is a pledge and specimen of that almighty power which is engaged on their behalf, to overcome all the obstacles, difficulties and enemies they are liable to meet with in their pilgrimage, which threaten to disappoint their hopes, and to prevent them from obtaining their heavenly inheritance. The first communication of a principle of faith and spiritual life to their hearts, whereby they are delivered from the dominion of sin, and from the spirit and love of the world, is attributed to the exceeding greatness of that might power, which raised the dead body of their Lord from the grave, and set Him at His own right hand, far above all principality and might, and every name that is named ([Ephesians 1:19-21](#)) And often the Church, collectively, in its militant state, and the individuals which compose it, in their personal concerns, have been brought, to outward appearance, exceeding low. Their enemies have seemed upon the point of triumphing, and saying, Down with them, even to the ground. Such was the boast of the Jewish rulers, when they had slain the Shepherd, and dispersed His flock. But it was a short-lived boast. He arose, He ascended, He took possession of His Kingdom for Himself, and for them. He poured out His Holy Spirit upon them, and they went forth preaching His Word, which spread like the light of advancing day, from Judea to Samaria, and to the distant parts of the earth. The united force of the powers of hell and earth, endeavoured to suppress it, but in vain. Many nations and kingdoms laboured to extirpate the very name of Christianity from among men, but they successively perished in the attempt; and the cause, against which they raged, is still preserved. It is founded upon a Rock, and the gates of hell cannot prevail against it ([Matthew 16:18](#)) Nor can any weapon prosper that is formed against the weakest and meanest of those who sincerely espouse this cause. He, to whom they have devoted and entrusted themselves, has promised that none shall pluck them out of His hands ([John 10:28](#)) And while He remains faithful to His Word, and able to fulfill it, they shall be safe. Yet they are often pressed above measure, beyond strength, insomuch that they, perhaps, despair even of life. But when they are at the lowest, the Lord is their helper; and they are taught, by the exigencies they pass through, to trust, not in themselves, but in God who raiseth the dead ([II Corinthians 1:9](#)) . It is, indeed, the Lord's usual method of training up His people, to an habitual dependence upon Himself. When He has raised their expectations by His promises, He permits, as it were, a temporary death to overcloud their prospect; and that which He has said He will surely do for them, appears for a season, to the judgment of sense, impracticable and hopeless. We might illustrate this point at large from the history of Abraham, of Israel in Egypt, of David, and of the rebuilding of the second temple. And I doubt

not, but it might be illustrated from the history of many in this assembly. If you have been walking with God for any considerable time, you have met with turns and changes, which have almost put you to a stand. You have been, and perhaps now are, in such circumstances that you feel you have no resource in yourself, and you are sure that the help of man cannot relieve you; but while your help is in the name of the LORD who made heaven and earth ([Psalm 124:8](#)), and while you are warranted to trust in Him, who raiseth the dead, you have no just reason to despond. It was a dark season with the disciples, when their Lord, whom they loved and in whom they trusted, that it had been He who should have redeemed Israel ([Luke 24:21](#)), was condemned, and put to death. But the appointed third day relieved their fears, and turned their mourning into joy.

(3.)

His resurrection is the pledge and pattern of ours. As certainly as Christ the firstfruits is risen, so certainly shall they that are Christ's arise at His coming. And each of His people shall arise, "aliusque & idem" — another, and yet the same. Their bodies, though properly their own, shall be changed, and fashioned like unto His glorious body ([Philippians 3:21](#)) This corruptible must put on incorruption; and the body, which is sown in dishonour and weakness, be raised in power and glory. Flesh and blood, in its present state, cannot inherit the Kingdom of God. The body, in this life, is a clog and a burden to those who place their chief happiness in the service of God, and in communion with Him. It is a vile body, defiled by sin, and it defiles their best desires and noblest efforts. Even the grace of the Holy Spirit, by which they live, though perfectly pure in itself, is debased when communicated to them, and exercised under the disadvantages of a sinful nature, as the best wine, will receive a taint, if poured into a foul vessel. The body, in another view, is a prison in which the soul, confined and pent up, is limited in its operations, and impeded in its perceptions of divine things. Though we are probably surrounded by the glorious realities of the spiritual world, only short and transient glances of them are discoverable by us; we see but by reflection, and darkly ([I Corinthians 13:12](#)); we know but in part, and should know nothing of them, but for the good report of the Word of God. Farther, the body, as it is the seat of innumerable infirmities, and the medium which connects us with the calamities incident to this mortal state, is often a great hindrance to our most desirable enjoyments. Pain and sickness call off the attention, and indispose our faculties, when we wish to be most engaged in prayer, detain us from the ordinances, or prevent the pleasure we hope for in waiting upon the Lord in them. But our new, spiritual, and glorified bodies, will be free from all defilement, or defect. They will be completely qualified to answer the best wishes, and most enlarged activity of the soul. Then, but not till then, we hope to be all eye, all ear, always upon the wing of His service, and perfectly conformed to His image, in light, holiness, and love; for then we shall see Him as He is, without any interposing veil or cloud ([I John 3:2](#))

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