

Monergism

# SERMONS PREACHED

IN THE PARISH-CHURCH OF OLNEY

WITH SIX BONUS DISCOURSES



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by John Newton

Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound: they shall walk, O Lord, in the light of thy countenance. In thy name shall they rejoice all the day: and in thy righteousness shall they be exalted. - PSAL. 89:15, 16.

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## **TO THE INHABITANTS OF THE PARISH OF OLNEY.**

MY DEAR FRIENDS,

I HAVE principally two motives for publishing these Discourses. The one is, to exhibit a specimen of the doctrine that is taught and most surely believed amongst us, to satisfy those who desire information, and to stop, if possible, the mouth of slander. I cheerfully submit them to examination; in full confidence that they contain nothing of moment which is not agreeable to the general strain of the word of God, and to the principles of the church whereof I am a minister, as specified in the Articles, Liturgy, and Homilies. And that what I now print is to the same purport with the usual course of my preaching, I doubt not but all who stately hear me will do me the justice to acknowledge.

My other motive is a desire of promoting your edification. It is my comfort that many of you live by the truths of the Gospel, and highly prize them. You will not therefore be unwilling to view the substance of what you once heard with acceptance. But it is to be feared, that the far greater part of the congregation have need to have the things pertaining to their peace pressed upon them again and again, for a different reason; not because they know them, and therefore love to have them brought to their remembrance, but because they have hitherto heard them without effect. For the sake of both, therefore, I am willing to leave an abiding testimony amongst you. I hereby take each of your consciences to witness, that I am clear of your blood; and that, to the best of my knowledge and ability, I have not shunned to declare the whole counsel of God.

In the choice of the subjects I have selected for publication, I have not been solicitous to comprise a succinct scheme of Gospel doctrine, but have given the preference to such topics, which the peculiar circumstances of the times, and of my hearers, make me desirous might be had in continual remembrance.

The Exposition of the Third Commandment, which was first delivered in your hearing, I afterwards preached (nearer the form in which it now appears) at London; and as it led me to touch on some particulars of a very public and interesting concern, I have given it a place in this volume. And I shall think myself happy indeed, if it may please God to give weight to the testimony of so obscure a person with respect to a grievance under which the nation groans.

As long discourses are in many respects inconvenient, I have chosen to publish no more than a brief summary of what you heard more at large from the pulpit. And as I aim to speak plain truths to a plain people, I have purposely avoided any studied ornaments in point of expression, being desirous to accommodate myself to the apprehensions of the most ignorant.

May it please the God of all grace to accompany my feeble endeavours to promote the knowledge of his truth, with the powerful influence of his Holy Spirit. And I earnestly entreat all who know how to draw near to a Throne of Grace by Jesus Christ, to strive mightily in prayer for me, that I may stand fast in the faith, and increase in the knowledge of Jesus the Saviour; and that for his sake I may labour, without fear or fainting, in the service to which he has been pleased to call me. May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all!

I am your affectionate friend, and servant in the Gospel of Christ,

JOHN NEWTON.

Olney, Jan. 20, 1767.

## **SERMON I**

### **THE SMALL SUCCESS OF THE GOSPEL MINISTRY CONSIDERED**

At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. -  
MATTH. 11:25.

OUR blessed Lord perfectly knew before-hand the persons who would profit by his ministry: but his observations, conduct, and discourses, were intended as a pattern and instruction to his followers. He is said to have marvelled at the unbelief of some, and at the fate of others; not as though either was strange to him, who was acquainted with all hearts, and always knew what he himself would do; but it is spoken of him as a man, and to shew how his ministers

and people should be affected upon the like occasions. In the preceding verses he had been speaking of Capernaum, and other places, where his mighty works had been performed in vain. He had denounced a sentence against them; and foretold that their punishment would be heavier in proportion to the greatness of the privileges they had abused. But this was not his pleasing work. Mercy and grace were his delight, and he usually expressed sorrow and pain for the obstinacy of sinners. He wept for his avowed enemies, and prayed for the murderers who nailed him to the cross. It was not without grief that he declared the approaching doom of these cities; yet, raising his thoughts from earth to heaven, he acquiesced in the will of his heavenly Father, and expressed the highest satisfaction in his appointment. He knew, that, however some would harden themselves, there was a remnant who would receive the truth, and that the riches and glory of the Divine sovereignty and grace would be magnified. Before I enter upon the particulars, this connexion of the words will afford us ground for some observations.

I. That the small success and efficacy of the preached Gospel upon multitudes who hear it, is a subject of wonder and grief to the ministers and people of God. It was so to our Lord Jesus, considered as a Preacher and Messenger; and they, so far as they have received his Spirit, judge and act as he did.

1. Those who have indeed tasted that the Lord is gracious, have had such a powerful experience in their own souls of the necessity and value of the Gospel, that in their first warmth, and till painful experience has convinced them of the contrary, they can hardly think it possible that sinners should stand out against its evidence. They are ready to say, "Surely it is because they are ignorant: they have not had opportunity of considering the evil of sin, the curse of the law, and the immense goodness of God manifested in his Son; but when these things shall be plainly and faithfully set before them, surely they will submit, and thankfully receive the glad tidings." With such sanguine hopes Melancthon entered the ministry, at the dawn of the Reformation: he thought he had only to speak, and to be heard, in



order to convince; but he soon found himself mistaken, and that the love of sin, the power of prejudice, and the devices of Satan, were such obstacles in his way, as nothing less than the mighty operations of the Spirit of God could break through. And all who preach upon his principles, and with his views, have known something of his disappointment. Speaking from the feelings of a full heart, they are ready to expect that others should be no less affected than themselves. But when they find that they are heard with indifference, perhaps with contempt; that those whose salvation they long for are enraged against them for their labour of love; that they cannot prevail upon their dearest friends, and nearest relatives; this grieves and wounds them to the heart.

2. They have been convinced themselves, that unbelief was the worst of all their sins: and, therefore, though they pity all who live in the practice of sin, yet they have a double grief to see them reject the only means of salvation; and that this contempt will lie more heavily upon them, than any thing they can be charged with besides. It gladdens the heart of a minister to see a large and attentive assembly; but how is this joy damped by a just fear, lest any, lest many of them should receive this grace of God in vain, and have cause at last to bewail the day when the name of Jesus was first sounded in their ears.

It seems plain, then, that those who are indifferent about the event of the Gospel—who satisfy themselves with this thought, that the elect shall be saved, and feel no concern for unawakened sinners—make a wrong inference from a true doctrine, and know not what spirit they are of. Jesus wept for those who perished in their sins. St. Paul had great grief and sorrow of heart for the Jews, though he gives them this character; "They please not God, and are contrary to all men." It well becomes us, while we admire distinguishing grace to ourselves, to mourn over others: and, inasmuch as secret things belong to the Lord, and we know not but some of whom we have at present but little hopes may at last be brought to the knowledge of the truth, we should be patient and forbearing, after the pattern of our heavenly Father, and endeavour, by every probable and prudent means, to stir

them up to repentance, remembering that they cannot be more distant from God, than by nature we were ourselves.

II. The best relief against those discouragements we meet with from men, is to raise our thoughts to God and heaven. For this the Lord Jesus is our precedent here. He said, "I thank thee, O Father." The word\* signifies to confess, to promise or consent, and to praise. As if it had been said, "I glorify thy wisdom in this respect, I acknowledge and declare it is thy will, and I express my own consent and approbation." Our Lord's views of the Divine counsels were perfect, and therefore his satisfaction was complete. It is said, "He rejoiced in spirit†," when he uttered these words. And the more we increase in faith and in the knowledge of God, the more we shall be satisfied in his appointments, and shall see and say, "He hath done all things well." It is needful for our comfort, to be well established in the truth suggested in my text, that the Lord hath provided for the accomplishment of his own purposes, and that his counsels shall surely stand. From this doctrine we may infer,

1. That where the faithful labours and endeavours of ministers, and others, to promote the knowledge of grace and the practice of holiness, fail of success, yet they shall be accepted. The servants of Christ may in their humble measure adopt the words of their Lord and Master, in the Prophet, "Though Israel be not gathered, yet shall I be glorious in the eyes of the Lord, and my God shall be my strength\*." When he sent forth his first disciples, he directed them wherever they entered to say, "Peace be to this house! and if a son of peace be there," if there be any who thankfully accept your salutation and message, "your peace shall rest upon it; if not, it shall return to you again†:" that is, your good wishes and endeavours shall not be lost for want of proper objects, but when they seem without effect on others, shall be productive of the happiest consequences to yourselves. You shall receive all you were desirous to communicate. Thus his ministers are to declare his whole will, whether men will hear, or whether they shall forbear. And if they do thus with a single eye to his glory, and in humble dependence upon his blessing, they

are not answerable for the event, they shall in nowise lose their reward.

2. Faithful endeavours in the service of the Gospel shall not wholly fail. Though all will not hear, some certainly shall both hear and obey. Though all are by nature equally averse and incapable, yet there shall be "a willing people in the day of God's power<sup>‡</sup>." If the wise and prudent turn away from the truth, there are babes to whom it shall be revealed. The Lord renews unto us a pledge of his faithfulness in this concern every time the rain descends. For thus he has promised, "As the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: so shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth; it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it\*."

3. The Divine Sovereignty is the best thought we can retreat to for composing and strengthening our minds under the difficulties, discouragements, and disappointments, which attend the publication of the Gospel. The more we give way to reasonings and curious inquiries, the more we shall be perplexed and baffled. When Jeremiah<sup>†</sup> had been complaining of some things which were too hard for him, the Lord sent him to the potter's house, and taught him to infer, from the potter's power over the clay, the just right which the Lord of all hath to do what he will with his own. It is only the pride of our own hearts that prevents this consideration from being perfectly conclusive and satisfactory. How many schemes derogatory from the free grace of God, tending to darken the glory of the Gospel, and to depreciate the righteousness of the Redeemer, have taken their rise from vain unnecessary attempts to vindicate the ways of God; or rather to limit the actings of Infinite Wisdom to the bounds of our narrow understandings, to sound the depths of the Divine counsels with our feeble plummets, and to say to Omnipotence, "Hitherto shalt thou go, and no farther." But upon the ground of the Divine Sovereignty we may rest satisfied and stable: for if God appoints and

over-rules all, according to the purpose of his own will, we have sufficient security, both for the present and the future.

First, For the present. We may firmly expect, what Scripture. and reason concur to assure us, that "the Judge of all the earth will do right." Whatever to us appears otherwise in his proceedings, should be charged to the darkness and weakness of our minds. We know, that in every point of science difficulties and objections occur to young beginners, which at first view may seem almost unanswerable; but as knowledge increases, the difficulties gradually subside, and at last we perceive they were chiefly owing to the defects of our apprehension. In divinity it is wholly so: "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all:" his revealed will is, like himself, just, holy, pure in the whole, and perfectly consistent in every part. We may safely rest upon this general maxim, that "the Judge of all the earth shall do right." Though he does not give us a particular account of his dealings, and we are not fully able to comprehend them; yet we ought, against all appearances and proud reasonings, to settle it firmly in our minds, that every thing is conducted worthy the views which God has given us of himself in his holy word, as a being of infinite justice, wisdom, goodness, and truth.—And farther,

Secondly, For the future. He has appointed a day when he will make it appear that he has done right. Though clouds and darkness are now upon his proceedings, they shall ere long be removed. When all his designs in providence and grace are completed; when the present imperfect state of things shall be finished; when the dead, small and great, are summoned to stand before him; then the great Judge will condescend to unfold the whole train of his dispensations, and will justify his proceedings before angels and men; then every presumptuous cavil shall be silenced, every difficulty solved. His people shall admire his wisdom, his enemies shall confess his justice. The destruction of those who perish shall be acknowledged deserved, and of themselves; and the redeemed of the Lord shall ascribe all the glory of their salvation to him alone. What we shall then see, it is now our duty and our comfort assuredly to believe.

The great subject of our Saviour's joy, and which, so far as it is apprehended, will bear up his servants above all their difficulties and disappointments; I mean, the consideration of the sovereign hand of God directing the success of his word when and where he pleases; we must defer speaking of till the next opportunity. And we shall close at present with a few inferences from what has been said thus far by way of introduction.

1. Take heed how you hear. The Gospel of salvation, which is sent to you, will be either a "savour of life unto life, or of death unto death," to every soul of you. There is no medium. Though, in a common and familiar way of speaking, we sometimes complain, that the Gospel is preached without effect, there is in reality no possibility that it can be without effect. An effect it must and will have upon all who hear it. Happy they who receive and embrace it as a joyful sound, the unspeakable gift of God's love. To these it will be "a savour of life unto life." It will communicate life to the soul at first, and maintain that life, in defiance of all opposition, till it terminates in glory. But woe, woe to those who receive it not! It will be to them "a savour of death unto death." It will leave them under the sentence of death, already denounced against them by the law which they have transgressed; and it will consign them to eternal death, under the heaviest aggravations of guilt and misery. Remember the doom of Capernaum, and why it was denounced. Jesus preached amongst them the words of eternal life, and they rejected him. This was all. In other things, perhaps, they were no worse than their neighbours, and probably disdained to hear themselves judged worthy of a heavier punishment than Sodom, and those cities which for their abominations were consumed with fire from heaven. But our Lord assures us, it shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment, than for those who slight his word. For this guilt and condemnation is not confined to the Jews who rejected his person, but extended to all who should at any time treat his Gospel with contempt. However inconsiderable his ministers are in other respects, if they faithfully deliver his message, he has declared himself closely interested in the reception they meet with: "He that

receiveth you, receiveth me; and he that despiseth you, despiseth both me and him that sent me\*." It is therefore at your peril to treat what we say with indifference (if we speak agreeably to the Scripture): the word of God which we preach will judge you at the last day.

2. Be afraid of being wise in your own eyes, lest you should approach to the characters of those from whom the righteous God sees fit to hide the knowledge of those truths, without which they cannot be saved. The Gospel is not proposed to you to ask your opinion of it, that it may stand or fall according to your decision; but it peremptorily demands your submission. If you think yourselves qualified to judge and examine it by that imperfect and depraved light which you call your reason, you will probably find reasons enough to refuse your assent. Reason is properly exercised in the ordinary concerns of life, and has so far a place in religious inquiries, that none can or do believe the Gospel, without having sufficient reasons for it. But you need a higher light, the light of God's Spirit, without which the most glorious displays of his wisdom will appear foolishness to you. If you come simple, dependent, and teachable; if you pray from your heart, with David, "Open thou mine eyes, that I may see wondrous things in thy law\*," you will be heard and answered; you will grow in the knowledge and grace of our Lord Jesus Christ: but if you neglect this, and trust in yourselves, as supposing this promised assistance of the Holy Spirit unnecessary, the glorious light of the Gospel will shine upon you in vain; for Satan will maintain such hold of you by this pride of your hearts, as still to keep you in bondage and darkness, that you shall neither see it, nor desire to see it.

3. Those of you who have some spiritual apprehensions of these things, have reason to praise God that you see a little. You were once quite blind: you neither saw your disease nor your remedy. You could discern nothing of the excellence of Christ, or the beauties of holiness. But now the eyes of your understanding are in some measure enlightened. It is the grace of God has made you thus far to

differ from what you once were, and from what multitudes around you still are. Be thankful. Accept it as a token for good. Be not discouraged that the beginnings are small; but wait on the Lord, and they shall be increased. Seek him by prayer. Converse with your Bibles. Attend upon the public ordinances. In the humble use of these means (while you endeavour to act faithfully according to the light you have already received), you shall gradually advance in wisdom and comfort. The Christian growth is not instantaneous, but by degrees, as the early dawn increases in brightness till the perfect day\*, and as the corn comes forward surely, though unperceived†. In this manner your views of Gospel truth shall increase in clearness, evidence, and influence, till you are removed from this land of shadows to the regions of perfect light, to behold the truth as it shines in the person of Jesus, without a veil, and without a cloud for ever.

## **SERMON II**

### **IN WHAT SENSE THE MYSTERIES OF THE GOSPEL ARE HID FROM MANY**

At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. -  
MATTH. 11:25.

WHEN our Lord appeared upon earth, though he came on the most gracious and important business, displayed the perfection of holiness in his conduct, and performed innumerable acts of kindness and love, he met with little regard. He found many enemies, but few hearty friends. Especially those who were most eminent for riches, learning, power, or reputed goodness, disdained him; and most of those who followed him were either people in low circumstances, or whose character had been offensive. Publicans and sinners,

fishermen, unlearned and obscure persons, were almost the only friends he had. The Lord Jesus, who was infinitely above the selfish views which are too apt to influence our little minds, was well satisfied with this event. He did not desire honour from men. "The souls of the poor were precious in his sight\*." He spoke kindly to those whom men abhorred: and if he mourned over the obstinacy of the chiefs of the people, it was for their own sakes. Yet (as I observed formerly) when he considered the appointment and will of God in this dispensation, he was not only content, but he rejoiced. He expressed his approbation in these words: "I thank thee, O Father," &c. There is something observable in this passage which will be of continual use and application, so long as the Gospel shall be preached. For as it was then, so it is still: the things that are hid from the wise and prudent are revealed unto babes. Five particulars offer from the words for our consideration.

I. What may be intended by these things?

II. Where and in what sense they are hid?

III. From whom? The wise and prudent.

IV. How the knowledge of them is to be obtained? By revelation: thou hast revealed.

V. Who are thus favoured? Babes.

I. By the things which it pleases God should be hid from the wise, and revealed to babes, we may understand,

1. In general, the things pertaining to salvation. That most men are ignorant of them, and careless about them, is too plain. Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh, and the tree is known by its fruits. Men speak as though their tongues were their own; they act as though they were to give no account; they live as though they were to live here for ever. The way of truth is hid from their eyes, and the fear of God has no place in their hearts.



2. More particularly, those doctrines which are in an especial sense peculiar to the Gospel, seem here to be intended. If the principles of what some call Natural Religion, though agreeable to the light of natural conscience, are little regarded; the more spiritual truths of the Bible are not only neglected, but scorned and opposed. The same spirit, which shewed itself under our Lord's personal ministry, still subsists. The chief doctrines he taught, and for which he met with the fiercest opposition, were precisely the same with those which have awakened the scorn and rage of the world ever since; and which multitudes who bear the name of Christians in this day oppose with all their strength. Such as,

First, The Divinity of Christ. When he spoke of himself as existing before Abraham, and said that God was his own father\*, the Jews took up stones to stone him. And this mystery is still hid from the natural man. No one can say, acknowledge, and believe, that Jesus Christ is Lord or Jehovah; that He who once hung upon the cross, bleeding to death, is God the Maker of all things, the rightful object of the supreme love, trust, and homage of men and angels; but by the Holy Ghost\*.

Secondly, Distinguishing grace. "When Jesus first preached at Nazareth, the eyes of all were fixed upon him<sup>†</sup>;" but when, making application to themselves, he touched upon this point, from the examples of Naaman the Syrian, and the widow of Sarepta, who were relieved when many lepers and widows in Israel were passed by, they were filled with indignation, and would have thrown him headlong down the rock. And it is to this hour an offensive doctrine to all who do not know the value and the need of it.

Thirdly, The new birth. When this was proposed to a master in Israel, he cried out, "How can these things be<sup>‡</sup>?" And by many who are wise and prudent in their own sight, it is at this day accounted nonsense. A small acquaintance with the general strain of what is published either from the pulpit or the press, may prove that modern divinity has, for the most part, found a smoother path to tread than

that by which Nicodemus was conducted to the knowledge of himself and his Saviour. Such a doubtful inquirer might now be entertained with many ingenious essays on the beauty of virtue, the efficacy of benevolence, the excellency of the human mind, and other favourite topics. He would find teachers enough to encourage and improve the idea he has of his own importance, but he would hardly meet with many who would speak to him in our Lord's language, and refer him to the brazen serpent, and a new birth, in order to learn the means and the nature of the Gospel salvation.

Fourthly, The nature of the life of faith. When our Lord spoke of this, under the metaphor of eating his flesh and drinking his blood, many, who till then had professed themselves his disciples, "turned back, and walked no more with him\*." And none can bear it now, who are not taught of God, to see such an excellency and sufficiency in Jesus, and such emptiness in themselves, as constrains them to cry out, with Peter, "Lord, to whom shall we go<sup>†</sup>?" These things are hid from the wise and prudent. But,

II. Where, and in what sense are these things hid?

1. Where are they hid?

First, They are hid in Christ. "In him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge<sup>‡</sup>." He is the great repository of truth. "It pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell§." And he is the Messenger by whom the will of God is made known to man||. From hence observe,

(1.) You can attain to no saving truth, but in and by the knowledge of Jesus Christ. If they are hid in him, it can be but lost labour to seek them elsewhere.

(2.) Whatever seeming knowledge you have, if it does not endear him to you, it is nothing worth. It is science falsely so called, and can do you no good: for in the knowledge of him, and of him alone, is eternal life\*.

Secondly, They are hid in the word of God.

(1.) They are contained there. "The whole Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is able to make us wise unto salvation<sup>†</sup>;" to furnish us with a sufficiency of knowledge and motives for every good work. The word of God is perfect.

(2.) Yet, though contained there, they are not plain to every eye. Though they are revealed in the letter, they are still hid from the wise and prudent. Something more is necessary than barely to read, in order to understand them; otherwise all who can read, and have the Bible, would be equally enlightened with equal application. But experience shews it is far otherwise. This leads me farther to inquire,

2. In what sense they are hid?

First, They are not hid as if it were on purpose that those who sincerely seek them should be disappointed in their search. Far be it from us to think so hardly of the Lord. We have express promises to the contrary, that all who earnestly seek shall find. Fear not, you that sincerely desire an experimental and practical knowledge of the truths of God, and are willing to be taught in his appointed way: though many things appear difficult to you at present, the Lord will gradually increase your light, and crown your endeavours with success.

Secondly, But from some persons they are hid, even from the wise and prudent, whom we are to speak of hereafter. Suffer me to offer a familiar illustration of the Lord's wisdom and justice in this procedure. Let me suppose a person to have a curious cabinet which is opened at his pleasure, and not exposed to common view: he invites all to come to see it, and offers to shew it to any one who asks him. It is hid, because he keeps the key; but none can complain, because he is ready to open it whenever he is desired. Some perhaps disdain the offer and say, Why is it locked at all? Some think it not worth seeing, or amuse themselves with guessing at the contents. But

those who are simply desirous for themselves, leave others disputing, go according to appointment, and are gratified. These have reason to be thankful for the favour; and the others have no just cause to find fault. Thus the riches of Divine grace may be compared to a richly furnished cabinet, to which Christ is the door. The word of God likewise is a cabinet generally locked up; but the key of prayer will open it. The Lord invites all: but he keeps the dispensation in his own hand. They cannot see these things, except he shews them; but then he refuses none that sincerely ask him. The wise men of the world can go no farther than the outside of this cabinet: they may amuse themselves, and surprise others, with their ingenious guesses at what is within; but a babe that has seen it opened can give us more satisfaction, without studying or guessing at all. If men will presume to aim at the knowledge of God, without the knowledge of Christ, who is the way, and the door; if they have such a high opinion of their own wisdom and penetration, as to suppose they can understand the Scriptures without the assistance of his Spirit; or if their worldly wisdom teaches them, that these things are not worth their inquiry; what wonder is it that they should continue to be hid from their eyes? They will one day be stripped of all their false pleas, and condemned out of their own mouths.

Thirdly, The expression, "Thou hast hid," may perhaps farther imply, that those who seek occasion to cavil shall meet with something to confirm their prejudices. When people examine the doctrines or profession of the Gospel, not with a candid desire to learn, imitate, and practise, but in order to find some plausible ground for misrepresentation, they frequently have their wish. The wisdom of God has appointed, that difficulties, offences, objections, and stumbling-blocks should attend, to exercise and manifest the spirits of these wise ones. How largely do they expatiate on the divisions and difference of sentiments which too much prevail among those who are united in the same leading truths! If they can discover an instance of error, folly, or wickedness, of a single person who professes to adhere to the Gospel doctrine, how do they rejoice as if they had found great spoil, charge the faults of a few indiscriminately

upon the whole, and labour to shew, that every mistake and inadvertence is a necessary consequence of the principles which those maintain who commit it! We do not plead for mistakes and errors of any sort, for weakness in judgment or inconsistency in practice. But as these things are more or less inseparable from the present state of human nature, they necessarily increase and strengthen the prepossession of scorners against the truth, and are so far a means of hiding it from their eyes. Yet here again the fault is wholly in themselves; for they seek and desire such occasions of stumbling, and would be disappointed and grieved if they could not meet with them. But those who are babes in their own eyes, humble, sincere, and teachable, are brought safe through, by a simple dependent spirit, and are made wiser every day, by their observation of what passes around them.

Many inferences and advices might be deduced from what has been said. I shall content myself with three.

1. Examine yourselves what understanding and experience you have of the things I mentioned under the first head. So much as you know of these, so far you are Christians, and no farther. "A form of godliness, without the power\*," is one of the worst characters of the worst times; yet how common in the present day! How many who choose to be called Christians, reject the testimony which God has given of his Son, deny the efficacy of his grace, speak of the new birth with disdain, as unintelligible and unnecessary, and account all that can be said of the life of faith (though founded upon express Scripture, and attested by many witnesses) no better than enthusiastic jargon! But if you are thus minded, however sober your deportment, or professedly benevolent your disposition, though you may be applauded as a pattern of generosity, a philosopher or a saint, by your acquaintance and neighbours, if the Scriptures are true, you can be but as a sounding brass and tinkling cymbal in the sight of God. You would have despised Thomas in your heart, if you had been witness to his joyful exclamation when he worshipped Jesus, and cried, "My Lord and my God!\*" You would have despised

Paul as a dark enthusiast, had you heard him say, "The life which I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me † ." Yea, you must have despised Jesus himself, if you had been present at his conference with Nicodemus. Our Lord Jesus is now in heaven; Thomas and Paul have been long dead: you cannot reach them; nor do they stand in your way: therefore perhaps you are content to speak well of them in general terms. But those who come nearest to their language and spirit, are the objects of your scorn and hatred. How then can you pretend to love him, or presume that he loves you? Jesus is worshipped in heaven; how then can you expect to come there? or what pleasure could you find there, in your present turn of mind? "O kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish; for in a little time his wrath will burn like fire."

But to every one who understands, embraces, and lives under the influence of these truths, I may safely apply our Lord's words, "Blessed art thou ‡," however despised by men, or chastened of the Lord; "for flesh and blood hath not revealed these things to thee;" thou hast assuredly received them from God by his Spirit. He alone is able to cause the light to shine into our dark hearts, "to give us the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ §."

2. Do not entertain hard and perplexing thoughts about the counsels of God, either respecting others or yourselves.

First, With regard to others. It is a frequent difficulty, either thrown in the way of inquirers after truth by the subtilty of Satan, or perhaps arising from the natural pride of the human heart, that would be thought able to account for every thing. I say, when they begin to apprehend the Gospel way of salvation, this perplexing question arises, If things are so, what will become of multitudes? What! are all the Heathens, Mahometans, Papists, and even all the Protestants except the few who adopt these singular sentiments, to be lost? I shall not attempt to conquer this objection by dint of reasoning, but would rather persuade you to direct your reasonings another way.

When the same question for substance was proposed to our Lord, his answer to those who asked him was, "Strive (each one for yourselves) to enter in at the strait gate\*." Take care of yourselves, and leave the cases of others to the Lord. Remember he is God, and therefore just and good.

Secondly, With regard to yourselves. Secret things belong to God; your business is with what is revealed. Some put the word of salvation from them perversely, and think, If the Lord designs me for eternal life, he will call me in his own time; till then I will go on in my sins. Those who can reason thus, and take encouragement to persist in wickedness, from the consideration of the power and efficacy of God's grace, do thereby avow themselves to be Satan's willing servants. But he terrifies many on whom he cannot thus prevail, with representing to them, that, let them do what they will, it is all in vain; unless the Lord has chosen them, notwithstanding any good beginnings they may hope he has wrought in them, they will come to nothing at last. It is your business to give all diligence to make your calling sure. If, by a humble waiting upon God, you are enabled to have your conversation according to the Gospel, listen not to vain and perplexing reasonings, but commit yourself to the mercy and guidance of the Lord; and he, in his good time, will enable you to see, and to say, that it is not in vain to trust in him. Your path shall be like the advancing light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day. The Lord has already provided all that you can reasonably desire.

(1.) The means are pointed out, in the use of which you are to be found, and wherein you may expect his blessing. These are chiefly secret prayer, the study of his written word, an attendance on the preached Gospel, and free converse (as proper opportunities are afforded) with his believing people. If you continue in the observance of these, and act faithfully to the light you have already received, by breaking off from the evil practices of the world, and watching against those things which you yourself know to be evil, you will certainly gain ground in light, strength, and comfort. You will see

more and more of the glory of the Lord in the glass of the Gospel; and, in proportion to your views, you shall be "changed into the same image from glory to glory." For,

(2.) The promise is sure. What God has said you may assuredly depend on. And what has he said? What indeed has he not said for the encouragement of those who are sincerely desirous to seek and serve him? "They that seek shall find. They that wait on the Lord shall renew their strength. I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground. He giveth power to the weak; and to them that have no might, he increaseth strength\*."

If, therefore, you feel yourself a lost sinner, see a beauty and sufficiency in Jesus, have a hunger and thirst after his righteousness, and are made willing to expect the blessing in his way; you may look upon this as a token for good. Such views and desires as these never are found in any heart till he communicates them. By nature we are averse and contrary to them. Give him the glory of what he has begun; and oppose your temptations, fears, and doubts, with this argument, drawn from your own experience, as the wife of Manoah formerly reasoned: "If the Lord had been pleased to kill us, he would not have enabled and encouraged us to call upon him; neither would he at this time have shewn us such things as these†."

## **SERMON III**

### **THE CHARACTERS OF THOSE FROM WHOM THE GOSPEL DOCTRINES ARE HID**

At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. -  
MATTH. 11:25.



THE judgments of God are a great deep. He does not give us a full account of his matters; much less can we by searching find out him to perfection; yet if we carefully attend to what he has revealed, and apply his written word with humility and caution to what passes in ourselves, and around us, we may, by his grace, attain to some considerable satisfaction in things which, at first view, seem hard to be understood. The subject of my text is of this nature. That God should hide things of everlasting consequence from any persons, sounds very harsh; but I hope, when the words are explained, we shall see that, though he acts as a Sovereign in his dispensations, his ways are just, and good, and equal.

We have already made an entrance upon this attempt. Besides some general observations in my first discourse, I endeavoured to shew you, in the second, I. What the things are to which our Lord refers; II. When, and in what sense, they are hid. I proceed now to consider,

III. From whom they are hid—the wise and prudent, it will, I think, be readily supposed, that the expression does not mean those who are truly so, and in God's account. He esteems none to be wise and prudent but these who are enlightened with his spiritual wisdom, who now serve and love him in Christ. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning (or, as the word likewise signifies, the head or principal part) of wisdom\*;" and from such as these he hides or keeps back nothing that is profitable for them: on the contrary, that promise is sure, "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him; and he will shew them his covenant<sup>†</sup>." When our Lord said, "The children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light<sup>‡</sup>," he did not mean they were so absolutely, for their boasted wisdom is the merest folly, but only that they acted consistently with their own principles. The wise and prudent here are either those who are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight, or those who are generally so reputed by the bulk of mankind. And these two amount to the same: for as the natural wisdom of man springs from the same fountain, self, and is confined to the same bounds, the things of time and sense, in all alike (though there is a variety of pursuits within

these limits, as tempers and situations differ), men are generally prone to approve and applaud those who act upon their own principles.

We may take notice then (as a key to this inquiry), that what is accounted wisdom by the world, is not only different from the wisdom of God, but inconsistent with it, and opposite to it. They differ as fire and water, light and darkness; the prevalence of the one necessarily includes the suppression of the other. See this at large insisted on by St. Paul, in the beginning of his First Epistle to the Corinthians, the first, second, and third chapters.

Who then are the wise and prudent intended in my text? May the Holy Spirit enable every conscience to make faithful application of what shall be offered upon this head!

1. In the judgment of the world, those are wise and prudent persons who are very thoughtful and diligent about acquiring wealth, especially if their endeavours are crowned with remarkable success. If a man thrives (as the phrase is) from small beginnings, and joins house to house, and field to field, so that he has land to call after his own name, and large possessions to leave to his children, how he is applauded (though at the same time envied) by the most who know him! I do not deny, that a proper concern and industry in our secular calling is both lawful and our duty; and I allow, that the providence of God does sometimes remarkably prosper those who depend on him in the management of their business; but I make no scruple to affirm, that, where this is the main concern (as some call it), such wisdom is madness. Such persons are no less idolaters than those who worship stocks and stones. And if the things of God are hid from them, it is surely their own fault; they do not even complain of it as a hardship; they have their choice, their reward, and are satisfied. They are told that these things are in Christ, and there they are content that they should remain; they see no beauty or suitableness in them, they have no desire after him; he might keep his heaven and truths to himself, if they could always have their fill of the world. They are told

that these things are hid in the Scripture, but they have neither leisure nor inclination to search there for them. Their time is taken up with buying and selling, building and planting, &c. O beware of this wisdom! "What will riches profit you in the day of wrath\*," at death or judgment? If you live and die in this spirit, you will bemoan your choice when it is too late.

2. Those are accounted wise and prudent, who think they have found a way to reconcile God and the world together. If a man should attempt to fly, or to walk upon the water, he would be deemed a fool. How is it that this endeavour, which is equally impossible (and expressly declared so by our Lord), should be more favourably thought of? The deceitfulness of the heart, and subtilty of Satan, concur in this point. You will have a sort of religion, but then you take care not to carry things too far. You are governed by the fear and regard of men. Something you will do to satisfy conscience; but not too much, lest you hurt your interest, disoblige your friends, or draw on yourselves reproach, or a hard name. I must tell you, from the word of God, your attempt to halve things is an abomination in his sight. Would it not be treason by the law, to pay the king an outward respect, and yet hold secret correspondence with his enemies? The decisions of the word of God are to the same effect in this instance. "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him<sup>†</sup>." "Know you not, that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever, therefore, will be a friend of the world, is the enemy of God<sup>‡</sup>."

3. A man is deemed wise who has considerable knowledge and curiosity about natural things, and all those subjects which usually bear the name of science; if he can talk of the magnitudes, distances, and motions of the heavenly bodies, can foretel an eclipse, has skill in mathematics, is well read in the history of ancient times, and can inform you what is found in books concerning the folly and wickedness of mankind who lived some thousands of years ago; or if he understands several languages, and can call a thing by twenty different names. It is true, when these attainments are sanctified by

grace, they may in some respects have their use. But, in general, the best use a believer will or can make of them, is to lay them down at the foot of the Cross. When a man, possessed of a large quantity of these pebbles, has his conscience awakened, and his understanding enlightened, he is glad to renounce them all for the Pearl of great price, and to adopt the Apostle's determination, "to know nothing but Jesus Christ, and him crucified\*." This was the effect when the word of God mightily grew and prevailed<sup>†</sup>. We may at least say, that this kind of wisdom is, for the most part, dangerous and blinding to the soul.

1st, It tends to feed and exalt self, to make a person something in his own eyes. This we are prone enough to by nature. An increase of unsanctified knowledge adds fuel to fire.

2ndly, It engrosses the time and thoughts. Our minds are narrow, capable of attending to but few things at once: and our span is short, and will hardly admit of many excursions from the main concern. If we were to live to the age of Methuselah, we might pursue some things which at present are highly improper and impertinent from this consideration alone. A man that is upon an urgent affair of life and death has no leisure for amusement. Such is our situation. We are creatures of a day. Time is vanishing, and eternity is at stake.

3rdly, The delusion here is specious, and not easily discovered. A person with these accomplishments is not always enslaved to money, or to sensual pleasures: he therefore pities those who are, and, comparing himself with others, supposes he is well employed, because his favourite studies are a check, upon his appetites, and prevent his selling himself for gold, or running into riot with the thoughtless. Yet an attachment of this sort equally blinds him with respect to his true interest. Will the knowledge of books, or men, or stars, or flowers, purify the conscience from dead works, to serve the living God? It is too plain, that the truths of the Gospel are hid from none more effectually than from many of this character. None cast a more daring or public slight upon the revealed will of God, than

some who are admired and applauded on account of their knowledge and learning.

4thly, Your nice and curious reasoners and disputers, that will see (as they profess) the bottom of every thing, and trust to their own judgment and inquiries, independent of the Spirit of God, are another sort of wise persons from whom these things are often justly hid. And this character may be found in many, both learned and unlearned: for many have good natural faculties, who have not had the advantages of learning and education. But this spirit is directly contrary to that simplicity, dependence, and obedience of faith, which the Scripture exhorts us to seek after. Its effects are various.

1st, Some (and those not a few) are led to reject the word of God altogether, because it evidently contains many things above and contrary to their vain imaginations. And herein they contradict the most obvious principles of that reason which they lay claim to. A revelation from God can only be thought necessary or probable, but on the supposition that it is to inform us of something which we could not have known without it. Therefore, to pretend to try the Scripture claim to this character, by such criteria or marks as we possess beforehand, is the same thing in effect as to determine to reject it without any trial at all.

2ndly, When the Scriptures, as to the letter, are acknowledged to be true, persons of this turn, presuming themselves sufficient judges of the sense, are helped by their ingenuity to explain away all the sublime doctrines of truth, so as to suit the prejudices and apprehensions of their own carnal minds. This, especially when joined with a smattering of learning, has been the chief source of all the errors and heresies which have pestered the church of God in all ages. This is a principal cause why the depravity of man by nature, the Deity and atonement of Christ, the operations of the Holy Spirit, and all the doctrines of grace, have been denied by men wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight, though evidently contained in the book which they profess to receive as of Divine inspiration.

3rdly, Even where the doctrines of grace have been notionally received, the same Spirit of wisdom can still find occasion to work. When there is more knowledge in the head than experience in the heart, many and various are the evils that often ensue. Disputes and hard questions are started, contentions and divisions multiplied, and people are more eager to perplex others, than to edify themselves. Thus the name and counsels of God are profaned by an irreverent curiosity, and the clear express declarations of his will darkened by words without knowledge. When this natural wisdom puts on a spiritual appearance, no persons are more fatally deceived, or more obstinately hardened. They think they can learn no more, but are wise enough to teach every one: they neglect the use of God's appointed means themselves, and despise them in others: they are proud, censorious, obstinate, and full of conceit. Take care of Satan at all times, but especially when he would transform himself into an angel of light. There is reason to think the things of God are entirely hid, as to their power and excellence, from some who fondly dream that none are acquainted with them but themselves.

The consideration of this subject may lead to a variety of improvement. It may teach you,

1. What to fear. A worldly spirit. This in a prevailing degree is inconsistent with a work of grace, and, in whatever degree it obtains, or is indulged, will proportionably retard and abate the light and comfort of our souls. The cares and pleasures of this life are by our Lord compared to thorns\*, unprofitable and painful; they produce no fruit, but they wound and tear. Yea, they are thorns in the eyes†, which will prevent the great things of God from being perceived.

A spirit of self-dependence. "Be not wise in your own conceits‡." "If any man think that he knoweth any thing, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know§." God giveth wisdom to the lowly, but he confounds the devices of the proud. His promises of teaching, leading, and guiding, are made to the meek, the simple, and those who are little in their own eyes.

2. What to pray for. A simple child-like temper; that you may come to the word as to the light, and look beyond yourselves for the assistance of the Holy Spirit, without which your most laboured inquiries will only mislead you farther and farther from the truth.

3. How to examine yourselves. Not by your notions and attainments in knowledge, for these you may have in a considerable degree, and be wholly destitute of true grace. The word of God supposes it possible that persons may have great gifts\*, flaming zeal, and much success, and yet, having no true love to God, be in his sight no better than sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. But if you would know your state, examine by your prevailing desires. Are your notions of grace effectual to lead you in the path of duty? Do you hunger and thirst for an increase of holiness? Does the knowledge you have of Christ lead you to love and trust him? Are you poor in spirit? You know nothing aright, if you know not yourselves.

4. Ye that are believers may see cause to praise the Lord for his dispensations towards you.

1st, Had you been wise in men's esteem, you might have continued fools to the end of your lives. If the Lord has taught you the secret of them that fear him, if he has shewn you the way of salvation, if he has directed your feet in the paths of his commandments, then you have the true wisdom which shall be your light through life, and in death your glory. Therefore,

2ndly, Be not grieved that ye are strangers to human wisdom and glory. These things, which others so highly prize, you may resign contentedly, and say, "Lord, it is enough if thou art mine." Nay, you have good reason to praise his wisdom and goodness for preserving you from those temptations which have ensnared and endangered so many.

3rdly, Do you desire more of this true wisdom? Seek it in the same way in which you have re-received the first beginnings. Be frequent

and earnest in secret prayer. Study the word of God, and study it not to reconcile and make it bend to your sentiments, but to draw all your sentiments from it, to copy it in your heart, and express it in your conduct. Be cautious of paying too great a regard to persons and parties. One is your master, even Christ. Stand fast in the liberty with which he has made you free; and, while you humbly endeavour to profit by all, do not resign your understanding to any, but to him who is the only wise God, the only effectual and infallible Teacher. Compare the experience of what passes within your own breast, with the observations you make of what daily occurs around you; and bring all your remarks and experiences to the touch stone of God's holy word. Thus shall you grow in knowledge and in grace; and, amidst the various discouragements which may arise from remaining ignorance in yourselves or others, take comfort in reflecting, that you are drawing near to the land of light, where there will be no darkness at all. Then you shall know as you are known; your love and your joy shall likewise be perfect, and you shall be satisfied with the rivers of pleasure which are before the throne of God, world without end.

## **SERMON IV**

### **THE NATURE OF SPIRITUAL REVELATION, AND WHO ARE FAVoured WITH IT**

At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. -  
MATTH. 11:25.

WE proceed now to the more pleasing part of our subject. The great things of the Gospel, though hid, are not lost: not hid as in the bottom of the sea; but he who hides them from the wise and prudent, is ready and willing to make them known to every sincere inquirer.



This discovery, on the Lord's part, is a revelation, and the character of those who obtain it is expressed by the word babes. Of the five particulars I proposed to consider from the text, these two yet remain to be spoken to.

IV. The saving knowledge of Divine truth is a revelation. Our Lord uses a parallel expression, when he commends Peter's confession of his faith; "Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed this unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven\*." Peter had Moses and the Prophets, so had the Scribes and Pharisees; and after their manner they were diligent in reading and searching them. But that he could acknowledge Jesus to be the Messiah, when they rejected him, was because the Father had revealed his truth to him, and given him a clearer knowledge of it, than he could have received from the written world alone. But it may be proper to inquire into the meaning of this term. What are we here to understand by revelation?

Sometimes revelation is used in an extraordinary sense, as when of old the Lord made known to his servants, the Prophets, those doctrines and events which, till then, were neither heard nor thought of. Of this we are not now to speak, but of that which is common to all believers, and necessary to salvation.

Now this revelation supposes the things to be revealed were real and certain before, but unknown, and not to be found out in any other way.

Revelation is not the creation or invention of something new, but the manifestation of what was till then unknown. The great things of eternity, the glorious truths of the Gospel, are real and certain in themselves already, and do not begin to be when we begin to be acquainted with them: yet till God is pleased to reveal them to the heart, we have no more spiritual and effective knowledge of them, than if they were not. Ignorance of things very near to us, and in which we are nearly concerned, may be from two causes.

1. From a want of light. Nothing can be perceived in the dark. If you are in a dark room, though it is richly adorned and furnished, all is lost to you. If you stand in a dark night upon the top of a hill that commands a fine prospect, still you are able to see no more than if you were in a valley. Though you were in a dangerous place, with pitfalls and precipices, and thieves and murderers all around you, still you might imagine yourself in safety, if you had no light with you.

2. It may be from some hindrance or obstruction between you and the object. Thus your dearest friend, or greatest enemy, might be within a few yards of you, and you know nothing of it, if there was a wall between you.

These comparisons may in some measure represent our case by nature. God is near; "in him we live, move, and have our being." Eternity is near; we stand upon the brink of it. Death is near, advancing towards us with hasty strides. The truths of God's word are most certain in themselves, and of the utmost consequence to us. But we perceive none of these things; we are not affected by them, because our understandings are dark, and because thick walls of ignorance, prejudice, and unbelief, stand before the eyes of the mind, and keep them from our view, Even those notions of truth which we sometimes pick up by hearing and reading, are but like windows in a dark room; they are suited to afford an entrance to the light when it comes, but can give no light of themselves.

I think, therefore, we may conclude, that God's revealing these things to us only signifies his effecting such a change in us, by his Holy Spirit, as disposes and enables us to behold them. He sends a Divine light into the soul; and things begin to appear so plain, we wonder at our former stupidity that we could not perceive them before. By the power of his Spirit he breaks down the walls which prevented and confined our views; and a new unthought-of prospect suddenly appears before us. Then the soul sees its danger: "I thought myself secure; but I find I am in the midst of enemies. Guilt pursues me behind; fear, and the snare, and the pit, are before me: which way

shall I turn?" Then it perceives its mistake: "While my views were confined, I thought there was nothing but this plan of life to take care of; but now I see a boundless eternity beyond it." It obtains a glimpse likewise of the glories of the better world, of the beauties of holiness, of the excellency of Jesus. This light is at first faint and imperfect, but grows stronger by the use of appointed means; and as it is increased, every thing appears with a stronger evidence.

We may more particularly illustrate this work of the Holy Spirit, as it influences those leading faculties of the soul, the understanding, affections, and will. By nature the will is perverse and rebellious, and the affections alienated from God: the primary cause of these disorders lies in the darkness of the understanding. Here then the change begins. The Spirit of God enlightens the understanding, by which the sinner perceives things to be as they are represented in the word of God; that he is a transgressor against the Divine law, and on this account obnoxious to wrath; that he is not only guilty, but depraved and unclean, and utterly unable either to repair past evil or to amend his own heart and life. He sees that the great God might justly refuse him mercy; and that he has no plea to offer in arrest of judgment. This discovery would sink him into despair, if it went no farther; but by the same light which discovers him to himself, he begins to see a suitableness, wisdom, and glory, in the method of salvation revealed in the Gospel. He reads and hears concerning the person, sufferings, and offices of Christ, in a very different manner to what he did before: and as, by attending to the word and ministry, his apprehensions of Jesus, and his understanding, become more clear and distinct, a spiritual hope takes place, and increases, in his soul; and the sure effect of this is, he feels his love drawn forth to Him who so loved him as to die for his sins. Beholding, by faith, the Lord Jesus Christ, as bleeding and dying upon the cross; and knowing for whom, and on what account, he suffered, he learns to hate, with a bitter hatred, those sins which nailed him there. The amazing love of Christ constrains him to account all things which he formerly valued as dross and dung, for the excellency of the knowledge of his Saviour. Nor does his faith stop here; he views Him

who once suffered and died, rising triumphant from the tomb, and ascending into heaven in the character of the Representative, Friend, and Forerunner of his people. Having such a High Priest, he is encouraged to draw near to God, to claim an interest in the promises respecting the life that now is, and that which is to come. Thus possessing, in the beginnings of grace, an earnest of the glory that shall be revealed, a real, universal, abiding change necessarily takes place in the affections. Now old things are passed away, and all things become new: the soul no longer cleaves willingly to the dust, or can be satisfied with earthly things, but thirsts for communion with God, and an increase of holiness. Sin is no longer consented to, or delighted in, but is opposed and watched against; and every unhallowed deviation from the will of God, excites the sincerest grief and humiliation, and leads to renewed application to the blood and grace of Jesus for pardon and strength. Thus the will likewise is brought into an unreserved subjection and surrender to the power of Christ, and acts as freely in his service as it once did against him. For that what is termed the freedom of the human will should consist in a suspended indifference between good and evil, is a refinement, which, however admired and applauded by many, is equally contrary both to sound reasoning and to universal experience. The will, in all persons and cases, is determined by the present dictates of the understanding, and the bent of the affections.

By ascribing so much to the Spirit of God, I do not mean, as you may perceive by what I have just now said, to seclude his holy word, or preached Gospel. All these truths and prospects are already contained in the word of God; but without the light of the Spirit they are not discerned. They are propounded to you in the public ministry. We testify, again and again, the things which we have seen and heard of the word of life; and when we are in some measure affected with their evidence, we are ready to wonder how any of you can possibly avoid perceiving them; till we remember how it was with ourselves, and then we know by our own experience, that we must preach, and you hear in vain, unless the Lord is pleased to open your hearts. But observe,

1. The Spirit of God teaches and enlightens by his word as the instrument. There is no revelation from him, but what is (as to our perception of it) derived from the Scripture. There may be supposed illuminations and strong impressions upon the mind, in which the word of God has no place or concern; but this alone is sufficient to discountenance them, and to prove that they are not from the Holy Spirit. For,

2. The Scripture is the appointed rule and test by which all our searches and discoveries, all our acquisitions in religious knowledge, must be tried. If they are indeed from God, they will stand this trial, and answer to the word, as face answers to face in a glass, but not otherwise. "To the law and to the testimony, if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them\*." If those who despise all claims to the influence of the Spirit of God, as enthusiasm, had not been frequently informed that we expect, we acknowledge, no internal revelation, but by the medium of the word of God, and agreeable to it, they would be less inexcusable in repeating the charges of folly and infatuation, which they ignorantly fix upon the work of the Spirit, and all who profess a dependence on it. To those who are indeed candid and sincere inquirers after truth, what has been said upon this part of our subject will, I hope, suggest the propriety of two directions.—From hence learn,

1. To set a high value upon the word of God. All that is necessary to make you wise to salvation is there, and there only. In this precious book you may find a direction for every doubt, a solution of every difficulty, a promise suited to every circumstance you can be in. There you may be informed of your disease by sin, and the remedy provided by grace. You may be instructed to know yourselves, to know God and Jesus Christ, in the knowledge of whom standeth eternal life. The wonders of redeeming love, the glories of the Redeemer's person, the happiness of the redeemed people, the power of faith, and the beauty of holiness, are here represented to the life. Nothing is wanting to make life useful and comfortable, death safe and desirable, and to bring down something of heaven upon earth.

But this true wisdom can be found nowhere else. If you wander from the Scripture, in pursuit either of present peace or future hope, your search will end in disappointment. This is the fountain of living waters: if you forsake it, and give the preference to broken cisterns of your own devising, they will fail you when you most need them. Rejoice, therefore, that such a treasure is put into your hand; but rejoice with trembling. Remember this is not all you want; unless God likewise gives you a heart to use it aright, your privilege will only aggravate your guilt and misery. Therefore remember,

2. The necessity of prayer. For though the things of nearest consequence to you are in the Bible, and you should read it over and over, till you commit the whole book to your memory; yet you will not understand, or discern the truth as it is in Jesus, unless the Lord the Spirit shews it to you. The dispensation of truth is in his hand; and without him all the fancied advantages of superior capacity, learning, criticism, and books, will prove as useless as spectacles to the blind. The great encouragement is, that this infallible Spirit, so necessary to guide us into the way of peace, is promised to all who sincerely ask it. This Spirit, Jesus is exalted to bestow; and he has said, "Whosoever cometh to me, I will in nowise cast out." Therefore water your reading with frequent prayer.—We proceed to,

V. The characters of those persons who succeed in their inquiries, and have the things of God savingly revealed to them; they are called babes.

1. They are, for the most part, babes in the world's esteem. They are despised by the wise and prudent for their weak capacities, small attainments, and their seeming insignificance in common life. But the Lord does not overlook any on these accounts. He is no respecter of persons. In the blessings of his common providence, those which are more immediately from his own hand, such as air and light, health and strength, the faculties of sight and hearing, &c. he bestows as freely, and in as great perfection, to the poor as to the rich, to the ignorant as to the learned. And thus it is with respect to

his grace. Our incapacity is founded in our nature, and is common to all, and not in any particular circumstances. He is as ready to save the mean as the noble. Many of the great and wise are offended at this. As they engross the earth, they would willingly engross heaven also to themselves. But the Lord has appointed otherwise; and it has been one reproach constantly attending the Gospel, that few but the common people have thought it worth their notice\*.

2. They are babes in their own esteem. Not that some are more humble than others by nature, and therefore the Lord gives them a preference on that account: by nature we are all alike, equally destitute of the smallest good: but the expression teaches us, that those to whom the Lord is pleased to reveal these things, he first empties and humbles, strips them of all ground of boasting, and brings them to a dependence on himself. The true believer is frequently compared to a little child; and it is easy to trace an instructive resemblance.

1st, A child, or babe, has little knowledge, and its capacity and powers are as yet very feeble. All whose understandings have been spiritually enlightened, will acknowledge themselves children in this respect. The little they know convinces them of their ignorance. They are convinced that their views of things are faint, partial, confused; that their judgments are weak; that, if the Lord prevents it not, they are very liable to be imposed on by the subtilty of Satan, and the treachery of their own hearts. They feel that they have not in themselves sufficiency to think a good thought.

2ndly, A child is teachable. Conscious of their own ignorance, they listen to all about them, and think every one is qualified to teach them something. Among men none are truly teachable, but those who know they need to be taught. The natural man, if possessed of any advantages, thinks every one needs his help. The humble Christian gives this proof that the confession he is ready to make of his ignorance is genuine, and from his heart, that he is desirous to learn from all. He is swift to hear, slow to speak, and open to

conviction. Though he will not assent to every thing he hears without proof or examination, yet he is disposed to receive instruction, and thankful to those by whom he is profited. He is fearful of being mistaken, of giving way to prejudices, and therefore gladly improves every means of information.

3rdly, A child is simple and dependent. He does not reason, but implicitly receives what he is told by his parents, or those whom he thinks wiser than himself. Such a resignation, indeed, the believer dares not make of his understanding to any men, however highly he may esteem them in the main; for he has learned from the word of God, not to put his trust in man; but this is the desire of the renewed heart, with respect to the teaching of God's word and Spirit. He allows no reasoning or questioning here; nor will he say with Nicodemus, "How can these things be?" It is enough for him that God has said it, and is able to make it good. This is a happy temper. In this way innumerable difficulties that arise from appearances and sophisms are avoided; and the mind, by faith, steers in safety across the immense ocean of conjectures and opinions, which disputants and reasoners essaying to do, are sunk and overpowered. It is true, there are various degrees of this simplicity; and in those who possess it in a larger measure, there is a remaining principle of pride and unbelief, which costs them much prayer and many conflicts to subdue. But this, in some degree, is essential to the character of those who are taught of God; they desire and endeavour to submit wholly to his guidance and will in all things.

Here then is a proper topic for self-examination. Let each one ask his heart, Have I this simple childlike disposition?

If you have, if it is the desire of your soul to be taught of God; if his word is your rule, if you depend on his Spirit to teach you all things, and to lead you as it were by the hand, sensible that, unless you are thus led and guided, you shall certainly go astray; be thankful for this, accept it as a token for good. You were not always so: there was a time when you were wise in your own eyes, and prudent in your



own sight. You have good warrant to hope, that the Lord, who has already taught you to depend on himself, will shew you all that is necessary for you to know.

But if this is not the case, if you lean to your own understanding, what wonder is it that you are still walking in darkness and uncertainty? Will you say, I have read the Bible diligently; I have taken no small pains to examine things, to see which of the many divisions that obtain among Christians is possessed of the truth; but I am still at a loss: surely, if the tenets some plead for had been in the Scripture, I should have found them there! I answer, without detracting from your sagacity or your sincerity, your case is easily accounted for from the verse we are upon, if your inquiries are not conducted in a humble dependence upon the Spirit of God. Too many instances we could produce of men, who, having laboured for years in what seems one of the most laudable undertakings, the explaining the Scriptures for the use of others, have at last been in a remarkable degree unsettled themselves; and the only visible fruits their reading and industry has afforded, have been error, invective, and dissatisfaction: so that their labours have been an exemplification of the former part of our text, a proof in point, how entirely the things of God are often hid from the wise and prudent.

You that are seeking the Lord, and are little in your own eyes, rejoice that the dispensation of grace is in his hands. If men had the disposal of it, you might perhaps have been overlooked. We should have been ready to have accepted the fair-spoken young man, who accosted our Lord with so much outward respect, and had so much to say in his own behalf\*: and probably we should have left the thief upon the cross to perish like a wretch, as he deserved. "But the Lord seeth not as man seeth†." "His ways are higher than our ways, and his thoughts than our thoughts ‡." Therefore there is encouragement for the meanest and the vilest. He has excluded none but those who exclude themselves. "Behold now is the accepted time, behold now is the day of salvation. Let the wicked forsake his ways, and the unrighteous

man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, for he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon."

## **SERMON V**

### **THE SOVEREIGNTY OF DIVINE GRACE ASSERTED AND ILLUSTRATED**

Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight. MATTH.  
11:26

THAT the doctrine in the preceding verse is true in fact, is sufficiently evident from common observation. The greatest part of those whom the world esteems wise and prudent, and all to a man who think themselves so, pay but small regard to the truths of the Gospel. They are hid from their eyes, and revealed to babes, to those whom they despise on account of their ignorance and insignificance. And if a few who are favoured with considerable advantages in point of genius, education, or rank, do receive the truth in the love of it, they have been at least taught that they are no better than babes, and are glad to count all outward things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus the Lord.

If we could give no other reason for this dispensation of grace, than that which is assigned in our text, it ought to be satisfactory; and would be so, if it was not for the pride of our hearts. Surely that which seems good in the sight of God, must be holy, and wise, and good in itself. How vain and presumptuous is blinded man, that would dare to reply against his Maker, to charge his holiness with injustice, his wisdom with mistake, his goodness with partiality! All their vain cavils will be silenced at the great day, when the secrets of all hearts are opened, and God will be justified when he condemns. However, though we dare not venture too far into the depths of the Divine counsels, yet, from the light he has afforded us in his word,

we may, in our feeble manner, assert and prove, that his ways are just and equal: and, besides the argument of his sovereignty, "that so it has pleased him," he has been pleased to favour us with some of the reasons, "why it has so pleased him." And this is the subject I propose to lead your meditations to from these words. May his Spirit assist me, that I may not darken counsel by words without knowledge.

Let us begin with inquiring, What might be his principal ends in sending his Son into the world, that we might have life through him? These, I apprehend, were chiefly two.

1. The redemption and complete salvation of all that believe. All mankind are by nature in the same state of sin and misery. But we are told, that at the great day there will be an unspeakable difference in the circumstances between some and others. Many will then stand trembling at his left hand, to whom the King shall say, "Depart." But those on the right hand will hear those joyful words, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." If you ask, To what is this difference primarily owing? The answer is provided: "Jesus loved them, and washed them from their sins in his own blood: he redeemed them out of every nation, and people, and language: they came out of great tribulation, and washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb; therefore are they before the Throne." It was then for their sakes, who should be hereafter found at the right hand of God, that "God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons."

2. But, besides this, God had another and a still higher end in the work of redemption; namely, the manifestation of his own glory. It was unspeakable love to us that he provided the means of salvation at all: and we cannot wonder, much less ought we to complain, that, in justice to himself, he appointed such means, and such a way, as that all the praise and glory of the contrivance should in the end

redound to himself alone. In order to this, it was necessary that the following things should be manifested with the fullest evidence.

1st, The greatness of man's depravity, guilt, and misery: that it was not a small thing, but a case worthy the interposition of Almighty power and infinite grace.

2ndly, The utter insufficiency of man to relieve himself; that so God might have the whole honour of his recovery, and we might be for ever debtors to his free undeserved mercy.

3rdly, That whereas there are, to outward appearance, a great variety of characters among mankind, it was necessary the dispensation of his grace should be so conducted as to shew, that no case was too hard for his power, or too low and miserable for his compassion and condescension.

Upon these grounds we may see something of his wisdom in the methods he has appointed, and in the subjects of his choice; why it has seemed good in his sight, to hide these things from the wise and prudent, and to reveal them unto babes, for such reasons as these:

1. To stain the pride of all human glory.
2. To exclude every pretence of boasting.
3. That there might be a ground of hope provided for the vilest and meanest.
4. That the salvation of believers might be sure, and not subject to miscarry.

1. The Lord of hosts hath proposed it, "to stain the pride of all human glory\*." How much men are disposed to admire their own wisdom, learning, and fancied accomplishments, is sufficiently obvious. But now the pride of all this glory is stained, inasmuch as it is proved by experience to be utterly useless in the most important concerns. One

man has talents to rule a kingdom, but is himself a slave to the vilest lusts and passions. Another has courage to face death in a field of battle; yet, with regard to religion, is a mere coward: overawed by the feeble breath of the multitude, he is both ashamed and afraid to practise what his conscience convinces him is his duty. Another almost pretends to count the number of the stars, and to call them all by their names; yet has no more thought of the God that made the heavens and the earth, than the beasts that perish. Another delights in books and languages, which few can understand but himself; nothing so false or foolish but he accounts it worth his study, if it has but the stamp of antiquity to recommend it; only the book of God (though much more ancient than all his fables), because it may be read in plain English, is thrown by as unworthy his notice. Another who professes to be Scripture-wise, perverts the Scripture, and abuses his own reason, to establish the most absurd errors, or to overturn the plainest truths. Another amuses himself with setting forth the praises of virtue and morality, while his own conduct furnishes a standing proof, either of the weakness of his scheme, or the insincerity of his heart. Time would fail to recount all the achievements of these wise and prudent men. But behold the pride of them all stained. In the midst of all their acquisitions and inventions, they are strangers to God, to themselves, and to peace; they are without Christ, and without hope: those things which alone are of real importance, are hid from their eyes. Here the desperate depravity and deceitfulness of the heart are manifested to the glory of God; and it is clearly seen, that if he does not interpose to save, men are wholly unable to save themselves.

2. To exclude boasting. "Where is boasting then? It is excluded." As the Apostle speaks in another place, "If Abraham was justified by works, he hath whereof to glory\*:" so if men were saved, either in whole or in part, by their own wisdom and prudence, they might, in the same degree, ascribe the glory and praise to themselves. They might say, My own power and wisdom gave me this; and thus God would be robbed of the honour due to his name. But now this is prevented. The word of the Lord is, "Let not the wise man glory in his

wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might; let not the rich man glory in his riches; but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord\*." For whatever outward advantages some may seem to possess, as to the things of God they stand altogether upon a level with the meanest. These things cannot be understood by any sagacity on our parts, but must be revealed by the Father of lights. What could be done in this way, you may collect from St. Paul's representation in the first chapter of his Epistle to the Romans. Many of the heathens were eminent for wisdom and abilities, and made great proficiency in science; but with regard to the knowledge of God, the result of all their researches was error, superstition, and idolatry; professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and their disquisitions had no other effect than to leave them without excuse. Their practice (as will always be the case) was correspondent to their principles; and, in the midst of a thousand refinements in theory, they were abandoned to the grossest and most detestable vices. If it be said, these had not the light of revelation, we may observe the same or similar effects where the Gospel is known. With this superior light men are still equally vain in their imaginations; and, though they do not pay an outward and formal worship to stocks and stones, they are gross idolaters; for they serve, love, and trust the creature more than the Creator. When there is a difference, it is owing to grace, and grace is acknowledged. Such will readily say, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name be the praise\*." Thus all pretence to boasting is effectually excluded; and he that can glory upon good grounds, must glory only in the Lord.

If it should be supposed that this representation of things tends to discourage a diligent and serious inquiry after truth, I answer, when rightly understood, it will have just the contrary effect. What can be more suited to excite diligence, than to point out the method in which it will assuredly be crowned with success? You cannot succeed without the light and assistance of the Holy Spirit; but if conscious of this, and aware of your own insufficiency, you will seek his direction and guidance by humble prayer, it shall be afforded you. If you know

not this, you will certainly be wearied in the end by repeated disappointments; but if you depend upon his teaching and co-operation in the use of the means he has appointed, your knowledge shall advance as the growing light.

3. This method of the Divine procedure opens a door of hope to the vilest and the meanest. Let not any be cast down on account of any peculiar incapacity or difficulty in their case. If none but the wise and the learned, the rich, and those who are esteemed well-behaved and virtuous, could be saved, or if these stood in a fairer way for it than others, the greatest part of mankind might give up hope, and sit down in despair at once. But the case is exactly the reverse. It is true, the persons I am speaking of are not the worse for these distinctions, whenever they are sensible how vain and insufficient they are, and betake themselves, as poor, helpless, miserable, blind, and naked, to flee for refuge to the mercy of God in Christ. But, alas! their supposed qualifications too often harden them to reject the counsel of God against themselves. They think themselves whole, and therefore see not the necessity or value of the Physician. You who are sensible you have nothing of your own to trust to, take encouragement; the Lord has suited his Gospel to your circumstances.

(1.) Are ye poor? The Lord Jesus Christ has sanctified the state of poverty by taking it on himself. He had not where to lay his head. He will not therefore despise you on this account. Only pray that you may likewise be poor in spirit. He looks through all outward distinctions, and often passes by a palace to make his presence and power known in a mud-walled cottage. Perhaps he appointed this state in mercy to your souls, that you might not be distracted with many things, nor take up with a portion in this world. You cannot be in a lower or more afflicted state than Lazarus, who, while he lay neglected at the rich man's gate, oppressed with want, and full of sores, was a child of God, and the charge of angels.

(2.) Are you ignorant? If you cannot read, you miss indeed a considerable advantage which you might derive from the perusal of his good word, and I would wish you to attain it if practicable. If not, give so much more diligent attention to the preaching of the Gospel; entreat others to read the Scripture to you. But especially pray. The Lord can teach you without a book, and make up for every defect. It is very possible for you to attain to know and love God, to love your neighbour, to rejoice in Christ, to keep his precepts, to be content with your station, to live by faith, and to die with comfort, though you cannot distinguish one letter from another. The prophet Isaiah, in the prospect of Gospel times, gives a description of the way of salvation which is peculiarly suited for your comfort: "And a highway shall be there, and it shall be called the way of holiness; the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein\*."

(3.) Have you been notorious open sinners? Then you are in the less danger of trusting to your own righteousness. And as to the rest, if you are sick of sin, if you sincerely desire to be freed, as well from the power as from the guilt of it, you stand as fair for salvation as the most sober and regular person upon the earth. St. Paul, speaking to those who had been partakers of the saving grace of God, after he had made an enumeration of the blackest sins which man can be guilty of, adds, "And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God†."

4. In this way the salvation of believers is sure. If it depended on any thing in man, it might miscarry. Man's boasted wisdom is soon changed. A few hours of a fever, a small blow on the head, may change a wise man into a fool. "But it is of grace, to the end that the promise might be sure to all the seed‡." Adam had a stock of wisdom; yet when he was trusted with his own happiness, he could not preserve it. But the Second Adam is all-sufficient. Our dependence is upon him. To those who are babes, he is wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and all that they want. If this concern had been left to the wisdom of man, it is most probable that Christ would have lived



and died in vain, without a single real disciple. But now the dispensation of grace is in his hands, we are sure that some will believe in him; and we are likewise sure, that those who truly do so shall never be ashamed of their hope.

Now, from what has been said,

1. Inquire what is the temper of your minds with regard to this appointment. Our Lord rejoiced in it as the wise and holy will, the good pleasure, of his heavenly Father. If you are displeased at it, is it not a proof that you have not the mind which was in Christ Jesus? If God wills one thing, and you will another, where must the contention end? To what purpose, or with what pretence, can you use that expression in the Lord's Prayer, "Thy will be done," when in effect your hearts rise with enmity against it? This is one topic from whence we may confirm the declaration of Scripture, that man by nature is not only a transgressor of the law, but an enemy, yea enmity itself, against God\*. They may pay some profession of regard to the power that made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and the fountains of water, while they worship they know not what, according to their own vain and dark imaginations. But the attributes and characters of God revealed in Scripture, his holiness, justice, truth, and sovereignty, they cannot bear. They are enemies to the declared strictness of his moral government, and enemies to the methods by which he has proposed to communicate his grace. But he is God, and who can control him? Who can say unto him, What hast thou done? You must either submit to his golden sceptre in time, or his rod of iron will fall upon you for ever.

2. Does it not appear from hence, that the doctrine of free sovereign grace is rather an encouragement to awakened and broken-hearted sinners than otherwise? If you are most unworthy of mercy, and destitute of every plea, should you not be glad to hear, that the Lord does not expect worthiness in those whom he saves; but that he himself has provided the only plea which he will accept, and a plea

which cannot be overruled, the righteousness and mediation of his well-beloved Son?

## **SERMON VI**

### **OF THE PERSON OF CHRIST**

All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him. - MATTH. 11:27

THE two preceding verses have led us to consider grace (if I may so speak) in the unfathomable depths of the sovereign will and good pleasure of God. In this verse, our Lord calls us to the contemplation of his own glorious person, authority, and fulness. In him grace is treasured up as in a repository for communication, to be dispensed to needy perishing sinners.

When an ambassador is deputed from an earthly prince, to transact some concern of great importance, he produces his commission and authority, without which all he could propose would be little regarded; and those are most honoured and attended to, who are intrusted with full powers, that is, with a liberty to act and propose as occasions offer, without farther instructions, and with full security that the king will ratify and confirm whatever they agree to, in the same manner as if he had done it in his own person. Thus (if we may presume to compare small things with great) our Lord Jesus Christ, the great Messenger of the Father's love, before he invites every weary heavy-laden sinner to come to him with a gracious assurance that he will receive, and pardon, and save them all, he condescends in this verse (as it were) to open his commission, to instruct us in his own personal dignity, and to communicate to us the ample and unlimited authority which he has received from God to treat with rebels. He knows what hearts of unbelief we have; how greatly an

awakened conscience is terrified with guilt; how busy Satan is to urge us to question either his ability or his willingness to save; and therefore he would leave nothing-undone that might encourage us to come to him, and find rest for our souls. May his gracious Spirit enable me to speak aright, and so open your hearts to understand what may be said upon this high subject, that we may have joy and peace in believing.

The words contain a threefold declaration.

I. Of his person: "No man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son."

II. Of his authority: "All things are delivered to me of my Father."

III. Of his office; summarily intimated in the expression, "He to whomsoever the Son will reveal him."

To treat these points in their proper extent, would be a subject more than equal to the abilities and life of man. Much would be left unsaid at last. We cannot order our speech by reason of darkness. This is a theme fit for an angel's tongue; the most exalted angel, or all the angels in heaven, would be unable to comprehend it, for it is infinite, as our text declares. None knows the Son but the Father. Here we are too prone to think highly of our own knowledge; but when we arrive in yonder world of light, to see him as he is, we shall be ashamed of the highest conceptions we had of him, and of our most laboured attempts to express them, while we were imprisoned in this distant land. Then we shall say with the queen of Sheba, "Behold the half, the thousandth part, was not told us." In the mean time, he is pleased to accept our imperfect stammerings, to assist our feeble inquiries, and does not disdain (as he justly might) to hear us take his name upon our polluted lips.

I. The inconceivable dignity of his person is pointed out by two expressions.

1. "No man," (or rather, as it might be rendered here and in many other places, "No one\*") knoweth the Son, but the Father." No one.

First, Not the wisest man in a state of nature. Various degrees of knowledge there are amongst the sons of men. There is a great difference between man and man; between one who knows not his letters, or any thing beyond the bounds of his own village; and another who has a large acquaintance with arts and sciences, history and languages, and has surveyed the manners and boundaries of many nations. But, with regard to the knowledge of Christ, the philosopher and the shepherd, the king and the beggar, are just upon a level. Of two blind men, one may know many things more than the other; but with regard to the knowledge of light and colours, they will be both ignorant alike.

Some of you perhaps think yourselves wiser than many of your neighbours. But I cannot too often remind you, that if you know not Christ, all your wisdom is folly, and you will find it so at last.

Secondly, Neither do his own people know him in the sense of my text. Some knowledge of him indeed they have, which is their differencing character from the world. But how small a portion I That they know him a little, is plain, because they love him and trust him; but how little, is plain likewise, because their love is so faint, and their trust so feeble. Their doubts, fears, complaints, and backslidings, are so many mournful proofs that they are but poorly acquainted with him; and sufficiently evidence, that a great part of what we account our knowledge, is not real and experimental, but notional only. The literal sense of what we read concerning Jesus, is attainable by study and human teaching; but the spiritual import can be received only from Him who teaches the heart, who increases it in us by the various exercises and dispensations we pass through; and the best have much more to learn than they have already attained. There are, indeed, happy moments when he manifests himself to the eye of faith, in his glory, and in his love; as he did to Peter in the mount, and to Thomas, when a sight of his wounds conquered his

unbelief, and made him in a transport of joy cry out, "My Lord, and my God." But these visits, though they have a powerful influence to conquer sin and fear, are transient; and when the cause is withdrawn, there is a proportionable abatement in the effect. The knowledge of Christ, in the present life, may be compared to the knowledge which a shepherd has of the sea, from having viewed it at the top of a cliff. In a sense, it may be said he has seen the sea; but how little has he seen, in comparison of what lies beyond the reach of his eye! How inadequate is such a prospect to give him an idea answerable to the length, and breadth, and depth, of the immense ocean! Nay, farther,

Thirdly, The glorified saints, and holy angels, who behold as much of his glory as creatures can bear, do not know him as he is. They are filled with his power and love. He comprehends them, but they cannot him. A vessel cast into the sea can but receive according to its capacity. Thus are they filled with his fulness till they can hold no more; but his glory still remains infinite and boundless. The glorious seraphim, therefore, are represented as hiding their faces with their wings, unable to bear the splendour of his presence. For,

Fourthly, "None knows the Son but the Father." This proves his Divinity. God only knows himself. The Son is his eternal Word, his eternal Wisdom, and therefore beyond the highest reach of finite understanding.

2. "None knows the Father but the Son." Here I might repeat the former particulars. God has made something known of himself in his works, much in his word, more still in his grace. All men have some faint perceptions of his power and presence. He manifests himself to his own family below, still more to his family above; yet, after all, he is said to dwell in light which no man can approach. None knows him but the Son; and he knows him perfectly, knows the incomprehensible God; therefore he is God himself;—as he said to Philip, "He that hath seen me, hath seen the Father\*."

Now, if we had no other proof of this doctrine but the passage before us, since this is the declaration of the true and faithful Witness, it should be accepted as decisive. But as this is the great mystery of godliness, the pillar and ground of truth, the foundation of all our hopes, I shall take this opportunity to confirm it more largely from other concurrent testimonies of Scripture.

By the Son, I mean the person who spoke these words: he who was foretold by the prophets; who in the fulness of time came into the world; who, with respect to his Divine nature, is called "the Word<sup>†</sup>," and with respect to his human nature was born of the Virgin Mary: he who was known upon earth by the name of Jesus; whose history is related by the Evangelists; who suffered a shameful and accursed death upon the cross without the gates of Jerusalem. Of him we affirm, "That he was, and is, the true God, and eternal life<sup>‡</sup>." In proof of this, besides what has been already said, let the following particulars be considered.

First, That the proper and peculiar titles of God are attributed to him frequently in the Scriptures; so frequently, that it would be a very long task to transcribe them all. Let a few, the application of which to Christ is express and indisputable, suffice for a specimen: "The Word was God:" "His name shall be called Emmanuel, God with us:" "Jehovah our Righteousness:" "The Mighty God" In the same style he speaks of himself by his servants the Prophets and Apostles: "Thy Maker is thine husband, the Lord of Hosts is his name; and thy Redeemer the Holy One of Israel; the God of the whole earth shall he be called." "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is none else." "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last, the Almighty\*."

Amidst the variety of testimonies which might be adduced to this purpose, there are two which are peculiarly observable. The Psalmist expresses the majesty, power, and immutability of God, in these sublime terms: "Of old thou hast laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of thine hands. They shall perish, but

thou shalt endure: yea, all of them shall wax old like a garment; as a vesture thou shalt change them, and they shall be changed; but thou art the same, and thy years shall have no end<sup>†</sup>." Surely none can deny, but this ascription must be incommunicably due to the Almighty; yet the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews<sup>‡</sup> applies these words directly to the Son of God.—The other passage I intend is the vision of Isaiah, recorded in his sixth chapter; which not only proves the point in hand, but irrefragably establishes the doctrine of the Trinity. For the Lord of hosts, whom Isaiah saw and heard, is affirmed by St. John to have been the Son<sup>§</sup>, by St. Paul to have been the Holy Ghost<sup>||</sup>. Isaiah, therefore, had a manifestation of what was afterwards in explicit words set forth to the faith of the church, that "there are three that bare record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one\*."

Secondly, His works upon earth were such as necessarily suppose a Divine power. Who can control the elements, raise the dead, command the devils, search the heart, and forgive sin, but God alone<sup>†</sup>? If it should be said, that many of his servants and followers wrought miracles equal to his, by a delegated power, and therefore this argument is not conclusive; I answer, There is an apparent difference in the manner of their working which proves the disparity between them and him. They could do nothing but in his name, and by his power: they usually addressed themselves to him by prayer, and always ascribed the praise and glory to him<sup>‡</sup>. But his power was independent, sovereign, and unlimited: "He spoke, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast." At the breath of his rebuke, the raging tempest and the boisterous seas were instantly hushed into a perfect calm. The deaf heard his voice, and the dead came forth from their graves, at his first call.

Thirdly, His works of office can be performed by none but God. This might be proved concerning each of the offices he exercises in consequence of his high character as Mediator between God and man; but I shall speak only of two.

(1.) It is his office to keep his believing people in this present evil world, to act§ the part of a Shepherd towards them, to supply their wants of every kind, to direct their steps, to control their enemies, to over-rule all things for their good, and to be a very present help in every time of trouble. To execute this important charge, it is necessary that his knowledge, his compassion, his power, and his patience, must be boundless. His eye must be every moment upon all their cases at once; his ear must be incessantly open to receive the prayers of all people, nations, and languages; his arm must be continually stretched out to support so many that stand, to raise up so many that fall, to afford seasonable and suitable supplies, at the same instant, to the distresses and temptations of millions. If this is the office he has undertaken, and if he is acknowledged sufficient and faithful in the discharge of it, what more undeniable evidence can be given, that he has all the attributes we can conceive as essential and peculiar to the Godhead? The provocations, defects, and backslidings of his people, are likewise so numerous, so often repeated, and attended with such black aggravations, that if he was not God, invincible in goodness, unchangeable in purpose, if his mercy was not, as his majesty, infinite, he would be wearied out, and provoked to cast them off for ever. The great reason why he bore with his people of old holds equally strong with respect to us: "I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed\*."

(2.) The like may be said of the high office, character, and appointment he has received, to be the Judge of the world, of angels and of men. For, besides that it is quite incredible that God, who is jealous of his glory, should intrust this most illustrious prerogative to any mere creature, it seems evident at first sight, that no creature can be possibly qualified for the discharge of it. To the great and final Judge all hearts must be open, all desires known, and every secret disclosed. He must be intimately acquainted with the counsels and plans that lay hid in God from eternity; he must have a sovereign, comprehensive, intuitive view of every event, of every design, that took place within the limits of time and creation; he must have unlimited authority to pronounce the decisive sentence which will fix



the everlasting state of all intelligent beings, and uncontrolled power for the immediate and irrevocable execution of his supreme decree. And what higher than this can our most laboured conceptions reach of the Almighty God? If it be said, that Christ will act by a delegated authority; we answer, It is a contradiction to say, that God can delegate his omniscience to a creature: and without this attribute, any assignable measure of wisdom or power would be insufficient. The power and fulness of the Godhead must so reside in the Judge, as justly to denominate him to be "God over all blessed for ever\*." And this the Scripture assures us is the case in fact. The man Christ Jesus, who is appointed the Judge of quick and dead, is so intimately and essentially united to and inhabited by the Deity<sup>†</sup>, that he is the proper object of our faith, as the true God and eternal life.

Fourthly, The honours he claims from us afford a further argument for his proper Divinity. He challenges our supreme love, obedience, trust, and worship: "Ye believe in God, believe also in me." "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you." "That all men should honour the Son as they honour the Father." "My sheep know my voice, and I know them, and they follow me; and I give unto them eternal life." "I am the light of the world." "I am the resurrection and the life\*." If we could suppose an apostle or an angel speaking of himself in terms like these, requiring our unlimited dependence, and directing our hope and love to centre wholly on him, we might justly reject him as a blasphemer. How the Apostles understood these expressions, and that they did not mistake our Lord's meaning, is evident from the behaviour of Thomas. He saluted his risen Saviour, "My Lord, and my God <sup>†</sup> ." Had his transport of joy carried him too far in giving this ascription to Jesus, he would doubtless have corrected him, and provided us with a caution against committing the like fault: for who that has tasted his love, and been made partaker of the power of his resurrection, can avoid adoring him with the utmost homage their words can express, or their hearts conceive?

From hence we may take occasion to observe,

1. His wonderful condescension; that, for us and our salvation, he stooped so low, drew a veil over his eternal glories, and appeared in the form of a servant, to suffer and to die: "Though he was rich, for our sakes he became poor, that we through his poverty might be made rich‡." This was love passing knowledge, to pour out his blood, his life, his soul, for those who by nature and practice were enemies and rebels, disobedient to his government, and averse to his grace!

2. What a blessed and glorious hope is set before awakened sinners! Add to the consideration of his person, what we have yet to offer from the word of God concerning his authority and purpose, and say if these truths do not give sufficient encouragement to believe and be saved!

3. How awful must be the case of those who shall be found in final rebellion against him, and die in a state of impenitence and unbelief! Alas! poor obstinate sinners, that have stood out so long, will you still harden your hearts, and stop your ears, and rush (like the thoughtless horse in the battle) upon your own destruction? Do you consider whom you are opposing? "Did ever any harden himself against the Lord, and prosper\*?" "Have you an arm like God? or can you thunder with a voice like him†?" Where will you stand, or what will you say, "when he shall arise to shake terribly the earth; when he shall be revealed in fire, to take vengeance on all that know not God, and obey not the Gospel‡?" O kiss the Son, throw down your arms, and fall prostrate at his footstool, lest his anger awake, and you perish without hope; for in a little time the great day of his wrath will be revealed, "which will burn like a furnace, and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble, and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch§." Then will it appear, that those, and those only, are blessed, who put their trust in him: "For those who trust in him shall never be ashamed; but when Christ who is their life shall appear, they also shall appear with him in glory||."

# SERMON VII

## OF THE AUTHORITY OF CHRIST

All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him. - MATTH. 11:27

WE have spoken something of the dignity and excellence of that Mighty One on whom our help is laid; and are now to consider,

II. The covenant authority he is intrusted with to manage the great concern of man's salvation. He is not only infinitely sufficient, but divinely appointed for this great work.

Of this covenant there is express mention in many parts of Scripture, to some of which I have referred in the note\*. It is styled the covenant of peace, the everlasting, ordered, and sure covenant. The power and efficacy of this covenant respected the future incarnation of our Saviour. He asserted his right, while in the form of a servant, in the words of my text; and to the same purpose are the words of John the Baptist: "The Father loveth the Son, and hath delivered all things into his hands<sup>†</sup>." "But the full manifestation of it was deferred to the time of his resurrection, when, and by which, he was declared to be the Son of God with power\*." Hence, before he left his disciples, he assured them, "All power is committed to me in heaven and in earth<sup>†</sup>."

The sum is, that our Lord Jesus Christ, by virtue of his Divine nature, and his voluntary undertaking in our flesh, to fulfil all righteousness for us, both as to obedience and satisfaction, is exalted in that nature wherein he suffered, to be the sovereign Judge and Lord of all<sup>‡</sup>. He it is now with whom we have to do. The Holy God, considered without respect to the covenant of grace, is a consuming fire to sinners; and

we cannot stand before him. But now he reveals himself: he dwells, as in his temple, in the man Christ Jesus. He has intrusted all his glory and all his grace in his hands; and to him we are to look, on him we are to depend, for all the blessings we need for time and eternity. For "all things are delivered to him of the Father." All things is a most comprehensive expression. We may distribute it as referring to all persons, all blessings, and all dispensations.

1. All persons are in his hands. Hence his sublime title, "King of kings, and Lord of lords§." He doth what he will among the armies of heaven, and the inhabitants of the earth. Thus Isaiah saw his glory, and spake of him.

1st, He is Lord over his enemies, and those that hate him. He rules them with a rod of iron, and so disposes their designs as to make them (though against their wills) the means and instruments of promoting his own purposes and glory||. They are his servants even when they rage most against him. He has a bridle in their mouths to check and turn them at his pleasure. He can and often does control them, when they seem most sure of success, and always sets them bounds, which they cannot pass. So he shewed his power over Pharaoh of old: the haughty king's resistance only gave occasion for a more glorious display of the greatness and goodness of the God of Israel. So he humbled the pride of Herod, and gave him up, in the midst of his guards, a prey to worms\*. And thus, sooner or later, all his enemies are brought to lick the dust before him.

2ndly, But especially he is Lord of his own people. By nature indeed they likewise are his enemies, but he knows them all by name. They have been in a peculiar manner given to him by the Father †; he accounts them his portion, and he will not lose his own‡. He knows where to find them, and when to call them; and when his time is come, one word or look from him can disarm them in a moment, and bring them humbly to his feet. How soon did he stop and change the persecuting Saul!§ When they are thus made willing in the day of his power, he takes them under his especial care; and whoso toucheth

them, toucheth the apple of his eye. He guides, and guards, and feeds, and strengthens them; he keeps them night and day, waters them every moment, and will not suffer any to pluck them out of his hand: nor will he himself leave them or forsake them, till he has done all that he has spoken to them of. He gives them likewise a new heart and gracious dispositions, suited to the honourable relation he has brought them into; so that they delight in his precepts, and yield him a cheerful, habitual, and universal obedience, from the constraining sense they have received of his inexpressible love.

2. All blessings are at his disposal. Is not this a welcome declaration to awakened souls? What is the blessing you want? Seek to Jesus, and you shall not be disappointed. Hear his gracious invitation, "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and ye that have no money; come ye, buy and eat, yea, come, buy wine and milk without money, and without price. Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live\*." The promised blessings which he holds in his hands, are the very same that the awakened enlightened conscience must have, and can have only from him.

1st, Pardon. How needful, how valuable is the pardon of sin to those who know what sin is, what it deserves, and what a share they have in it! Such are incapable of taking comfort till they know how God may be reconciled, and sin forgiven. These are the persons to whom Jesus says, "Look unto me, and be ye saved. I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins†."

2ndly, Righteousness. By believing in him sinners are not only pardoned, but justified. They are accepted in the Beloved, and accounted righteous by his righteousness imputed to them, which we are assured is unto all, and upon all that believe, without any difference or exception‡. Hence his people adore him, and glory in him, by his name, the Lord our Righteousness. In him they possess a righteousness answerable to the demands of the holy law, have confidence and liberty of access to God at present, though conscious

of innumerable deficiencies in themselves; and they shall stand with boldness before him in this righteousness, and not be ashamed in the great day of his appearance, when he shall come to judge the world.

3rdly, Strength. The forgiveness of sin that is past would little avail, unless there was provision made for a continual supply of needful grace. Without this we shall quickly grow weary, yield to the force of surrounding temptations, till at length the latter end would be worse than the beginning. But now every sincere soul may be freed from this fear. The way of prevention is pointed out, and the success infallibly secured by that one promise, though there are many to the same effect, "They that wait on the Lord shall renew their strength\*."

4thly, Healing. This is often necessary; for the spiritual warfare is not to be maintained long without wounds. Our great enemy is so subtle, so watchful, so well provided with temptations adapted to every temper and circumstance; and we are so weak, unpractised, and so often remiss and off our guard, that he will at times prevail to bring us into a dark, barren, backsliding state, despoiled of comfort, and oppressed with fears. But see what a good and gracious Shepherd we have: hear his comfortable words: "I will seek that which was lost, and bring again that which was driven away, and will bind up that which was broken, and will strengthen that which was sick†."

5thly, Support under trouble. He has engaged to lead his people safely\*, through fire and through water. He gives them leave to cast all their care upon him, with an assurance that he careth for them. He has said, "all things shall work together for their good; that his grace shall be sufficient for them; and that in good time he will bruise Satan under their feet, make them more than conquerors," and place them out of the reach of sin and sorrow for ever. Besides the habitual peace which arises from the believing consideration of these truths, he has likewise peculiar seasons of refreshment, when he manifests himself to the soul in a way the world knows not of, and often makes the hour of their sharpest trials the time of their

sweetest and highest consolations: "As the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation aboundeth by Christ<sup>+</sup>."

3. All dispensations are under his direction. He is Lord of all, and does according to his pleasure among the armies of heaven and the inhabitants of the earth. He is the Supreme Disposer,

1st, Of those external dispensations which are distinguished by the name of providential.

(1.) Those that are welcome and prosperous, are both his gift and his purchase To his people they come free: but he paid dear for them. And this gives them their chief value in the judgment of those who know him, to receive them as the pledges and fruits of his redeeming love. When the blessings of common providence are received and enjoyed as the gifts of God reconciled in Christ, they are then, and not otherwise, truly comfortable. It is this thought enables the poor believer often to taste a sweeter relish and flavour in bread and water, than the voluptuary ever knew in the wasteful profusion and studied refinements of luxury. To be able to look back and see how the hand of our gracious Lord has led us from our childhood, chose and managed better for us than we could have done, corrected our mistakes, and in many things exceeded our desires; to look round and see all our concerns in his sure keeping, who delights in our prosperity, and will suffer nothing to grieve us, but what he intends to employ as means for our greater advantage; to look forward and see, that he has prepared still better things for us than ever our eyes beheld, or our hearts conceived,—how cheering are these views! Those who are thus stayed upon the Lord Jesus, as over-ruling and managing all their concerns, are not terrified with every shaking leaf; "their hearts are fixed, trusting in the Lord."

(2.) Afflictive dispensations are likewise of his sending. And the consideration of his hand in them, the good he designs us by them, the assurance we have of being supported under them, and brought through them; according to the degrees in which these things are

apprehended by faith, and accompanied with a humbling sense of their own demerits, his people submit to his appointment with patience and thankfulness, and say, after the pattern which he has left them, The cup which my Saviour puts into my hand, shall I not drink it?

In brief, it is he who appointed the time and place of our birth, and all the successive connections of our lives. Our civil and our religious liberties are both owing to his favour; and in these he has been peculiarly favourable to us. "He has not dealt so with every nation."

2ndly, The dispensation of grace. It is he who raises up instruments to preach his Gospel, appoints them their places, furnishes them with that measure of gifts and sufficiency which he sees requisite and best. And it is he only that makes their poor labours successful. He sends his word to some, and brings others to his word: and in both cases he so makes use of ordinary means, that to a common eye he seems to do nothing, when in reality he does all. He brought St. Paul to Corinth, and maintained him there a considerable time against all the efforts of his enemies\*. He over-ruled the thoughtless rambling of One-simus<sup>†</sup>, and led him by a way which he knew not, to the means by which he had appointed to bring him to the knowledge of himself. And these instances are recorded for our instruction, as specimens of what he does in the same kind everyday.

3rdly, The dispensation of death. Our times are in his hands. He claims it as his own prerogative<sup>‡</sup>, that he keeps the key of death and the invisible state. None can remove us sooner, none can detain us a moment longer, than his call. In this likewise he is little observed. We charge death to fevers, frights, and falls: but these are only the messengers which he sends. Sin has brought us all under a sentence of death: but the moment and the manner of the execution befall us according to his good pleasure. Till then, though his providence leads us through fire and water, though we walk upon the brink of a thousand apparent, and a million of unseen, dangers, we are in reality in perfect safety. Having appointed St. Paul to stand before



Cæsar, though the tempest greatly assaulted, and seemingly overpowered the ship he was in, St. Paul was as safe on the stormy sea, when all probable hope of being saved\* was taken away, as Cæsar himself upon his throne. But when his time is come, in vain are all the assistance of friends, or the healing arts of medicines, to procure the smallest respite.

4thly, The dispensation of judgment. "The Father hath committed all judgment to the Son†;" and has especially appointed a day wherein he will judge the world in righteousness by the man Jesus Christ‡, whom he hath ordained. Then his glory shall be confessed by all. Every eye shall see him, and they also that pierced him. Awful will the day be to those who hate him, when he shall appear in flaming fire, to convince sinners of all their ungodly deeds which they have committed, and of all their hard speeches which they have spoken against him§. They must give an account of all. Account, did I say? they can give none; but will be struck dumb before him, and hear with horror their dreadful doom, "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels||."

But it will be a joyful time to his own people. The clouds of infirmity, affliction, and reproach, under which they are now obscured, shall vanish away, and they shall shine forth like the sun in the presence of their Father. God, even their own God, shall wipe away all tears from their eyes. They shall be glorified, and their enemies ashamed. What joy will fill their hearts, when Jesus the Judge shall own his relation to them before assembled worlds, and shall say, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." Then sorrow and sighing shall be heard no more; but songs of triumph and shouts of everlasting joy shall take place, and so shall they be ever with the Lord.

How are your hearts affected with this subject? Do you not expect that I should close it with a suitable word of application?

1. To those who are as yet in their sins. Will you not tremble before this great Lord God? If these things are not so, if you can prove that we have followed cunningly devised fables, go on secure. But have I not your consciences on my side? Do you not feel a secret foreboding that these are the truths of God? And dare you still persist? Do you not see that you are already in his hands? In a moment he could break you in pieces; yet he spares. He affords you one opportunity more. To-day, while it is called to-day, hear his voice; lest to-morrow should surprise you into eternity, and the weight of unpardoned sins should sink you into the lowest hell. As he has power to punish, so likewise he is mighty to save. Believe his word and live. His obedience unto death is a plea with which you may approach the Mercy-seat. He has power to take away your heart of stone, to subdue your enmity, to forgive your sins; and what he does, he does freely, without money, and without price. You need not, you cannot, mend yourselves before you come to him. If you seek him, he will be found of you; but if you obstinately reject him, you will perish under the most aggravated guilt, as sinners against the light and grace of the Gospel.

2. You that see your need of a Saviour, lift up your heads and rejoice. Is he not, thus qualified, able to save to the uttermost? Why should you keep back, when he bids you come unto him, that you may find rest? Could you invent any invitations more free, more full, than those that are recorded in the Gospel? Can you desire any stronger security than the blood of Jesus, and the oath of him that liveth for ever? Do you wish to know how other great sinners have succeeded in their application to him? Search the Scriptures, and read how he saved Mary Magdalene, the dying thief, the cruel jailor, the persecuting Saul, and many of those who were actually concerned in nailing him to the cross. Be patient, continue waiting on him in prayer, and you shall find he has not inclined you to seek his face in vain.

3. To believers I hope this is a comfortable theme. You see all your concerns are in safe hands. He to whom you have committed your

souls, is able to keep them. Jesus, who has all authority and power in heaven and in earth, vouchsafes to be your Shepherd. What then can you want who are at his providing? What have you to fear who are under his protection? Why then do you so often distrust, so often complain? It is because your faith is weak. Are you tempted to think you could place yourselves to more advantage than he has placed you, that you could do better without the afflictions he is pleased to send you, that you cannot spare what he takes away, nor do well without something which he withholds? Reject all such thoughts; they are highly dishonourable to your Saviour, and to your profession. Those who know not God must reason thus; but you have a covenant promise, that all things are working together for your good. "This is not your rest, it is polluted." But you will soon be at home; and then, when by a clearer light you look back upon the way by which the Lord led you through the wilderness, you will be ashamed (if shame be compatible with the heavenly state) of your misapprehensions while in this dark world, and will confess, to his praise, that mercy and goodness surrounded you in every step, and that the Lord did all things well. What you will then see, it is now your duty and privilege to believe. If you sincerely desire his guidance in all things, labour to submit to it. The path which he has marked out for you is difficult, but he has trod it before you, and it leads to glory. The time is short. Yet a little while, and you shall receive the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls.

## **SERMON VIII**

### **THE GLORY AND GRACE OF GOD REVEALED IN JESUS CHRIST**

All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him. - MATTH. 11:27

THE love we bear to the Lord Jesus Christ, and the confidence we place in him, will always be exactly proportioned to the apprehensions we form of him. Therefore, "to grow in grace, and in the knowledge of him\*," are spoken of as inseparably connected. On this account the Scriptures are frequent and full in describing him to us, that we may have a large acquaintance with his all-sufficiency, and be delivered from our sins and fears. An awakened conscience, that sees the need of a Saviour, well knows, that the person who can deservedly lay claim to its trust must have these three properties; power, authority, and intention to save. How these eminently belong to Jesus, we learn from his own words here. Power belongeth to him, for he is a Divine person, the Creator, Possessor, and Upholder of all things. Authority is his, for all things are delivered to him. Thus far we have proceeded, and are now to speak of his intention or office, the design of his appearance, and for which he is authorised. This is intimated in the close of my text. We are therefore now to speak,

III. Of his office, summarily included in this one thing, To reveal the knowledge of God. "Neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him."

The knowledge of God, here spoken of, intends something more than merely to know that there is a God. Some faint apprehensions of this, all men have by nature. This great truth is so clearly manifested in the works of creation and providence, that any man would be greatly offended, if he was supposed to be ignorant of it. But as it is one thing, to know that there is a king over the nation, and quite another thing to know the king so as to have liberty of access to him and an interest in his favour, so it is in the case before us. Our Lord did not come to tell us that there is a God (the devils know this, and tremble), but to reveal to us such a knowledge of God as may stand with our comfort; to teach us how poor, guilty, hell-deserving sinners may draw near to God with hopes in his mercy, and call him their Father and their Friend.

Now, besides the revelation of this knowledge in the Old Testament, which may be properly ascribed to Christ, inasmuch as he was the Lord, Guide, and Teacher of his church from the beginning, and instructed Moses and the Prophets in the things concerning himself —I say, besides this (which was made at sundry times, and in divers manners, in a more dark and imperfect way), our Lord Jesus, through his incarnation, has vouchsafed us a twofold revelation of that knowledge of God in which standeth our eternal life.

1. In his person.

2. By his Spirit.

1. In his person. In this respect he is said to be "the brightness of the Father's glory, and the\* express image of his† substance." That God is great, and good, and wise, appears in part from his works; but it is but a small portion of these attributes we can spell out in this way; and there are other perfections in God, of which we can gain no certain knowledge without a farther revelation. But would we see a glorious display of the great God, let us turn our eyes to Jesus, and behold him by faith in two principal views.

(1.) As hanging upon the cross. Could we have seen this awful transaction, and been in a right frame of mind, we should naturally have asked such questions as these, Who is he? What has he done? Had we been told, This person, thus destitute and tormented, is the beloved Son of God, who knew no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth; we must have farther asked, Why then was he scourged, wounded, and nailed to the tree? Why are those barbarous men permitted to mock his sufferings? Why does he not deliver himself, and destroy his enemies? The proper answer to these questions includes a revelation of the Divine perfections.

1st, Wisdom. We had deserved to perish, but his mercy had designed to save us with an everlasting salvation. Yet this must be in a way worthy of himself. Sin must be punished, and the honour of his

broken law vindicated. How could this be done, and the righteousness of God made to harmonize with our peace? A wisdom astonishing to angels is manifested in devising this wonderful means. No sacrifices\* or offerings, no acts of obedience or mediation, which creatures could supply, would have been of the least avail when the injured Majesty of God demanded a satisfaction. But the eternal Word, united to our nature, afforded a propitiation worthy of God, and suitable for us. Jesus, by his obedience unto death, has made an end of sin<sup>†</sup>, and brought in an everlasting righteousness, available for all those who flee to him as the hope set before them, for refuge from approaching wrath.

2ndly, Love. God so loved the world. If you ask, How? judge from this instance, words cannot express it. He so loved sinners, enemies, rebels, that, for their sakes, he abandoned and delivered up his beloved Son into the hands of wicked men, permitted him to be assaulted by the powers of darkness; yea, it pleased the Father himself to bruise him, and to make his soul an offering for sin. This is love without parallel, and beyond conception. We can only admire and say, "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed on us\*." When Jesus Christ as crucified is clearly apprehended by faith, then we have the most convincing, the most affecting proof, that God is love.

3rdly, Justice. Wonder not that God's own Son is thus treated. He stands in the place of sinners, and therefore he is not, he cannot be spared. The words his enemies use<sup>†</sup> to his reproach, will, in the lips of his redeemed people, be an expression of his highest praise. Having undertaken to save others, and being determined not to give up their cause, it is in that respect absolutely impossible for him to save himself.

Again; this justice, which was once as a flaming sword to forbid and exclude every hope of salvation to fallen man, is now engaged in our behalf. For since it has pleased the Father to charge sin upon his own Son, his wrath will turn away from all who believe. The immense

debt is already paid, and justice will not exact it twice. From henceforth God is not only gracious and merciful, but † just and faithful in the forgiveness of sin, and declares his own righteousness in justifying the believer in Jesus.

(2.) The knowledge of God is made known in the person of Christ, if we contemplate him as reigning in glory. He is no longer a man of sorrows, oppressed and despised. He is now upon the throne. In him the fulness of the Godhead dwells; and from him, as light from the sun, the unsearchable riches of his goodness are communicated to indigent, unworthy sinners. All the Divine perfections shine gloriously in him, as the God-man, the Mediator, who is exalted above all conception and praise, and doth according to his will in the armies of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth.

1st, Grace. The great God is pleased to manifest himself in Christ, as the God of grace. This grace is manifold, pardoning, converting, restoring, persevering grace, bestowed upon the miserable and worthless. Grace finds the sinner in a hopeless, helpless state, sitting in darkness, and in the shadow of death. Grace pardons the guilt, cleanses the pollution, and subdues the power of sin. Grace sustains the bruised reed, binds up the broken heart, and cherishes the smoking flax into a flame. Grace restores the soul when wandering, revives it when fainting, heals it when wounded, upholds it when ready to fall, teaches it to fight, goes before it in the battle, and at last makes it more than conqueror over all opposition, and then bestows a crown of everlasting life. But all this grace is established and displayed by covenant in the man Christ Jesus, and without respect to him as living, dying, rising, reigning, and interceding in the behalf of sinners, would never have been known.

2ndly, Power. The whole creation proclaims that power belongs unto God. But in nothing will his power be more illustriously displayed than in the wonders of redeeming love! What power is necessary to raise those who are spiritually dead in sin, to soften the heart of stone, to bring light out of darkness, and order out of confusion!

Wherever his Gospel is faithfully preached, it is always confirmed by this accompanying power. How quickly, how easily, did he change Saul from a persecutor to an Apostle! Again, how is his power illustrated by the care he takes of all who believe in his name, affording to every one of them seasonable, suitable, and sufficient supplies in every time of need! So that his weak, helpless, and opposed people, are supported, strengthened, and enabled, to hold on, and to hold out, against all the united efforts of the world, sin, and Satan.

3rdly, Bounty. How glorious is Jesus in his kingdom! Exalted beyond all conception and praise; wearing upon his vesture, and upon his thigh, the name that is above every name; and having all thrones, principalities, and powers, obedient to his will, and adoring at his feet. But all his riches and honours (so far as their capacities can receive) he condescends to share with his people. He owns their worthless names, he permits them to claim the most tender relation to him, and to call him their Brother, their Friend, and their Husband. Yea, he says concerning them, "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne\*." To him therefore we must look for the most astonishing and affecting display of the Divine bounty.

Thus the knowledge of God is revealed in the person of Christ by the word. But great and important as these truths are, we cannot receive and understand them merely by reading. The Lord Jesus therefore has favoured his church with a farther revelation. That is,

2. By his Spirit. This was one principal fruit of his ascension and intercession<sup>†</sup>. With the promise of this Spirit he cheered his disciples when sorrowing under the apprehension of his departure. "It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you\*." The offices of the Holy Spirit are various as our wants; he teaches, comforts, sanctifies, and seals the children of God; but he effects all



these benefits by revealing the knowledge of God, as manifested in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself.

1. In convincing sinners of their lost estate, which is absolutely necessary to their deliverance. None will prize the Saviour but those who feel their need of him. Two things are necessary to convince man of his lost condition by nature and practice as a sinner,—the spirituality of the law, and the sufferings of Christ: the one shews the universality of sin, the other its demerit. But these can be truly discerned only by the light of the Spirit of Christ. While St. Paul (who was never absolutely without the law) was ignorant of the law's spirituality, "I was (says he) alive<sup>†</sup>." I had so little knowledge, both of the law and of myself, that I trusted to it for righteousness, and vainly thought that I yielded it obedience, and grounded my hopes of salvation thereon. "But when the commandment came," when the Spirit explained and enforced it in its full extent, as reaching to the very thoughts of the heart, and requiring an obedience absolutely perfect "then sin revived, and I died." All my hopes vanished, I saw every principle, affection, and action polluted, and the corruptions which I supposed were tamed, broke forth with redoubled vigour. Again; though sin is declared to be displeasing to God and destructive to man, by all the evils and miseries with which the world is filled, and all the punishments which the righteous Judge of all the earth has inflicted on the account of it; yet the just demerit of sin is not to be learnt by the destruction of Sodom, or of the old world, but only from the sufferings of Christ, who has borne the curse for sinners. Nor is it sufficient to know historically that he did suffer, and how he suffered. Where these things are not known by the light of the Spirit, they are no more regarded than a worn-out tale. But where the Spirit of Christ reveals by the word, the nature, cause, and end of his sufferings, then sin appears exceedingly sinful. Nothing less than this can make the soul abhor it.

2. The Spirit produces faith in Jesus, as having once suffered, and being now mighty to save. His blood, his righteousness, his intercession, compassion, and power, are presented to the soul in a

light which bears down the objections of guilt, unbelief, and Satan. Then the wounds made by sin are healed. Then old things pass away, all things become new, all difficulties are solved, and God is revealed experimentally to the soul, as holy, righteous, and true, in justifying the believer in Jesus.

3. Those whom the Spirit thus comforts, he also seals\*. He impresses the image of Christ upon them. Such is the power of the views he gives them of his glory, that they are transformed into the resemblance of their Lord † . Though the first traces of this delineation are faint and indistinct in the sight of men, yet they are perfect in kind. The Spirit impresses feature for feature, and grace for grace ‡ ; and the chief thing he designs and effects by all his subsequent dispensations while the soul remains in the body, is to heighten and finish the heavenly signature. Together with this, and in the same degree, he seals and ratifies to their consciences an interest in all the promises of the Gospel; and, by infusing into their hearts the temper of children, he gives them confidence at the Throne of Grace, enables them to cry, Abba, Father, and bears witness with their spirits that they are born of God. Thus God is revealed not only to them, but in them; and they are made conformable to him in whom they believe, in all righteousness, goodness, and truth.

Let me once more address,

1. Poor mourning souls. Are you seeking to Jesus? You have good reason: you see he is a mighty Saviour. He is furnished with full authority, and came expressly on purpose to save such as you. He assures you, that none shall sincerely seek him in vain. Believe his word, and dismiss your fears. He has begun his good work, by revealing to you your misery, danger, and helplessness, by leading your thoughts to himself. He will not stop here; he will in due time accomplish his whole commission, by revealing to you that knowledge of God in which standeth your present peace and eternal life.

2. Careless sinners. How greatly will your guilt be aggravated if you receive this grace of God, the Gospel of salvation, in vain? Do not your hearts tremble when you think of meeting the Lord Jesus in glory? Have you an answer ready, when he shall ask you why you refused his instruction, and cast his words behind you? The light of truth has visited you, how long will you resist it? How long will Satan blind your eyes? To those who accept not his revelation of grace, he will be ere long revealed inflaming fire. O humble yourselves before him, while the hope of mercy is yet afforded; and pray for the Spirit we have been speaking of, that you may be recovered out of the snare of the devil, and made partakers of the knowledge and image of God.

3. Believers. This subject is the food of your souls. You remember when you had dark, hard, and uncomfortable thoughts of God; but you have seen his glory in the person of Christ, you have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit of God\*, that you may know the things that are freely given you of God. You were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord†. Walk then as children of the light; remember your calling, your privileges, your obligations, your engagements. Let these all animate you to press forward, to endure the cross, to despise the shame. Let it not grieve you to suffer with Christ here, for hereafter you shall reign with him. The hour is swiftly approaching, when you shall be out of the reach of changes and sorrow for ever. Then "thy sun shall no more go down; neither shall thy moon withdraw itself: for the Lord shall be thine everlasting light, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended‡."

## **SERMON IX**

### **LABOURING AND HEAVY LADEN SINNERS DESCRIBED**

Come unto me, all ye that labour, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. - MATTH. 11:28

WE read that, when David was withdrawn into the wilderness from the rage of Saul, every one that was in distress, or in debt, or discontented, gathered themselves unto him, and he became their captain\*. This was a small honour in the judgment of Saul and his court, to be the head of a company of fugitives. Those who judge by outward appearances, and are governed by the maxims of worldly wisdom, cannot have much more honourable thoughts of the present state of Christ's mystical kingdom and subjects upon earth. The case of David was looked upon as desperate by those who, like Nabal†, lived at their ease. They did not know, or would not believe, the promise of God, that he should be king over Israel; and therefore they preferred the favour of Saul, whom God had rejected. In like manner, though our Lord Jesus Christ was a Divine person, invested with all authority, grace, and blessing, and declared the purpose of God concerning himself, and all who should obey his voice, that he would be their King, and they should be his happy people; yet the most that heard him saw no excellence in him, or need of him: their portion and hearts were in this world, therefore they rejected him, and treated him as a blasphemer and a madman. A few, however, there were who felt their misery, and desired to venture upon his word. To these he gave the freest invitation. Those who accepted it, found his promise made good, and rejoiced in his light. Thus it is still; he is no longer upon earth to call us; but he has left these gracious words for an encouragement to all who need a Saviour. The greatest part of mankind, even in Christian countries, are too happy or too busy to regard him. They think they deserve some commendation, if they do not openly mock his messengers, disdain his message, and offer abuse to all who would press them to-day, while it is called to-day, to hear his voice. Even this treatment his servants must expect from many. But there are a few, like David's men, distressed in conscience, deeply in debt to the law of God, and discontented with the bondage of sin, who see and believe that He, and He only, is able to save them. To these labouring and heavy laden souls, he still says, "Come unto me, and I will give you rest." May his gracious Spirit put life and power into his own words, and

into what he shall enable me to speak from them, that they may at this time receive a blessing and peace from his hands.

The text readily points out three inquiries.

I. Who are the persons here invited?

II. What is it to come to Christ?

III. What is implied in the promised rest?

I. The persons are those who labour (the Greek expresses toil with weariness\*) and are heavy laden. This must, however, be limited to spiritual concerns; otherwise it will take in all mankind, even the most hardened and obstinate opposers of Christ and the Gospel. For let your consciences speak; you that account the yoke of Christ a heavy burden, and judge his people to be miserable and melancholy, are not you wearied and burdened in your own way? Surely you are often tired of your drudgery. Though you are so wedded and sold to your hard master, that you cannot break loose; though you are so mad as to be fond of your chains; yet you know, and I know (for I remember the gall and wormwood of that state), that you do not find all that pleasure in your wickedness which you pretend to. So much as you affect to despise hypocrisy, you are great hypocrites yourselves. You often laugh when you are not pleased, you roar out your boisterous mirth sometimes, when you are almost ready to roar with anguish and disquiet of spirit. You court the friendship of those whom in your hearts you despise; and though you would be thought to pay no regard at all to the word of God, there are seasons when (like him you serve) you believe and tremble. And, farther, what visible burdens do you bring upon yourselves? "The way of transgressors is hard<sup>†</sup>." Your follies multiply your troubles every day. Confusion and uneasiness in your families, waste of substance, loss of health and reputation, discord, strife, sorrow, and shame; these are the bitter fruits of your evil ways, which prey on your present

hours, and make your future prospects darker every day. Surely you are weary and heavy laden beyond expression.

But this is not the case with others. You avoid gross vices; you have perhaps a form of godliness. The worst, you think, that can be said of you is, that you employ all your thoughts, and every means that will not bring you under the lash of the law, to heap up money, to join house to house, and field to field; or you spend your days in a thoughtless indolence, walk in the way of your own hearts, and look no farther; and here you will say you find pleasure, and insist on it that you are neither weary nor heavy laden. I might enlarge on your many disappointments, the vain fears which are inseparable from those who live without God in the world, and the trouble you find from disorderly, restless, and unsatisfied passions. But, to wave these things, I say briefly, that if you are not labouring and heavy laden, then it is plain that you are not the persons whom Christ here invites to partake of his rest. And though you can rest without him now, think, O think! what rest you will find without him hereafter? If you now say, Depart, he will then say, Depart. And who will smile upon you when he frowns? To whom will you then flee for help? or where will you leave your glory? O that it would please him to touch your hearts, that, as weary and heavy laden sinners, you might fall humbly at his feet, before his wrath burn like fire, and there be none to quench it!

But to proceed: let us,

1. Explain the terms, what it is to labour and be heavy laden.
2. Shew who are the persons that answer this description.

First, The persons are said to be,

1. Labouring, toiling, weary. This is not hard to be understood. Weariness proceeds either from labour or from weakness; and when these are united, when a person has much to do, or to bear, and but little strength, he will soon be weary. The case of some, however, is,

that when they are tired, they can lay down their burden, or leave off their work. But these are not only labouring, fainting, weary, but,

2. Heavy laden likewise. As if a man had a burden, which he was unable to bear a single minute, so fastened upon him, that he could not by any means be freed from it; but it must always press him down, night and day, abroad or at home, sleeping (if sleep in such a circumstance were possible) and waking. How would the poor creature be wearied! How could you comfort or give him ease, unless you could rid him of his burden? How desirable would the prospect of liberty be to such a one! and how great his obligations and acknowledgments to his deliverer!

Secondly, This representation is an emblem of the distresses and burdens of those who seek to Jesus, that they may have rest for their souls; nor can any truly seek him till they feel themselves in such a state. They may be generally comprised under three classes.

1. Awakened sinners. None but those who have felt it can conceive how sinners labour, toil, and faint, under their first convictions. They are burdened,

First, with the guilt of sin. This is a heavy load. When Jesus bore it, it made him sweat great drops of blood. It is true, he bore the weight of all his people's sins; but the weight of one sin is sufficient to press us down, if God permits it to lie heavy upon us. I suppose the best of us can remember some action or incident or other in our past lives which we would wish to forget if we could. Now, how would you be distressed to have a person sounding in your ears, from morning till night, and every day of your lives, that worst thing that ever you did? Would it not weary you? This is a faint image of the convinced sinner's state. When conscience is truly awakened, it acts this officious and troublesome part; but its remonstrances are not confined to one sin, it renews the remembrance and the aggravations of multitudes. Nor is this the voice of a man, but indeed of God, who speaks in and by the conscience. The poor sinner hears and trembles;

then the complaint of Job is understood: "Thou writest bitter things against me, and makest me to possess the iniquities of my youth\*." Do you wonder that such a one can no longer take pleasure in worldly things? It is impossible, unless you could silence this importunate voice, that they can bear themselves at all. Nay, often it is so strong and urgent, gives them such a lively sense of what sin is, and what it deserves from a righteous God, that they are almost afraid or ashamed to see any person that knows them. They are ready to think, that people can read in their faces what passes in their hearts, and almost expect that the ground should open under their feet. O how wearisome is it to be continually bowed down with such a burden as this!

Secondly, with the power of sin. Perhaps they were once in some measure at ease in this respect: they saw others whom they supposed to be worse; and therefore trusted in themselves that they were righteous. But convictions rouse and inflame our sinful natures. St. Paul exemplifies this by his own case before conversion: "I was without the law once; but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died\*." He never was strictly without the law; for he expected salvation by obeying it; but he was without the knowledge of its spirituality, demands, and sanction: and while he remained thus, he was alive, that is, his hope remained good, and he was satisfied with his obedience. But when the commandment came, when its extent, purity, and penalty, were brought home to his conscience, sin revived, and he died. He found all his pretensions to liberty, obedience, and comfort, were experimentally confuted by what he felt in himself. The more an awakened sinner strives against his corruptions, the more they seem to increase. This wearies him; for, besides the greatness of the toil itself, he finds himself weak, weak as water, weaker and weaker. And he is not only weary, but heavy laden; for this likewise is a burden which he cannot shake off. He sees that he cannot succeed; yet he dares not desist.

2. Those who are seeking salvation by the works of the law, are labouring and heavy laden, engaged in what is beyond their strength



and baffles all their endeavours. This may appear, from what has been already said. It is a hard task to keep the whole law: and nothing less will either please God, if made the ground of justification, or satisfy the conscience that has any true light. Those declarations of the word, that "cursed is the man who continueth not in all things written in the book of the law to do them<sup>†</sup>," and, "whoso keepeth the whole law, and yet offendeth in one point, he is guilty of all<sup>‡</sup>," keep them in continual anxiety and servitude. The weakness of their flesh makes it impossible for the law to give a ground of hope; yet they cannot lay down their burden, but are compelled to renew the fruitless task. I speak not of mere formalists, who go through a round of external services, without meaning or design; but all who are in a measure sincere, find themselves still followed with a restless inquiry, "What lack I yet\*?" Endless are the shifts and contrivances they are put to; but all in vain: for, what makes it worse, they always add to this burden many inventions of their own, as though the demands of the law were too few.

3. Those who are under temptation. It is a hard and wearisome service to be in close conflict with the powers of darkness. The leading branches of this exercise are,

1st, When the soul is assaulted, and as it were filled with insufferable blasphemies. When Satan is permitted to shoot these fiery darts, none can express (not even those who have felt them) the amazement and confusion that fills the mind. For a person who has received a reverence for the name and attributes of God, to be haunted from morning to night, from day to day, with horrid imprecations, so strongly impressed, that he often starts and trembles with an apprehension, that he has certainly consented, and spoken them aloud with his lips; this is irksome and terrifying beyond description.

2ndly, When the foundations of faith and experience are attacked. Many who have thought themselves grounded in the truth, who have hoped that they had surely tasted that the Lord is gracious, and have

in their first comforts been ready to say, "I shall never be moved\*, thou, Lord, of thy goodness hast made my mountain so strong," have found themselves afterwards at their wit's end, when the enemy has been permitted to come in upon them like a flood†. One black cloud of temptation has blotted out all their comfortable evidences; and they have been left to question, not only the justness of their own hopes, but even the first and most important principles on which their hopes were built.

3rdly, When the hidden corruptions and abominations of the heart are stirred up. And perhaps there is no other way but this of coming to the knowledge of what our depraved natures are capable. Such things a season of temptation has discovered to some, which I believe no racks nor tortures could constrain them to disclose, though but to their dearest friend. This subject, therefore, will not bear a particular illustration. The Lord's people are not all acquainted with these depths of Satan. As people who live on shore have a variety of trials, dangers, and deliverances, yet know but little of the peculiar exercises of those who go down to the sea in ships; so, in the present case, there are great waters ‡ , depths of temptation known comparatively to few. Those who are brought through them, have more to say of the wonders of God in the great deep than others; and this is his design in permitting it, that they may know more of him, and more of themselves. But while they are under these trials, they are weary and heavy laden; and this burden they must bear till the Lord removes it. The help of men, books, and ordinances, is sought and tendered in vain, till his appointed hour of deliverance draws near.

These, therefore, convinced, striving, and tempted souls, are the persons to whom Jesus says, "Come to me, and I will give you rest." The purport of this gracious invitation we are to consider hereafter. In the mean time rejoice in this, Jesus has foreseen your cases, and provided accordingly. He says, Come; that is, believe, as he himself expounds it: "He that cometh unto me shall never hunger; and he

that believeth on me shall never thirst\*." See how his promises suit the state you are in.

1. Are you heavy laden with guilt? The Gospel message is, "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin†."

2. Are you groaning under the power of indwelling sin? Hear his gracious words: "I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live‡." And to the same purpose his Prophet: "He giveth power to the faint, and to them that have no might he increaseth strength§."

3. Are you striving in the fire to keep the law? "Wherefore will you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which satisfieth not?" Forego the vain attempt. Is it not written, "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth||? "

4. Are you in temptation? He that says, "Come unto me," has been tempted himself\*\*, and knows how to pity you. He has power over your enemy, and can deliver you with a word\*. Did he not thus dispossess Satan in the days of his humiliation? and if then, surely he is no less able now; for since that time he has gloriously triumphed over the powers of darkness †. And as his arm is not shortened, neither is his ear heavy; he has said, without exception, "Whosoever cometh unto me, I will in nowise cast out‡;" and thousands who have been in your distress, have successively found that promise fulfilled, "The God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly§."

# **SERMON X**

## **OF COMING TO CHRIST**

Come unto me, all ye that labour, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. - MATTH. 11:28

THE dispensation of the Gospel may be compared to the cities of refuge in Israel. It was a privilege, an honour to the nation in general, that they had such sanctuaries of Divine appointment; but the real value of them was known to few. Those only who found themselves in that case for which they were provided, could rightly prize them. In like manner, the Gospel of Christ is the highest privilege and honour of which a professing nation can boast; but it can be truly esteemed and understood by none but weary and heavy laden souls, who have felt their misery by nature, are tired of the drudgery of sin, and have seen the curse of the broken law pursuing them, like the avenger of blood of old. This is the only consideration that keeps them from despair, that God has provided a remedy by the Gospel; and Jesus has said, "Come unto me, and I will give you rest." If they could receive the full comfort of these words, and heartily obey the call, their complaints would be at an end; but remaining ignorance, unbelief, and Satan, combine in various ways to keep them back. Some will say, "O that I could come! but, alas! I cannot." Others, "I fear I do not come aright."—Having, therefore, endeavoured to shew you the persons chiefly intended here, under the character of those who labour and are heavy laden, I proceed to consider,

II. What it is to come to Christ. I have observed in general, that it appears to have the same signification with believing in him. But, that we may understand it the more clearly, let us inquire,

1. How those to whom he personally spoke these words, in all probability, understood them.

2. How far their apprehensions of them are applicable and suitable to our circumstances.

3. Whether, as we have the same necessity, we have not likewise equal encouragement to come to him with those who were conversant with him upon earth.

1. It does not appear that those to whom our Lord spoke in person were so much perplexed as many are now, to know what coming or believing should mean: he seems to have been understood\* both by friends and enemies. Many questioned his authority and right to exact a dependence on himself; but they seemed to be at no difficulty about his meaning. It certainly implied more than a mere bodily coming into his presence. He was surrounded, and even followed, by multitudes, who never came to him in the sense of his invitation. To such, while standing about him, he complained, "Ye will not come unto me, that ye may have life\*." Therefore, if we consult what is written of those who came to Jesus for relief, and obtained it, we may conclude, that coming to him implies,

First, A persuasion of his power, and of their own need of his help. They knew that they wanted relief, and conceived of him as an extraordinary person empowered and able to succour them. This persuasion of Christ's sufficiency and willingness was then, as it is now, afforded in different degrees. The centurion spoke with full assurance: "Speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed<sup>†</sup>." The leper more dubiously: "Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean<sup>‡</sup>." Another, in still fainter language: "If thou canst do any thing, have compassion on us, and help us<sup>§</sup>." The faith of this last was, as the man himself acknowledged, mixed with much unbelief and fear; yet Jesus did not despise the day of small things: he pardoned his suspicions, confirmed his fluctuating mind, granted him his request; and his case is recorded as an instance how graciously he accepts and cherishes the feeblest efforts of true faith: "He will not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax."

Secondly, An actual application. This evidenced their faith to be right. They did not sit content with having heard of him, but improved it: they went to him, told him their cases, and implored his compassion. Their faith prevailed against all discouragements. In vain the multitude charged them to hold their peace\*; knowing that he only was able to relieve them, they cried so much the more a great deal. Even when he seemed to discover a great reserve†, they still waited, and knew not how to depart without an answer. Nor could a sense of unworthiness, fear, or shame, keep them back‡, when once they had a strong persuasion of his power to save.

Thirdly, When he was sought to as a soul-physician, as was the case with many whose bodily diseases he healed, and with others who were not sick, those who came to him continued with him, and became his followers. They depended on him for salvation, received him as their Lord and Master, professed an obedience to his precepts, accepted a share in his reproach, and renounced every thing that was inconsistent with his will§. Some had a more express and open call to this; as Matthew, who was sitting at the receipt of custom, regardless of Jesus, till he passed by him, and said, "Follow me||." That word, accompanied with the power of his love, won his heart, and diverted him from worldly pursuits in an instant. Others were more secretly drawn by his Spirit and providence, as Nathaniel, and the weeping penitent\*\* who silently washed his feet with her tears; and this was the design and effect of many of their bodily and family afflictions. The man who was brought to be healed of the palsy††, received the forgiveness of his sins; and the ruler, who first came to Jesus with no other view than to obtain the life of his son\*, obtained much more than he asked or expected. The Lord afforded such an affecting sense of his power and goodness upon that occasion, that he from thenceforth believed, with all his house.

2. These things are applicable to us. Jesus is no longer visible upon earth; but he has promised his spiritual presence to abide with his word, ordinances, and people, to the end of time. Weary and heavy laden souls have now no need to take a long journey to seek him; for

he is always near them, and in a spiritual manner, where his Gospel is preached. Poor and inconsiderable as we are in the judgment of the world, I trust we have a right to claim his promise<sup>†</sup>, and to believe that he is even now in the midst of us. Therefore come unto him; that is,

First, Raise your hearts, and breathe forth your complaints to him. Do you see your need of him? Be persuaded, and pray to him to assure you more strongly of his power and goodness. He is just such a Saviour as your circumstances require, as you yourself could wish for; and he is able to convince you in a moment that he is so. If he is pleased to cause a ray of his glory to break in upon your mind, your fears, and doubts, and griefs, would instantly give place.

Secondly, Persevere in this application to him. Set a high value upon these his public ordinances, and be constant in attending them. His eye is fixed upon us; his arm is revealed amongst us. I trust it is a time of his grace, and that everyday we meet, he does something for one or another in the assembly. He has a fixed time for every one whom he relieves. He knew how long the poor man had waited at the pool side\*; and when his hour came, he spake and relieved him. So do you endeavour to be found in his way; and not here only, but in whatever he has made your duty. Read his word; be frequent in secret prayer. You will find many things arising from within and without to discourage and weary you in this course; but persist in it, and in good time you shall find rest for your souls. These are the means which the Lord has appointed you. Converse likewise at proper opportunities with his people; perhaps he may unexpectedly join you, as he did the two disciples when walking to Emmaus<sup>†</sup>, and cause your hearts to burn within you. Farther,

Thirdly, You are to follow him, to take up his cross, to make a profession of his name and Gospel, to bear contentedly a share in the reproach and scorn which is the usual lot of those who will live godly in Christ Jesus, in the midst of an unbelieving and perverse generation. You are not only to trust in him as a priest to atone for

your sins, but to receive and obey him as your Teacher and your Lord. If you are truly weary and heavy laden, you will be glad to do this, and are crying to him to enable you: and you are likewise willing to forsake every thing that is inconsistent with his will and service. If you are desirous to come to Christ, it is not grievous to you to think of parting with your sinful pleasures and vain companions. Rather these are a part of the burden from which you long to be freed.

Come in this way, and you shall find rest for your souls. Are any of you thinking,—O that I could!—surely if I had seen him and heard him, I should have ventured; but now unbelief and fear keep me back. I observe, therefore,

3. That as we have no less need of Jesus than those of old who saw and conversed with him; so we have at least equal encouragement to come unto him. This I think will appear, if we consider that,

On the one hand, the bodily presence of Christ, considered in itself, had no peculiar or extraordinary influence upon those who saw him, but all was wrought by the power of his Spirit; the same Spirit which is promised to abide with his church for ever.

1st, Multitudes who saw and heard him were unmoved and unconvinced by all the wonders of his love. Though he spoke as never man spoke, and went about doing good, he was slighted, opposed, and hated, even to the death. And those who know the heart of man, and believe that the carnal mind is enmity against God, will allow it highly probable, that upon a supposition he should appear again in the same circumstance of humiliation, and to use the same authoritative freedom in vindicating the commands of God from the vain figments, traditions, and customs of men, he would meet with little better treatment, even in those countries which are called by his name, than he did from the proud, self-righteous, unbelieving Jews. We may warrantably suppose there were many more lepers, blind, &c. in the places where he resorted, than those who came to him to be healed.



2ndly, Many of his professed disciples, even after they had followed him for a while, turned back and forsook him\*. We have therefore the less reason to wonder when we see any give up the profession of the Gospel, and return to the world again. It was thus from the beginning; and those who do so now, would have done so if they had lived then. His looks, his voice, his gesture, and even his discourses and miracles, could not engage a single person to cleave to him with full purpose of heart, unless he was likewise spiritually revealed to the eye of their faith, as the image of the invisible God, the brightness of the Father's glory, full of grace and truth.

3rdly, Even his true disciples, who were constantly with him, to whom he had personally made the most express and endearing promises, and who sometimes thought themselves assured beyond the power of a doubt, yet could not maintain their confidence longer than his Spirit upheld them. To them expressly, though not to them exclusively, Jesus had said, "I go to prepare a place for you\*," and I will come again to receive you to myself, that "where I am, there ye may be also<sup>†</sup>." When he had concluded that affectionate discourse, their doubts and fears were dissipated, and they could confidently say, "Now we believe<sup>‡</sup>;" yet it was not long before they found his reply fulfilled: Jesus said unto them, "Do you now believe! The hour is coming, when you shall be scattered every man to his own, and shall leave me alone§." Will not this instance convince you of your mistake, when you think you could depend more on a voice from heaven, than on the written word? The Apostles had the strongest of assurance imaginable, the word of the Lord Jesus himself, face to face; and yet this would not support them, without renewed supplies of strength.

On the other hand, consider if the loss of his bodily presence is not more than made up to us.

1st. By the fuller manifestation of the Holy Spirit than was afforded before his ascension. The Holy Ghost was not then given in that clear and abundant measure as afterwards\*, because Jesus was not yet

glorified. While he was with them, he was their Comforter and Teacher; but he told them, "When I depart, I will send you another Comforter †," whose office and abode with you will be in many respects so much more advantageous, that on this account it is expedient for you that I go away.

2ndly, By the greater number and variety of promises which we enjoy. We have not only the Scriptures of the Old Testament in common with them, but to us the ancient revelations of the will and love of God are enlarged, explained, applied, and confirmed by the super-addition of the new‡.

3rdly, By the experience of multitudes of all ages, people, and languages; who have gone before us, since their time: the cloud of witnesses to the truth and grace of God, the reality of eternal things, and the victorious power of faith, is now increased by the concurrent evidence of thousands and millions, who have overcome all opposition by the blood of the Lamb, and the word of his testimony.

4thly, By the proofs and living witnesses of his power and grace amongst ourselves. Are there not many, with whom you worship and converse from day to day, who can tell you they were even dead in trespasses and sins, but he has quickened them. They were once, as you are, labouring and heavy laden, they waited for him long, had a share in such temptations and conflicts as you now feel, were often at a stand, and upon the point of concluding their case to be desperate, as you may think yours at present; but at length they were enabled to come unto him, and they have found rest. Every such instance should encourage you to gird up the loins of your minds, to be patient and hope to the end. As they have known your troubles, so shall you partake of their consolations in due time. What is it then should hinder you from coming to Jesus that you may find rest? What exceptions can your unbelief devise against the invitations, motives, and examples, which the Lord sets before you by his preached Gospel?

(1.) Is it a sense of your load which makes you say, you are not able? But consider that this is not a work, but a rest. Would a man plead, I am so heavy laden, that I cannot consent to part with my burden; so weary, that I am not able either to stand still or lie down, but must force myself farther? The greatness of your burden, so far from being an objection, is the very reason why you should instantly come to Christ, for he alone is able to release you.

(2.) But perhaps you think you do not come aright. I ask, how would you come? If you can come as a helpless unworthy sinner, without strength, without righteousness, without any hope but what arises from the worth, work, and word of Christ, this is to come aright. There is no other way of being accepted. Would you refresh and strengthen yourself, wash away your own sins, free yourself from your burden, and then come to him to do these things for you? May the Lord help you to see the folly and unreasonableness of your unbelief.

I have observed already, that coming to Christ signified more at first than merely to come into his presence: so likewise it means more now than to be found among his worshippers. Let none of you be deceived with a form of godliness. Examine your religious profession by this test. Have you laboured under a sense of your misery? Have you known the burden of sin? Has Jesus given you rest? Or are you earnestly seeking to him for it? If you understand not the meaning of these questions, you are not yet in that state to which the promises are made. And why are you not labouring and heavy laden? Are you not sinners? Has not the righteous God revealed a law? Has he not guarded this law with the sanction of a dreadful curse? Have you not transgressed this holy law in thought, word, and deed, times without number? If you have not, why do you join in the public confession, and call for mercy when the commandments are repeated? If you have, how will you escape the penalty? How indeed, if you dare to neglect this great salvation? The law condemns you already; if you receive not the Gospel, you must perish without remedy: for other name or means whereby men can be saved there is none under

heaven. Once more you are warned of danger; once more the refuge is set before you. We preach Jesus, who came to seek and to save those who were lost; Jesus who was wounded with whips, and thorns, and nails, that his enemies might be healed. Does not this thought affect you? Will you slight his love, despise his blood, and crucify him afresh? God forbid! Is there not some heart now relenting, beginning to feel impressions of fear, shame, and grief? Happy beginning! Obey the voice of God now opening in your conscience! Now is the time to pray; before, you knew not what to pray for: but now you see you want the blood of Christ, and the teaching of his Spirit. "Ask, and you shall receive; and seek, and you shall find." Take your warrant from my text; Jesus has said, "Come unto me, and I will give you rest." Let your hearts answer, "Take away our iniquity, and receive us graciously: Behold, we come unto thee, for thou art the Lord our God; and in thee the fatherless, the helpless, the comfortless, find mercy."

## **SERMON XI**

### **THE PRESENT AND FUTURE REST OF BELIEVERS IN CHRIST**

Come unto me, all ye that labour, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. - MATTH. 11:28

THE learned have a variety of arguments whereby to prove the Scripture to be the word of God. But though that kind of proof, which may be brought in a way of reasoning and external evidence, is doubtless useful upon proper occasions; yet, I apprehend, the chief and most satisfactory argument to those who are capable of receiving it, arises from the correspondence between the subject matter of the Scripture, and the state of an awakened mind. When the eyes of the understanding are opened, we begin to see every thing around us, to be just so as the Scripture has described them. Then, and not till

then, we perceive, that what we read in the Bible concerning the horrid evil of sin, the vileness of our fallen nature, the darkness and ignorance of those who know not God, our own emptiness, and the impossibility of finding relief and comfort from creatures, is exactly true. We cannot but apply the words of the woman, and say, Come\* and see a book that has told me all that ever I did, the ground of all my complaints, the true cause and nature of all the evil I either see, hear, or feel, from day to day. And as we find our disease precisely described, so we perceive a suitableness in the proposed remedy. We need a Saviour, and he must be a mighty one; but though our wants and sins, our fears and enemies, are great and numerous, we are convinced that the character of Christ is sufficient to answer them all. We need a rest, a rest which the world cannot give. Inquire where we will among the creatures, experience brings in the same answer from all, It is not in me. This again confirms the word of God, which has forewarned us that we shall meet nothing but disappointment in such pursuits. But there is a spiritual rest spoken of which we know to be the very thing we want, and all our remaining solicitude is how to attain it. From hence, as I said, we may assuredly conclude, that the book which gives us such just views of every thing that passes, must be given by inspiration from Him who is the searcher of hearts. This proof is equally plain and conclusive to all capacities that are spiritually enlightened, and such only are able to understand it. We are now to speak,

III. Of this promised rest. And here two things offer to our consideration.

1. What this rest is?

2. How it is obtained?

1. The Greek word αναπαυσω expresses something more than rest, or a mere relaxation from toil; it denotes refreshment likewise. A person weary with long bearing a heavy burden, will need not only to have it removed, but likewise he wants food and refreshment, to

restore his spirits, and to repair his wasted strength. Such is the rest of the Gospel. It not only puts a period to our fruitless labour, but it affords a sweet reviving cordial. There is not only peace, but joy in believing. Taken at large, we may consider it as two-fold.

1st, A present rest. So the Apostle speaks, "We who have believed do enter into rest\*."

(1.) The common wearisome pursuit of the world is described, as "spending their money for that which is not bread, and their labour for that which satisfieth not<sup>†</sup>;" wandering from object to object in quest of good<sup>‡</sup>, but still mortified by incessant and repeated disappointments. We should pity a person whom we should see seeking some necessary thing day after day, which we knew was impossible to be found there. It is, however, the case with all till they come to Christ. Satisfaction is what they profess to aim at; and they turn every stone (as we say), try every expedient, to meet with it, but in vain. It is only to be found in Him. When they come to him, their wishes are answered. This is exemplified by our Lord in the character of a merchant-man seeking goodly pearls§, who was still upon the inquiry till he had found one pearl of great price. This answered and exceeded his desires: upon the discovery of this one, he rejoiced to forego all his former acquisitions, and to give up every other possession or purpose that he might obtain it.

(2.) I have spoken something concerning the wearisome exercise of a conscience burdened with guilt: but by coming to Jesus and believing in him, an end is put to this. When we are enabled to view our sins as laid upon Christ, that those who come are accepted in the Beloved, that there is no more condemnation, but pardon, reconciliation, and adoption, are the sure privileges of all who trust in him; O the sweet calm that immediately takes place in the soul! It is something more than deliverance. There is a pleasure more than answerable to the former pain, a comfort greater than all the trouble that went before it. Yea, the remembrance of the former bitterness greatly enhances the present pleasure. And the soul understands and experiences the

meaning of those Scriptures, "When the Lord turned the captivity of Zion, then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing\*." "In that day thou shalt say, O Lord, I will praise thee: though thou wast angry with me, thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortedst me. Behold, God is my salvation: I will trust, and not be afraid; for the Lord Jehovah is my strength and my song; he also is become my salvation†."

(3.) There is likewise a rest from the power of sin. In vain is this sought from resolutions and endeavours in our own strength. Even after we are spiritually disposed, and begin to understand the Gospel salvation, it is usually for a season rather a fight than a rest. But when we are brought nearer to Christ, and taught to live upon him as our sanctification, deriving all our strength and motives from him by faith, we obtain a comparative rest in this respect also. We find hard things become easy, and mountains sink into plains, by his power displayed in our behalf. Farther,

(4.) There is a rest from our own works. The believer is quite delivered from the law as a covenant, and owes it no longer service in that view. His obedience is gracious, cheerful, the effect of love; and therefore he is freed from those fears and burdens which once disturbed him in the way of duty. At first there was a secret, though unallowed dependence on himself. When his frames were lively, he was strong, and thought he had something to trust to, but under a change (and changes will happen), he was at his wit's end. But there is a promised, and therefore an attainable rest in this respect; a liberty and power to repose on the finished work and unchangeable word of Christ; to follow him steadily through light and darkness; to glory in him only when our frames are brightest; and to trust in him assuredly when we are at our lowest ebb.

Such is the present rest; in different degrees according to the proportion of faith, and capable of increase even in those who have attained most, so long as we remain in this imperfect state. But there is,

2ndly, A future rest besides and beyond all that can be experienced here: "There remaineth yet a rest for the people of God\*." Faint and imperfect are our most enlarged ideas of that glory which shall be revealed. "It does not yet appear what we shall be †." Who can describe or conceive the happiness of heaven? The most we can clearly understand of it lies in negatives. It will be as unlike as possible to this wilderness of sin and sorrow where we are now confined. Here we are in a warfare, but then we shall enter into perfect rest.

(1.) A rest from all sin. There no unclean thing shall defile or disturb us for ever. We shall be free from sin in ourselves. This alone would be worth dying for. Indwelling sin is a burden under which even the redeemed of the Lord must groan, whilst they sojourn in the body; and those who are most spiritual are most deeply affected with shame, humiliation, and grief, on this account, because they have the clearest views of the holiness of God, the spirituality of the law, the love of Christ, and the deceitfulness of their own hearts. Therefore the Apostle Paul, though perhaps in grace and talents, in zeal and usefulness, distinguished above all the children of Adam, accounted himself the chief of sinners\*, less than the least of all saints †, and cried out under the disparity he felt between what he was, and what he would be, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death‡?" But we shall not carry this burden beyond the grave. The hour of dissolution shall free us from the inbred enemies (the inseparable concomitants of this frail perishing nature) which now trouble us, and we shall see them no more for ever.

Again; we shall be free from all the displeasing effects of sin in others. Our hearts shall be no more pained, nor our ears wounded, nor our eyes filled with tears, by those evils which fill the earth. Now, like Lot in Sodom, we are grieved every day with the filthy conversation of the wicked\*. Who that has any love to the Lord Jesus, any spark of true holiness, any sense of the worth of souls in his heart, can see what passes amongst us without trembling? How openly, daringly, almost universally, are the commandments of God



broken, his Gospel despised, his patience abused, and his power defied. To be a silent spectator of these things is sufficiently grievous; but if (as we are in duty bound) we dare to stand as witnesses for God in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, we find the spirit of the first-born Cain instantly takes fire, and denounces war against all who should presume to say, that we ought to obey and fear God rather than men. Invectives and ill treatment are the certain lot of all who openly and consistently appear on the Lord's side; and if they escape stripes and bonds, imprisonment and death, it is to be ascribed to the restraints of Divine Providence, and (as a means in our happy land) to the temper of the laws, and to the clemency of the powers under whom we live. These things often constrain the believer to say, "O that I had wings like a dove! for then would I flee away and be at rest<sup>†</sup>." Let us not be weary or faint in our minds; ere long this wish shall be answered. A glorious rest awaits you, where sin and sinners shall have no place, nor the alarms of war be anymore heard.

(2.) A rest from all outward afflictions, which, though necessary, and, under the influence of Divine grace, profitable, are grievous to bear; but then they will be necessary no more. Where there is no sin, there shall be no sorrow. Then, believers, God "shall wipe away all tears from your eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away\*."

(3.) A rest from Satan's temptations. How busy is this adversary of God and man, what various arts, what surprising force, what constant assiduity does he employ to ensnare, distress, and terrify those who by grace have escaped from his servitude. He says, like Pharaoh of old, "I will pursue, I will overtake, I will destroy<sup>†</sup>." He follows them to the last stage of life, but he can follow them no farther. The moment of their departure out of the body shall place them beyond his reach for ever.

(4.) A rest from unsatisfied desires. Here, the more we drink, the more we thirst: but there our highest wishes shall be crowned and exceeded; we shall rest in full communion with Him whom we love; we shall no more complain of interruptions and imperfections, of an absent God, and a careless heart. Here, when we obtain a little glimpse of his presence, when he brings us into his banqueting-house, and spreads his banner of love over us, how gladly would we remain in such a desirable frame! How unwilling are we to come out of the mount! But these pleasing seasons are quickly ended, and often give place to some sudden unexpected trial, which robs us of all that sweetness in which we lately rejoiced. But when we ascend the holy hill of God above, we shall come down no more; we shall be for ever with the Lord, never offend him, never be separated from him again. We shall likewise rest in full<sup>z</sup> conformity to him. Here we find a mixture of evil in our best moments; when we approach nearest to him, we have the quickest sense of our defilement, and how much we fall short in every branch of duty, in every temper of our hearts: but when we shall see Jesus as he is, we shall be fully transformed into his image, and be perfectly like him.

2. But how is this rest to be obtained? Blessed be God, in that way which alone can render it attainable by such unworthy indigent creatures. If it was to be bought, we have nothing to offer for it; if it was proposed as a reward of merit, we can do nothing to deserve it. But Jesus has said, I will give you rest. Our title to it cost him dear; he purchased it for us with his own blood; but to us it comes freely. Faith in his name puts us in immediate possession of the first-fruits, the earnest of this inheritance; and faith will lead us powerfully and safely, through all hindrances and enemies, to the full enjoyment of the whole. Faith unites us to Christ; gives us an immediate interest in all the benefits of his life, death, and intercession; opens the way of communication for all needful supplies of grace here, and insures to us the accomplishment of all the Lord has spoken to us of, in a state of glory. "He that believeth shall be saved\*;" saved in defiance of all the opposition of earth and hell; saved, notwithstanding he is in himself unstable as water, weak as a bruised reed, and helpless as

infancy. What Jesus will give, none can take away. Only remember that it is a free gift. Receive it thankfully, and rejoice in the giver. Let him have all the glory of his own undertaking. Renounce every hope and every plea, but his promise and mediation. Commit your souls to him, and then fear nothing. "The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms\*." He will fight your battles, heal your wounds, refresh your fainting spirits, guide you by his counsel while here, and at last receive you to himself.

May we not therefore say, Happy are the people that are in such a case! Happy they, who have been enabled to accept this gracious invitation, who have already entered upon the rest of grace, and have a well-grounded expectation that they shall rest in glory! Believers, what should you fear, or why complain? Look back to where the Lord found you sleeping in sin, helpless and hopeless, yet insensible of your danger: look forward to what he has provided for you, an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away; a crown of life, a kingdom that cannot be shaken; think of the love, the sufferings, the glory of him to whom you owe these blessings; and let these considerations animate you to run with patience † and thankfulness the race that is set before you.

Happy likewise are you whose hearts are fixed upon this rest, and this Saviour, though as yet you are in heaviness through manifold temptations. The Lord will give you rest. Doubt it not, he cannot deny himself; wait his hour; though he seem to tarry long, yet maintain your confidence in his promise. Redouble your prayers, cry mightily to him, he will not (as perhaps many around you do) rebuke your importunity, and charge you to hold your peace. Look at the generations of old, and see, did ever any trust in the Lord and was confounded? or did any abide in his fear and was forsaken? or whom did he ever despise that called upon him?

And you who are yet strangers to rest are thus far happy, that you are still spared, and have the Gospel continued to you. The Lord is still waiting to be gracious: he says to all, Come unto me, and ye shall find

rest for your souls. Do you not see this rest desirable? What rest, either here or hereafter, can you expect, if you remain, in the service of sin? Why may not you obtain your liberty? You are no worse than others, either by nature or practice. Though you have been transgressors from the womb, you are not excluded, if you do not exclude yourselves: though your sinful habits and inclinations are exceedingly strong, he is able to subdue them. There is a power in his blood, and in that Spirit which he is exalted to bestow, sufficient to make the Ethiopian change his skin, and the leopard his spots\*, to soften the hardest heart, and to pardon the most aggravated guilt, and to enable those to do good, who have been accustomed to do evil. Arise, he calleth you. O may he accompany the outward call of his word, with the efficacious power of his grace, that you may this instant obey his voice, and flee to him for refuge! Whither can you flee else? Who, but Jesus, can save you from the wrath to come? Be wise, and delay no longer. "But, if you will not hear, mine eye shall weep for you in secret places<sup>†</sup>." If you will not come to Jesus for life, you must die. If you are out of Christ, God is angry with you every day. The curse of his broken law lies heavy upon you, whether you are asleep or awake, abroad or at home, at the market or in the church. The wrath of God is revealed against you; if you turn not, he will whet his sword\*; he hath bent his bow, and made it ready; he hath prepared the instruments of death to smite you; he hath ordained the arrows of his vengeance against you: and can you, dare you, go on in your sins, and say, I shall have peace? O may you be wise in time! "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God<sup>†</sup>." "Consider this, ye that forget him, lest he tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver<sup>‡</sup>."

## **SERMON XII**

### **OF THE YOKE OF CHRIST**

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. - MATTH. 11:29

THOSE who are enabled to come unto Christ, not only experience a change of state, but of character, disposition, and practice. They are not only freed from condemnation, but they are made partakers of a divine nature. They are delivered from the slavery and yoke of Satan, and made willing in the day of the Lord's power, to accept and embrace his yoke, which is commended to us in the following verse, as easy and pleasant. Our Lord speaks of his service as a yoke or burden, because it is so esteemed by all who know him not. They account him a hard master, and think his service wearisome; but those who have made the experiment, find it otherwise; though, it must be confessed, it exposes to some difficulties, calls for the daily exercise of self-denial, and will not admit either of competition or composition with the world, nor can be pleasing to the unrenewed part of our nature. But the knowledge of his love, the hope of glory, and those seasonable refreshments with which he is pleased to favour those who come unto him, sweeten every bitter thing, and make them willing to bear his yoke, and to prefer it to all that the world accounts freedom.

Let us inquire,

I. What is meant by the yoke of Christ?

II. The proper means by which we are enabled to take it upon us; that is, the believing consideration of him as our effectual Teacher and perfect Pattern.

III. The happy effect of bearing his yoke: we shall find rest to our souls.

I. The yoke of Christ, taken at large, includes all that dependence, obedience, and submission, which we owe him as our rightful Lord and gracious Redeemer. He has a double right to us: "He made us\*."

We are the creatures of his power: He gave us our being, with all our capacities and enjoyments. And farther, "He bought us<sup>†</sup>:" He pitied us in our low and fallen state, and gave his own life, his precious blood, to ransom us from that ruin and misery which was the just desert of our sins. There is good reason, therefore, that we should be his, and live and cleave to him in love alone; that we should no longer live to ourselves, but to him who died for us and rose again. In particular, we may consider,

1. The yoke of his profession. This is very pleasing to a gracious soul, so far as faith is in exercise. Far from being ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, he is ready and willing to tell to all who will hear, what God has done for his soul. Many young converts, in the first warmth of their affection, have more need of a bridle than of a spur in this concern. For want of prudence to time things rightly, and perhaps for want of more tenderness mixed with their zeal, they are apt to increase their own troubles, and sometimes, by pushing things too far, to obstruct the success of their well meant endeavours to convince others. But, though this is a fault, it is a fault on the right side, which time, experience, and observation, will correct. And though we are hasty enough to condemn the irregular overflowings of a heart deeply impressed with a sense of eternal things, I doubt not but the Lord, who owns and approves the main principle from whence they spring, beholds them with a far more favourable eye than he does the cold, cautious, temporizing conduct of some others, who value themselves upon their prudence. We should judge thus, if we had servants of our own. If we had one who was heartily and affectionately devoted to our interests, always ready to run by night or by day, refusing no danger or difficulty from a desire to please us, though sometimes through ignorance or inattention he should make a mistake, we should prefer him to another of greater knowledge and abilities, who was always slow and backward, and discovered at least as much care to save himself from inconveniences, as to promote our service. However, this warm zeal usually suffers abatement; we are flesh, as well as spirit: and there are some circumstances attending a profession of the Gospel, on the account of which it may be with

propriety termed a yoke to us, who have so many remaining evils within us, and so many outward temptations to call them forth. It will certainly stir up opposition from the world, and may probably break\* in upon our dearest connections, and threaten our most necessary temporal interests.

2. The yoke of his precepts. These the gracious soul approves and delights in; but still we are renewed but in part. And when the commands of Christ stand in direct opposition to the will of man, or call upon us to sacrifice a right hand or a right eye; though the Lord will surely make those who depend upon him victorious at the last, yet it will cost them a struggle; so that when they are sensible how much they owe to his power working in them, and enabling them to overcome, they will at the same time have a lively conviction of their own weakness. Abraham believed in God, and delighted to obey; yet when he was commanded to sacrifice his only son, this was no easy trial of his sincerity and obedience: and all who are partakers of his faith are exposed to meet, sooner or later, with some call of duty, little less contrary to the dictates of flesh and blood.

3. The yoke of his dispensations. This none can bear as they ought, but those who come to him. It is natural to us to repine, to fret and toss like a wild bull in a net<sup>†</sup>, when we are under afflictions. Believers likewise find their flesh weak, when their spirits are willing; yet they see sufficient reasons for submission, and they know where to apply for grace. Affliction is a touchstone that discovers what spirit a man is of. The hypocrite may keep up a fair semblance of true piety, while all things go smooth and to his wish; but in sharp troubles the mask will drop off. Satan proceeded upon this maxim in his contest with Job; and the maxim is a truth, though Satan was mistaken in the application.

II. The appointed means by which sinners are enabled to bear this threefold yoke, is suggested in the words, "Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly." However amiable and desirable the disposition I have described may appear, you will never acquire it by any strength,

wisdom, or diligence of your own. Our Lord, to prevent you wearying yourselves with unsuccessful efforts and needless disappointments, has assured you beforehand, "Without me you can do nothing\*." But here he graciously offers you the assistance you need. As if he had said, I know you are unable of yourselves, but I will help you. Be not afraid of the prospect, but consider what I can do. To my power all things are easy: I can make the crooked strait, and the rough smooth: I can sweetly engage your affections, subdue your wills, influence your practice, and deliver you from your sinful fears. Consider likewise what I have done: thousands, who, by nature, were as unskilful and impatient as yourselves, have been made willing in the day of my power.

Therefore, Learn of me. Be not afraid to come to me, for I am meek and lowly of heart. Great and mighty as I am, you may freely apply to me in every doubt and difficulty. Awakened souls, through a sense of guilt, and the power of unbelief, are backward and unwilling to come to Christ. They think, Surely he will take no notice of such a one as I am. But observe how kind and condescending is his invitation; how graciously suited to engage our confidence. It was said of a Roman emperor, that those who durst speak to him were ignorant of his greatness; but those who durst not, were still more ignorant of his goodness. This was a false and impious compliment when applied to a sinful mortal; but it is justly applicable to Jesus, the King of kings, and Lord of lords. His glorious majesty may well fill our hearts with awe, and humble us into the dust before him; but his immense compassion, tenderness, and love, are revealed to overbalance our fears, to give us confidence to draw nigh to him, and an encouraging hope that he will draw nigh to us.

Again, Learn of me. I know the cause why these things appear so hard. It is owing to the pride and impatience of your hearts. To remedy this, take me for your example: I require nothing of you but what I have performed before you, and on your account; in the path I mark out for you, you may perceive my own footsteps all the way. This is a powerful argument, a sweet recommendation of the yoke of



Christ, to those who love him, that he bore it himself. He is not like the Pharisees, whom he censured\* on this very account, who bound heavy burdens, and grievous to be borne, and laid them on men's shoulders, but they themselves would not move them with one of their fingers.

1. Are you terrified with the difficulties attending your profession, disheartened by hard usage, or too ready to shew resentment against those who oppose you? Learn of Jesus, imitate and admire his constancy: "consider him who endured the contradiction of sinners against himself\*." Make a comparison (so the word imports) between yourself and him, between the contradiction which he endured, and that which you are called to struggle with; then surely you will be ashamed to complain. Admire and imitate his meekness: when he was reviled, he reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; he wept for his enemies, and prayed for his murderers. Let the same mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.

2. Do you find it hard to walk stedfastly in his precepts, especially in some particular instances, when the maxims of worldly prudence, and the pleadings of flesh and blood are strongly against you. Learn of Jesus. He pleased not himself<sup>+</sup>; he considered not what was safe and easy, but what was the will of his heavenly Father. Entreat him to strengthen you with strength in your soul, that, as you bear the name of his disciples, you may resemble him in every part of your conduct, and shine as lights in a dark and selfish world, to the glory of his grace.

3. Are you tempted to repine at the dispensations of Divine Providence? Take Jesus for your pattern. Did he say, when the unspeakable sufferings he was to endure for sinners were just coming upon him, "The cup which my Father has put into my hands, shall I not drink it<sup>‡</sup>?" and shall we presume to have a will of our own; especially when we further reflect, that as his sufferings were wholly on our account, so all our sufferings are by his appointment, and all

designed by him to promote our best, that is, our spiritual and eternal welfare?

It is thus by looking to Jesus, that the believer is enlightened and strengthened, and grows in grace and sanctification, according to that passage of St. Paul, "We all with open face," or unvailed face, "beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord\*." The word of God is a glass in which the goodness and beauty of the Lord Jesus are manifested to the eye of faith by the light of the Holy Spirit. In this wonderful glass the whole object is not seen at once, but every view we take strengthens the sight to discover something not perceived before: and the prospect is not only affecting, but transforming; by beholding we are gradually formed into the resemblance of Him whom we see, admire, and love.

All those whom Jesus thus teaches to bear his yoke, find his promise fulfilled: they obtain,

III. Rest to their souls. Those who are truly awakened want nothing to make them happy, but to be assured they have an interest in the Redeemer's love. Now this satisfaction is peculiar to those who take his yoke upon them, and are daily learning of him, and copying after him.

For, 1. This affords the best and most unshaken evidence that he has begun a good work of grace in our hearts: I say the best, because the most unshaken. Many are greatly perplexed to know if they are truly converted; and are kept the longer in suspense, because they overlook the ordinary Scriptural method of confirmation. They expect to know it by some extraordinary sensation, suddenly impressed upon their minds. But, besides that there have been many instances in which this expected evidence has been counterfeited, and a groundless confidence has been placed in a delusion or vain imagination (to the hurt of many, if not to their overthrow), even when they are from the gracious Spirit of God, they are, for the most

part, transient; and when a different frame takes place, the believer is often tempted to question the reality of what went before. I think therefore the testimony of an enlightened conscience, judging by the word of God, and deciding in our favour, that by his grace we have been enabled to take up the yoke of Christ, is in some respects a more satisfactory evidence, that we are his, and that he is ours, than if an angel was sent from heaven to tell us, that our names are written in the book of life.

2. The promise of the peculiar manifestation of his love\*, is made and restrained to those who walk in the path of obedience. If the discoveries the Lord is pleased sometimes to make of himself to the soul, are not the proper and direct evidences of a state of grace, they are, however, exceedingly desirable. Whoever has tasted the sweets of that water of life cannot but long for repeated draughts. When he lifts up the light of his countenance upon the soul, then is love, joy, and peace within, however dark and distressing-things may be without. But this desirable presence can only be expected while we wear his yoke, and walk in his steps. If we turn aside into forbidden ways, if we decline or dishonour the profession of his truth, we grieve the Holy Spirit, on whose communications our comforts are suspended; we give the enemies of our souls encouragement to assault us, and are in danger of falling from one wickedness to another, without the power of withstanding either the greatest or the smallest temptation, till the Lord is pleased to turn again to our assistance. In such a situation there can be no rest. "But he that walketh uprightly, walketh surely\*," and findeth rest.

And true rest is no otherwise to be obtained. Those of you who refuse the yoke of Christ, well know in yourselves that you are far from rest. Your experience agrees with this declaration in the prophet: "There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked<sup>†</sup>." In what respect will you dare to pretend that you have the advantage of those who bear the yoke of Christ?

We allow the profession of the Gospel is subject to inconveniences; but surely not so many as you meet with who are ashamed, or afraid, or averse, to maintain it. If those who are of your household are not your foes on this account, yet we can see how it fares with those who live without the fear of God. How many, and how sharp, are your trials from disobedient children, unfaithful servants, false friendships, ungoverned passions, and unsatisfied desires! Nor do you save any thing in point of character, not even with those by whom you are most desirous to be esteemed. They cannot indeed reproach you with being a believer; but may they not, do they not, reproach and despise you for being a drunkard, or a liar, or a miser, or an extortioner? And is this more honourable than to suffer shame for the cause of Christ?

Do the precepts of Christ seem hard? Certainly not so hard as that miserable bondage you are under to Satan, the god of this world, who works in you, and rules over you, at his will. He will not allow you to listen to the united remonstrances of conscience, health, interest, and reputation. But you are hurried on in his drudgery, constrained, like a mill-horse, to toil in the same tedious round of folly and sin; though you are aware of the consequences and wages before-hand. How absurd is it for you to boast of your freedom, while you are compelled to rush into present misery, and to dare your eternal ruin, with your eyes open!

And how greatly are you to be pitied under the many unavoidable afflictions of life, to which you are equally liable with the servants of Christ! When your idols are torn from you, when sickness seizes you, or death stares you in the face, then how do you fret and pine! how many are your fears and alarms! Then you are your own tormentors. The review of the past affords you only shame and regret. If you look forward to the future, you are filled with foreboding fears and distressing apprehensions; you are weary of living, and afraid to die.

Why then will you continue thus, when Jesus says, "Come unto me, that you may have rest?" O may he incline your hearts this day to

hear his voice! Have you been hardened in your evil ways, by a suspicion that your case is desperate, that it is now too late, and that he whom you have so often rejected will refuse you mercy? Beware of such a thought: "There is forgiveness with him\*." "Behold now is the accepted time; behold now is the day of salvation." He is gracious to pardon, and mighty to save; only acknowledge your offences, and throw down the arms of your rebellion. He is mighty to save, and no less willing than able. As yet there is hope; but who can tell how long his patience may bear with you? Take notice of that awful denunciation, "He that, being often reprov'd, hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy†." If you seek him to-day, with all your hearts, you shall find him. But who can answer for to-morrow? To-morrow, or to-night your souls may be required of you; or, if your lives are spared, you may be given up to judicial and incurable hardness of heart. If his Spirit should cease from striving with you, you are lost for ever.

## **SERMON XIII**

### **THE SERVICE OF CHRIST EASY AND PLEASANT TO HIS PEOPLE**

For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light. - MATTH. 11:30.

THIS verse alone, if seriously attended to, might convince multitudes, that though they bear the name of Christians, and are found among the Lord's worshipping people, they are as yet entire strangers to the religion of the Gospel. Can it be supposed, that our Lord would give a false character of his yoke? If not, how can any dream that they are his followers, while they account a life of communion with God, and entire devotedness to his service, to be dull and burdensome? Those, however, who have made the happy trial, find it to be such a burden as wings are to a bird. Far from

complaining of it, they are convinced that there is no real pleasure attainable in any other way.

What the yoke of Christ is, we have already considered. It includes the profession of his Gospel, obedience to his precepts, and submission to his will, under every dispensation. But since it is confessed, that a sinful nature, and a sinful world, will bring many difficulties, trials, and temptations upon all who walk in this way, it may be worth our while to inquire more particularly, what there is in the yoke of Christ that overpowers all these hardships, and makes such amends for every suffering, that, upon the whole, every believer will subscribe to this as a sure and experienced truth, that the "yoke is easy and the burden light."

I. Those who bear the yoke of Christ, act from a principle which makes all things easy. This is love. It is said of Jacob, that when he served a hard master seven years for Rachel, they seemed to him but a few days, for the love which he bare her\*. And many of you find it easy to do much for your parents, children, and friends, because you love them. But there is no love like that which a redeemed sinner bears to Him who "has loved him, and washed him from his sins "in his own blood."—Farther, love produces the greatest effects, when it is mutual. We are willing to do and suffer much to gain the affection of a person we regard, though we are not sure of success; but when the affection is reciprocal, it adds strength to every motive. Now the believer does not love at uncertainties: he knows that Jesus loved him first, loved him when he was in a state of enmity\*; and that nothing but the manifestation and power of this love could have taught his hard unfeeling heart to love him whom he never saw†. This love, therefore, affords two sweet and powerful encouragements in service.

1. A cordial desire to please. Love does what it can, and is only sorry that it can do no more. We seldom think much, as I have hinted already, either of time, pains, or expense, when the heart is warmly engaged. The world, who understand not this heart-felt spring of true

religion, think it strange that the believer will not run into the same excess of riot with them<sup>‡</sup>. They wonder what pleasure he can find in secret prayer, in reading and hearing the word of God; they pity the poor man who has such a melancholy turn, and gravely advise him not to carry things too far. But the believer can give them a short answer in the Apostle's words: "The love of Christ constrains me<sup>§</sup>." His ruling passion is the same with theirs, which makes his pursuit no less uniform and abiding; but the objects are as different as light from darkness. They love the perishing pleasures of sin, the mammon of unrighteousness, and the praise of men; but he loves Jesus.

2. A pleasing assurance of acceptance. If we know not whether what we do will be favourably received or not, it makes us remiss and indifferent. But this animates the Lord's people; they are assured that he will not overlook the smallest services or sufferings they are engaged in for his sake. He has told them in his word, "that if they give but a cup of cold water in his name, and on his account, he will accept and acknowledge it, as if it were done immediately to himself\*."

II. It makes a service still more easy and pleasant, if, besides acting from a principle of love, the service itself is agreeable to our inclination. Esau would probably have done any thing to please his father, in hopes of obtaining the blessing; but no command could please him more than to be sent for venison, because he was a cunning hunter, and his pleasure lay that way<sup>†</sup>. Now the believer has received a new nature; so that the Lord's commandments are not grievous to him; but he delights in them with his whole heart. It is true he groans under remaining corruptions; and this is properly his burden, not the service of Christ, which he approves and delights in, but because he can serve him no better. So far as faith is in exercise, he rejoices in every part of the yoke of Christ. He glories in the profession of his name. He has made Moses's choice; he prefers even the reproach of Christ, to all the honours of the world<sup>‡</sup>, and has a measure of that spirit by which the Apostles were enabled to rejoice

that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name§. He heartily consents to the precepts; he esteems them as a light to his feet; he makes them his meditation all the day. Nothing pleases him more than to find an increasing victory over the hindrances to his obedience; and the time of his greatest grief is, when, through infirmity or the prevalence of temptation, he is seduced to neglect or transgress them, though in the smallest instance, and in what does not pass under human observation. Even afflictions, though not joyous in themselves, but grievous, are cheerfully submitted to, because the Lord has appointed them, and is pleased to account them a filling up of his sufferings\*.

III. In other cases, even when there is a principle of love, and the service not disagreeable in itself, yet weakness may render it wearisome or impracticable. Though, perhaps, you would willingly take a long journey to serve a friend; yet if you are sick or lame, what could you do? But the yoke of Christ is light and easy in this respect, that there is a sufficiency of strength provided for the performance. This consideration makes every difficulty vanish; for though these should be increased tenfold, yet if strength be increased in an equal proportion, it amounts to the same thing. What is hard or impossible to a child, is easy to a man; what is hard to flesh and blood, is easy to faith and grace. The believer, though weak in himself, is strong in the Lord: the power on which he depends is not in his own keeping, but it is treasured up in the covenant of grace, or in the Lord Jesus, in whom all fulness dwells, and is always to be obtained by prayer. Every child of God is interested in the blessing of Asher: "Thy shoes shall be iron and brass; and as thy day is, so shall thy strength be\*." By the day may be understood,

1. A day of service. Whatever the Lord appoints for us to do, if we depend upon him in the use of appointed means, he will certainly qualify, furnish, and strengthen us, for the accomplishment of it. If David is called out to meet Goliath, though he is but a stripling<sup>†</sup>, and the other a practised warrior from his youth, he shall not be disheartened or overcome, but be made a conqueror, though all



appearances are against him. If we are in the path of duty, and if our help and hope is in the name of the Lord, we may confidently expect that he will uphold us, however faint and enfeebled we may seem to be to ourselves or others.

2. A day of suffering. If, like Daniel and his companions, we should be threatened with lions and flames, we may confidently commit our way to God; he can control the fire, and stop the lions' mouths ‡. While all things are in his hands, whose we are, and whom we serve, why should we fear that they will act beyond the bounds of his permission, or that he will permit them to do any thing which it is not his purpose to over-rule to our advantage? Such considerations in the hour of need, seasonably impressed by his good Spirit, together with a trust in his promises, shall inspire us with new strength to meet the greatest danger undismayed; and, with regard to trials immediately from his own gracious hand, he will so adjust them, in number, season, weight, and measure, to the ability he communicates, that we both shall be able to bear, and also find a way made for us to escape. With such assurances, we may boldly say, "The Lord is on my side, I will not fear what man (or Satan) can do unto me."

IV. There is farther a consideration of profit and advantage, which makes the yoke of Christ easy. The believing soul is not mercenary. He loves his Master and his service; yet it is impossible to serve God for nought. In the keeping of his commandments there is a reward, though not of debt, yet of grace\*; a great and sure reward, respecting both the life that now is and that which is to come.

Those who sincerely take up the yoke of Christ, and cleave to him in love alone, have ample compensation in the present life for all that their profession can cost them. They enjoy the testimony of a good conscience, which is compared to a continual feast. St. Paul, though a champion for free grace, and determined to glory only in the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus †, expresses a high and just value for this privilege; and that it afforded comfort, yea joy, in a

time of trouble. Superadded to this, they are often favoured with the peculiar consolations of the Holy Spirit, which, though slightly esteemed by those who know them not, satisfy the soul as with marrow and fatness, and can change the voice of mourning into songs of praise in an instant ‡. And though these are not their constant food, yet they have real and habitual communion with God, from day to day, in his ordinances and providences. They live in his presence; they converse with him, and he with them; their good things are doubly pleasing, because they receive them from his hand: and this thought likewise sweetens every bitter cup of affliction which he prepares for their good. The mutual intercourse and communion his people have with each other, is likewise a considerable branch of their present reward. How pleasing is it, when, speaking to each other in his name, they take sweet counsel together, they are confirmed in his way, by finding how their experiences answer as face to face in a glass; and he causes their hearts to burn within them, while they are freely declaring what he has done for their souls. Lastly, they are happy in a comfortable expectation of a better world; and when the appointed time comes, death will put an end to all their troubles; and then shall they fully know and possess the future reward which the Lord has prepared and reserved for them that love him.

This is briefly summed up by the Apostle: They shall be absent from the body\*, and all its inseparable evils; sin and sorrow, want, pain, and every distress that belongs to this mortal state, shall affect them no more; and they shall be present with the Lord, whom they love. Then they shall see his face without a cloud, and share his joy without abatement or interruption; and all this shall be for ever. When they are made pillars of the New Jerusalem†, they shall come out no more. The prospect of this makes them rejoice under all their tribulations; for they know whereto they lead, and how they will end. "These light and momentary afflictions are working for them a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory‡."

From these things I hope it will appear, that the yoke of Christ is easy. His people serve him because they love him; they love his ways: he is their strength; he comforts them now, and will be their portion for ever.

But perhaps some, whom I would willingly comfort, will rather be discouraged by this representation, and say, Alas! if it is thus, I am yet to seek: my love is so faint, my strength so feeble, my consolations so small, my obedience so imperfect, that I am afraid I have not known the easy yoke of Christ. There are therefore some other things to be taken into the account, and which are no just exception to the character our Lord here gives of his yoke.

1. The entrance, or first application of the mind to the yoke or profession of the Gospel, is seldom pleasant. Though the work of grace leads to love, it usually begins in fear. On this point we have already spoken at large. It is no pleasing state to be weary and heavy laden, to see ourselves obnoxious to a curse, and unable to escape; yet by apprehensions of this kind the soul is prepared to embrace the yoke of Christ; and none but those who have experienced the misery of a fallen state will be truly desirous of the Gospel rest.

2. The progress is gradual. The first dawnings of grace in the heart are faint, and hardly perceptible: hence the whole process is compared to things that are very inconsiderable in their first principles. The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard-seed, which is hid and lost in the earth for a season; it is like leaven, which when cast into meal may be concealed and unnoticed for a while, but by degrees diffuses its influence through the whole mass\*. It is like the corn which springs up and comes forward night and day, a man knows not how\*. The growth in the Christian life being thus low and indistinct, many, who aim to ascertain their interest rather by the degree than the reality of grace, are often dejected to find their attainments proceed no faster. It is indeed a humbling consideration, but ought not to rob us of the comfort arising from a believing view of what Jesus has completely wrought out for us, and of what he has

promised he will infallibly perform in us, in his own good time. A deliverance from this poring into ourselves for the grounds of our hope, is a part, a considerable part, of the rest to which he invites us.

3. The difficulties attendant on that course of faith and obedience, which is included in taking his yoke upon us, are many and great. while we sojourn in a wilderness state, and in a sinful nature, there will be fightings without, and fears within. It is the appointed and necessary rule of our profession, that "through much tribulation we must enter into the kingdom of God<sup>†</sup>." All who are against him will be against us for his sake; and the evil heart of unbelief will shew itself in a variety of forms, as it is acted upon by various impressions, from the things of sense and the powers of darkness. But these troubles do not arise from the spiritual yoke of Christ, but from our present situation and circumstances, and shall therefore shortly cease for ever. His ways are ways of pleasantness; though we are sure to meet with perplexity and uneasiness, so far and so often as we wander from them into our own crooked paths. But,

4. The end is sure. "He that endureth to the end shall be saved\*;" and all who are in his way have his promise and power engaged in their behalf, that they shall certainly endure, that he will so lead, guide, support, and strengthen them, that neither life nor death, nor things present, nor things to come, shall separate them from his love<sup>†</sup>. Your complaints and fears, therefore, are no proof that you are not right. Go on in his name. Trust in him in whom you have believed, and be nothing terrified by your adversaries. The longer you wear the yoke, the easier you will find it.

Let each one examine himself by what has been offered. If you have not a principle of true love to Christ, and a prevailing desire to live in all holy obedience to his will, you are no Christian; and though you may begin warmly, you will not be able to hold out, but your profession will wither away for want of root and moisture. Nor is it difficult to know whether you love him or no: if you do, you have seen your need of him, and abhor yourself in dust and ashes.

From hence likewise you may discern the difference between the religion of the Gospel, and the formal worship that many are contented with, in which the heart has no place. Remember that "God is a spirit †;" and unless you love him, you cannot possibly please him. If a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would be utterly contemned. His commandments likewise are spiritual; they extend beyond the surface of the outward conduct, and take cognisance even of the retired thoughts and intents of the heart. Many sins may be avoided, and many duties performed, from motives and principles which not being derived from his word, or conformable to it, are therefore sinful in themselves, and make every thing proceeding from them defective and displeasing in his sight. If you are attempting to serve him by your own natural strength and understanding, be assured that you have not yet taken up the yoke of Christ: if you had, you would find it answerable to the character he has given of it, for his word is truth. But your constrained obedience you know in yourselves, far from being easy and light, is a heavy burden which you would be glad to cast off if you durst. You serve the Lord as a slave serves a hard master; not with a willing mind, but of necessity, and from a dread of punishment. But in vain do you draw near to him with your lips while your heart is far from him. Therefore spend no longer your labour for that which is not bread, but come to Jesus that you may find rest for your souls. He is able to take away your heart of stone, and give you a heart of flesh, to put a new spirit in you that shall delight in his yoke, to give you strength and ability for every part of your duty, and to make you a willing people in the day of his power.

Believers, rejoice in your security. The Lord has given you a never-dying principle of love, and provided for you a never-failing supply of grace. These will bear you up through all your journey, and at last bring you safely home to the mansions provided for you in your Father's house. Then shall you praise him world without end.

## **SERMON XIV**

## **BELIEVERS CAUTIONED AGAINST MISCONDUCT IN THEIR PROFESSION**

Let not then your good be evil spoken of. - ROM. 14:16

THE immediate occasion of this caution you may learn from the context. It has pleased God from the beginning, to permit his people, who all agree in the great and essential truths of the Gospel, to differ in some things of less importance. This difference of judgment gives room for the mutual exercise of patience, forbearance, tenderness, and charity; but at the same time too often affords opportunity for the remaining corruptions of the heart to discover and exert themselves. The Jewish converts were for some time attached to the observance of that distinction in meats and drinks which had been enjoined by the law of Moses: the Gentiles, on the contrary, claimed a right to be free from this yoke, as a part of the liberty which they had received from Christ. The Apostle does not in this place blame either party with respect to their own judgment and practice; but he reproves them for censuring and despising each other: and he especially reproves those who understood their liberty in the Gospel, for not being prudent in the use of it, but rather forward to provoke and offend their weaker brethren. He confirms their liberty, but admonishes them not to abuse it, either by urging others to act against their consciences, or by treating them with contempt, because they had not entirely laid aside those scruples and prejudices to which they had been long accustomed. "Let not your good be evil spoken of." Be thankful for your liberty, but do not bring it into discredit and reproach, by acting in an unbecoming spirit towards others.

The instruction in my text, understood in this sense, has always been applicable and seasonable in the Christian church, and perhaps never more so than in our land, and in our times. While believers in Jesus, who are led by the same Spirit into the same fundamental truths, and stand in the most endeared relation to each other

through their common Head, place such undue stress upon lesser incidental differences, and are professed partisans for the little interests of systems, denominations, and leaders, love, the grand characteristic of their profession, is hardly discernible; they censure and grieve each other, retard the success of the cause which they would all be thought to have most at heart, and open the mouths of the adversaries to revile that which they understood not. The prevalence of this wrong disposition calls for the admonition in my text. Be thankful for your privileges; you not only claim the rights of private judgment and liberty of conscience, as men and as Christians, but as Britons you possess them. "Let not then your good be evil spoken of;" allow to others that freedom which you expect yourselves; and if you do not suppose yourselves infallible, suppose it possible that some may be as near to the Lord as yourselves, who cannot agree with you in every sentiment you have adopted.

But this direction may be taken in a much more general sense. It behoves all who honour the Lord Jesus Christ to be careful in every part of their conduct, that they do not give occasion for their good to be evil spoken of. To make the subject as suitable as I can to the different states and characters of all present, I shall,

I. Inquire, what is the believer's good.

II. Explain and apply the advice here given, "Let not your good be evil spoken of."

I. All mankind have something near at heart, on which their dependence is placed, and wherein they find their chief pleasure. This (whatever it is) is their good; and according to the object in which they delight is their proper character. By nature the world and worldly things are the highest good we seek after; and these, in one view or other, as tempers and situations vary, are pursued with unwearied earnestness. Riches, honours, sinful pleasures, are the poor things in view, when the unrenewed heart cries out, in its eager pursuits, "Who will shew us any good\*?" If your strongest desires

tend this way, your good will not be evil spoken of by many. Men will praise you when you do well for yourself: you are not therefore concerned in the admonition in my text. Only take notice what the word of God declares of your good, and of you for accounting it so. Your good is vanity, your fruit is vexation of spirit, and you who set your hearts on such a good as the objects of sense can furnish, are adjudged "enemies to God<sup>†</sup>." You yourselves will speak evil of this good when you come to die, if you die in your sins. Then you will see a propriety in Esau's words to your own case, "Behold, I am at the point to die, and what profit shall this birth-right do to me<sup>‡</sup>?"

As the world is the good of the unconverted, so a covenant God in Christ is the good and portion of all who are called by his grace. They are ever looking to the obedience and blood of Jesus, applied by the Spirit of grace, as the sole foundation of their hope and comfort. God is their good in the highest sense, and every thing else is good so far as it leads to him, and assists them in maintaining communion with him. In this view we may mention several particulars, each of which they account their good, because the means of enjoying and glorifying their God.

1. The Gospel, that gracious revelation by which they have been taught to know themselves, and to know Jesus, is their good. All the doctrines, precepts, and promises, contained in the Scripture, are a very precious treasure, in which they rejoice more than those who find great spoil. Each of them can say, in the language of the Psalmist, "The law of thy mouth is dearer to me than thousands of gold and silver. How sweet are thy words unto my taste, yea sweeter than honey to my mouth! O how I love thy law! It is my meditation all the day long\*." By this word they are enlightened, quickened, warned, comforted, and supported: therefore it is the joy and rejoicing of their hearts, and more than their necessary food<sup>†</sup>.

2. The ordinances make a part of their good. A famine of the word of the Lord would distress them greatly; and if they may but have frequent opportunities of this kind, and meet with his gracious



presence in them, they can be content to be without many things which the men of this world highly value. When beset with many straits, and surrounded with troubles, they can find refreshment in the Lord's assurance by the prophet, "And though the Lord give you the bread of adversity, and the water of affliction, yet shall not thy teachers be removed into a corner any more; but thine eyes shall see thy teachers\*." If this promise is fulfilled to them, they will not greatly complain of the bread of adversity, although that is joined with it. But, on the contrary, they find it a hard trial to be deprived of lively ordinances and faithful ministers, however advantageous and pleasing their situation may be in temporal things, because these are not their good.

3. They account their profession a part of their good. They esteem it a high privilege to bear the name of Christ, though it exposes them to the reproach of the world. They account it a great and important trust to have the honour of the Gospel committed to them, and in some measure dependent on their conduct. When they are in their right minds, they would rather die than be guilty of any thing that might bring it into discredit. Wilfully they cannot, they dare not do it; but through ignorance and infirmity they are prone to mistake, and therefore need, and are desirous to observe, the caution in my text.

4. Their experiences are their good, their choice pearls; I mean the inward dealings of the Lord with their souls,—the proofs they have had of his power and wisdom in bringing them thus far safely on their way to his kingdom, the discoveries he has given them of the deceitfulness of their own hearts, the manifestations of his grace, love, and nearness to them, notwithstanding all their unworthiness and unfaithfulness. Some of these experiences have cost them dear, have cost them many a pang, trouble, and conflict: yet they would not be without them to avoid all that they have suffered; and they are content to suffer on, if by any means they may increase this precious stock. They delight to recollect how low they were brought, how wonderfully delivered, what answers they have been favoured with to their poor prayers; and from hence to collect the all-sufficiency and

goodness of him to whom they have fled for refuge, and to derive arguments wherewith to combat their unbelieving fears in time to come. Thus far their experiences are their good; not as the foundation of their hope, or the source of their comfort,—for these their whole reliance is on the obedience and blood of Jesus the Saviour,—but as evidences that they have neither "followed cunningly devised fables, nor received the grace of God in vain\*."

Thus much in general, that you may all have something whereby to try your spirits, and to know whether you have embraced the good of the Lord's chosen people†. If your good does not lie in such things as I have mentioned, you have no durable riches, nothing but what you must soon leave behind you. Can you be content to be stripped of all, and to enter poor, naked, and friendless, into an eternal world? O that you would take our Lord's advice. He might command, for he has all authority; but he says, "I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eye-salve, that thou mayest see‡."

But some there are whose hearts can go along with me in what I have said. The great God himself is your good. His word and ordinances, your profession of his name, and your experience of his goodness, are what you rejoice in. To you then I address the rest of my discourse. "Let not your good be evil spoken of."

I am,

II. To explain and apply this advice. The words plainly imply two things.

1. That there are many ready enough to speak evil of your good; many who despise the Gospel, and you for professing it: they watch for your halting, and will be glad of the smallest occasion to expose you. The world, that loves its own, will make allowances in other cases. Indiscretions, and even vices, will be charged to the account of

human infirmity, and the amiable name of candour shall be employed to conceal or palliate such things as can by no means be justified. But if you are a professed believer in Jesus, you must not expect this candour will be extended to you; rather all your words and actions will be sifted, your mistakes exaggerated; and if any part of your conduct will bear a double construction, it will generally be viewed in the most unfavourable light. Nay, even when there is no just occasion afforded, falsehoods and calumnies have been and will be industriously propagated against the servants of Christ\*. That it must be so, we are often warned by Scripture, and it is abundantly confirmed by experience.

2. That though it is impossible wholly to stop the mouths of evil-minded men, yet they would not be able to talk so fast if the imprudence of believers did not too often afford them advantage. That such occasions should sometimes be given by those whose hearts and aims are in the main sincere, will not be thought strange to any person who is acquainted with the true state of human nature. Through inadvertence, want of experience, errors of judgment, sudden and unexpected temptations, and other evils inseparable from our present situation, persons, whose chief desire is to adorn the doctrine of their God and Saviour in all things, may and do in some instances cause their good to be evil spoken of. It is, however, our bounden duty, as we regard the honour of God and his truth, to endeavour as much as possible to "cut off occasion from them\*" that seek occasion in this respect.

In order to this, let us inquire, what are the most common objections which are made against the Gospel preaching and profession, not only by malicious enemies, but sometimes by persons who discover no very bad intention, but are partly imposed upon by the misrepresentations of others, and partly stumbled by the faults of professors?

1st, It is objected, that our doctrine lays no sufficient stress upon good works. We dare not indeed recommend them out of their

proper place, or propose them as the ground of our acceptance with God. But I hope none who attend here will dare to say, that they are not frequently reminded, that "without holiness no man shall see the Lord<sup>†</sup>." However, the world will judge more by what they see in you, than by what they hear from me. Be upon your guard, therefore, lest by any instances of a trifling, foolish, unkind, or unjust conduct, you let your good be evil spoken of. It will not be a sufficient apology to say, that your principles do not allow of these things, if those who know you can charge them upon your practice.

2ndly, It is farther objected, that the evangelical system is a scheme chiefly made up of notions and subtle distinctions, and opens a door to a thousand disputes. This is one unhappy consequence of our many divisions and subdivisions, and the heat with which they are contended for by their respective partisans. Let this engage you to avoid a disputing contentious spirit. "Be swift to hear, slow to speak\*;" and when a reason is asked "of the hope that is in you<sup>†</sup>," give your answers with meekness and fear, lest you cause your good to be evil spoken of.

3rdly, It is likewise a very common objection, that a usual effect of this doctrine is to make people idle and careless with regard to the necessary concerns and business of life. Indeed I should not be unwilling to plead with candid and fair reasoners, in behalf of young converts, on this point. At first setting out, the change is so great, their views of eternal things so strong and affecting, that, considering human infirmity, it can hardly be otherwise but that the attention will be almost entirely taken up with them for a season. While a sense of unpardoned sin is fixed upon the conscience, and a person now duly aware of the uncertainty of life is in suspense about the greatest of all concerns, and knows not how or whither he shall be able to flee from the wrath to come, it is no wonder if this solicitude should in a great measure swallow up his thoughts, and leave him but little either leisure or ability to attend to other concerns, which, however proper in their respective places, are confessedly, in comparison of this, of little or no importance. In like manner, the

removal of this burden is usually accompanied with such a lively sense of the wisdom, love, power, and grace of God, revealed in Christ Jesus by the Gospel, as may for a little while almost overpower and extinguish the apprehension of inferior things. But if this indifference about common duties continues very long, or is indulged to an extreme, it gives great and just offence. It causes the ways of truth to be evil spoken of; and we hardly know what to say, but this, That the fault is not owing to the Gospel, but to the neglect of what the Gospel teaches and enjoins. This is no new inconvenience; the Apostles observed and reproved it in their day. There were such mistaken persons among the Thessalonians, who supposed or pretended that the Gospel exempted them from labour. Of these he says, "Now them that are such we exhort and command, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread;" and farther directs, "that if any would not work, neither should he eat\*." The Sabbath is the Lord's; and the same command which forbids us to do any work then, requires us to labour on the other six days. "Let not your good be evil spoken of." Be faithful to your trust, diligent in your business, do every thing heartily as unto the Lord, and not unto men. Give no one just cause to say, that since you have become religious, you care not (as the phrase is) which end goes foremost; for this would be to put a stumbling-block in their way, and to increase their prejudices against the truth.

4thly, Once more; The Gospel doctrine is charged with weakening the bands of natural and social relation; that it makes children and servants heady, high-minded, and disobedient, so that they presently think themselves wiser than all about them, and are obstinately bent to have their own wills. This objection will indeed cleave to the Gospel so long as the spirit of the world and the Spirit of God are opposite to each other. For cases will inevitably arise where we must either displease God or man, and then we ought not to hesitate a moment. But professors should take care to be assured that there is such a necessity before they act against lawful authority; and especially when the point in dispute lies between children and parents. For though we ought to disobey and forsake father and

mother when God's commands require it; yet next, under God, parents are above all to be honoured, consulted, and obeyed: and the excepted cases are not near so numerous as persons in the warmth of their first zeal are apt to suppose. The enemy suits his temptations to our occasions; and it is no uncommon thing to be drawn to act violently in our own spirits, while we imagine we are striving in the cause of God and truth.

In short, we are directed to examine ourselves, and others are allowed to examine us by our fruits. The people of the world are not proper judges of spiritual experiences, but they can judge tolerably right of tempers and actions. Some will watch you out of ill-will, and some will observe you for information. If they hear you have begun to make a religious profession, they will take notice to see if you are the better for it. They will observe you not only in the church, but in the shop and in the house: and if they perceive you are all of a piece, steady, quiet, humble, diligent, who knows but this may be a means in the hand of God to win upon them, and to give them a more favourable regard to the means which have wrought so effectually on you? But, on the contrary, if you are imprudent, rash, and careless, if you either conform to the world, or neglect your acknowledged duty in it, you will cause your good to be evil spoken of, bring difficulties upon yourselves, and put it out of your own power to be useful to others. Pray therefore for wisdom and grace, to make your light so shine before men, that they, seeing your good works, may glorify your Father who is in heaven. This is the great design and proper effect of the Gospel, when rightly understood. For as it is the grace of God alone which bringeth salvation, so this grace not only enlightens the understanding, but purifies the heart, regulates the conduct, works by love, and overcomes the world. It effectually teaches and enforces (what the best schemes of morality and philosophy have always failed in) the denial of all ungodliness and worldly lusts\*; and by the motives it displays, and the strength it communicates, enables the true Christian to adorn his character in every relation, and to fill up the whole circle of duty as it respects himself, his neighbour, and the God with whom he has to do. It teaches to live soberly,

righteously, and godly; to avoid whatsoever is contrary to the purity of the Gospel; to practice moderation in the use even of lawful things; and to do unto others as we would they should do unto us. It teaches the rich to be humble and bountiful, the poor to be thankful and resigned. It teaches superiors to be kind, inferiors to be faithful. Husbands and wives, parents and children, masters and servants, magistrates and people, are all instructed by this grace to a conduct answerable to their high calling, and to the common relation they stand in to Him who has loved them and washed them from their sins in his own blood. For the morality of the Gospel has a nobler spring, and a more extensive scope, than the ties of social life. Their sobriety and righteousness are not substituted in the place of vital godliness, but are the fruits derived from it. The grace of God teaches them to live godly, to delight in him, to obey him, to do every thing for his sake, as under his eye, and to be continually governed by a sense of his unspeakable love manifested in his Son, and "an expectation of the blessed hope set before us, the glorious appearance of the great God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us, that, by his blood and Spirit, he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people zealous of good works." Labour to shew that you are not only called by his name, but have sat at his feet, and drank of his spirit; and if, after all, unreasonable and wicked men will speak evil of you, and your good, be not moved at it, but pity and pray for them. When He shall return to vindicate your cause, and wipe away your reproach, then "every cloud shall be removed, and the righteous shall shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father\*."

## **SERMON XV**

### **THE EXTENT AND SANCTION OF THE THIRD COMMANDMENT**

Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain. -  
EXOD. 20:7

THE foundation of true religion is laid in a right knowledge of God and ourselves. How deficient we are in each of these, how far fallen from original righteousness, is strongly implied in this prohibition; which would be wholly unnecessary, if we were not wholly sunk in stupidity and wickedness. That such worms as we should be liable to trifle with the Divine Majesty, whose presence fills the heaven and the earth, before whom the angels hide their faces; that such frail dependent creatures have need to be cautioned, that we do not profane the name of the God in whom we live, and move, and have our being, is a striking proof of our depravity; and that we can dare to break through this caution, and slight the awful threatening with which it is closed, is a dreadful aggravation of our guilt.

These words when first spoken to the Israelites, were delivered in flames and thunder. The mountain shook; the people trembled; and even Moses, who had been honoured with peculiar freedom of access to God, was constrained to cry, "I exceedingly fear and quake\*." Such a scene, or rather infinitely more dreadful, shall hereafter take place, "when the Lord himself shall again descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and the trump of God; when he shall be revealed in flaming fire, to take vengeance of all who know him not, and obey not his Gospel†." "Then shall sinners be convinced not only of their ungodly deeds, but of all their hard speeches which they have spoken against him‡;" and they shall know the full meaning of that terrible exception which I have read, "that the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain."

The terms of my text require little explanation. The name of God is in every one's mouth, upon one occasion or other, in places where his revealed will is known. In a more eminent and peculiar sense his name is discovered to his believing people in Christ Jesus the Lord; those who know the name§ of God in Christ will put their trust in



him; they dare not, they cannot blaspheme that holy name by which they are called. But I shall take it more extensively here; for though but few understand the name of God in an evangelical and saving sense, there is not a person in this assembly but knows and makes mention of his holy name, so far as to render them transgressors of this commandment. To take his name in vain, is to use it falsely or profanely; inconsiderately, without due reverence; or unprofitably, and without a suitable necessity. The sanction, "The Lord will not hold him guiltless," has indeed a meaning and emphasis beyond what is expressed. Similar forms of speaking are frequent in Scripture; as, "The Lord will not spare that man\*;" that is, he will punish him to the utmost; for it is immediately added, "All the curses of this book shall come upon him." Again, "He spared not the angels;" that is, he shewed them no mercy, as the following words declare: "He spared not the old world;" he visited them with utter destruction, and swept them all away with a flood. So, "he will not hold him guiltless," implies two things: 1st, That the Lord God has appointed a day to call sinners to an account for their words, as well as their actions. 2ndly, That whatever shall become of others, those who have presumed to take his name in vain have their doom already determined. Whoever escapes, they shall surely be punished; whomever he acquits, he will certainly condemn them.

As the import of the expressions is not difficult, so likewise it will be far more easy than agreeable to point out some of the many ways in which this commandment is customarily and carelessly broken. The law in general, and each particular precept, is spiritual<sup>†</sup>, and perhaps this will be found of a more extensive signification than some of you are aware. The delightful theme of a minister of the Gospel is to preach Jesus Christ, and him crucified; to open the treasures of Divine mercy, and to shew the grace, freeness, and security of the promises; to raise up them that fall, to strengthen those that stand; "to support the weak, to comfort the feeble-minded; to preach deliverance to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound‡." But these subjects do not comprise the whole of our message; and, in general, we find, that the full soul loatheth the

honey-comb\*; and multitudes, through ignorance of the spirituality and purity of God's holy law, and a partial judgment of their own hearts, can neither see the beauty nor the necessity of the Gospel-salvation. We are therefore constrained frequently to insist on far less pleasing subjects, to lift up our voices like a trumpet†, to demand a general attention while we attempt to shew our hearers their transgressions and their sins, that we may thereby make the doctrine of the cross of Christ welcome and desirable. It is painful to the patient, and, without doubt, unpleasing to the humane artist, to probe a deep and dangerous wound; but necessity commands, and, without it, a complete and lasting cure is not to be expected.

1. The first and most direct way in which the name of God is taken in vain, is by perjury; that is, when he is expressly appealed to in confirmation of what is false, or when engagements are made as in his name and presence, which are not strictly and literally complied with. I need not take up your time in proving, that this is a sin of a deep dye in itself, and attended with peculiar aggravations under the light of the Gospel; and I wish it was more difficult to prove the frequency of it in our land; but this likewise is as obvious as the light. I have sometimes met with a random assertion, that though we are wicked enough, we are not worse than other countries. In other things I am content to wave the parallel; but with respect to the sin of perjury, I fear we are much worse than any nation now under the sun, perhaps worse than any that the sun ever saw. I am afraid, there are more and more daring instances of this wickedness amongst us than in all the rest of Europe. By an unhappy kind of necessity it is interwoven, as it were, with the very constitution of the body politic, and diffuses itself like a deadly contagion amongst all orders and ranks of people. Oaths are so excessively multiplied, and so generally neglected, that it is equally difficult and rare for a person to engage through a course of years, in any kind of employment, either civil or commercial (O that it stopped even here!) without being insnared. Some are so expressed, that it is morally impossible to comply with them; others so circumstanced, that they are usually swallowed without the remotest design of regarding them, either in whole or in

part. If here and there a few make conscience of their engagements, and are desirous to perform to the Lord their oaths\*, or decline taking such as open a door either to honour or profit, so strong is the torrent the other way, that it is well if they escape the charge of singularity and preciseness. Though wickedness of every kind too much abounds amongst us, perjury is perhaps peculiarly and eminently our national sin: and I tremble to think it is so; for it gives too just a ground to fear the approach of national judgments. Surely all who have any regard for the honour of God, any sense of the worth of souls, will pray earnestly that this iniquity may not be our ruin, but that the Lord would be pleased to inspire and succeed the most proper means for the removal, or at least the mitigation, of this evil. This would be an event worthy to stand in the annals of the happy times and auspicious government under which we live.

2. And though the matter of an oath be strictly true, yet if it is not transacted with a serious acknowledgment and homage of that Divine Being to whom appeal is made; such an oath, however lawful and necessary it may be in itself, is, with regard to all such thoughtless triflers, no better than taking the name of God in vain. It cannot but be grievous to every serious mind, to observe the little reverence and solemnity, or rather the total want of common decency, which too frequently prevails among us in this respect; so that sometimes it is not easy to say, whether those who tender the oath, or those who take it, seem least in earnest. Without doubt this indifference may be assigned as one cause of the increase and prevalence of perjury. If those who are authorized to require or receive those solemn appeals, were themselves impressed with a due reverence of the awful majesty of God, and were solicitous to inspire all who came before them with the same sentiments, and would remind them (those especially who appear very positive and unguarded) of the impiety and danger of swearing falsely, it is possible many mischiefs would be prevented. Some persons would probably tremble and start back from the first temptation to this wickedness; and others might be deterred from persisting in it, who, for want of such admonitions and examples, and because they never

saw any solemnity observed, precipitately rush upon this enormous evil, and are at length given up to a dreadful habit of wilful and corrupt perjury.

3. If an oath lawful and necessary in itself may thus become criminal through inconsideration, what shall we say of the throng of profane swearers, who wound our ears, and pollute our language, by a horrid mixture of execrations and blasphemies in their common conversation? "Their throats are an open sepulchre; their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness, the poison of asps is under their lips\*." This I have to say from the word of God, that the Lord will not hold them guiltless. In vain their thoughtless plea, that they mean no harm: in vain their presumptuous comparison of themselves with others, as though these were trivial escapes that did not affect the peace of society. If these were small sins singly, their frequency would swell to a vast amount: but is it indeed a small sin to rush against the thick bosses of God's buckler, and to despise so terrible a threatening as this? Surely "the plague shall never depart from the house of the swearer." "As he clothed himself with cursing like as with his garment; so it shall enter into his bowels like water, and like oil into his bones†." A habit of swearing is a sure sign, not only of an unsanctified heart, but of a conscience hardened, and, as it were, seared with a hot iron, callous, and quite insensible.

4. Some persons who scruple expressly to mention the name of God, accustom themselves to swear by his creatures, by the heavens, by the light, or by their own souls, &c. But that this likewise is a direct violation of the law, and exposes to the same penalties, we are assured by Him who best knew how to explain his own commands. Our Lord determines this point in his sermon on the mount, so as not to leave the possibility of a doubt. "I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven, for it is God's throne: nor by the earth, for it is his footstool—Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair thereof white or black\*." "And whoso shall swear by the temple, sweareth by it, and by him that dwelleth therein; and he that shall swear by heaven, sweareth by the throne of

God, and by him that sitteth thereon<sup>†</sup>." "But let your communication be Yea, yea; Nay, nay; for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil." This decision evidently condemns, not only what is usually deemed swearing, but the whole multitude of idle expletives, whether fashionable or vulgar, which have the force of affirmations in common discourse. Will any who live in a Christian country, and have the Bible at hand, think to plead ignorance of these things in the great day?

5. If I should stop here, some of you would applaud yourselves, and perhaps not be displeased with me for what I have hitherto said. Some who think themselves clear thus far, will join with me in saying, "Because of swearing, the land mourns<sup>‡</sup>." But are there no other ways of taking the name of God in vain? Yes; many do it as often as they pray; and it is easily proved against numbers who join in our established worship. Let each one consider with what dispositions and desires they have engaged in the service they have already gone through this day. Our mouths have all spoken the same things; but have they been the language of our hearts? In the confession, we acknowledge that "there is no health in us," and speak as if we were true penitents. In the communion service, we cry for mercy as miserable sinners; we pray that the "thoughts of our hearts may be cleansed by the inspiration of God's Holy Spirit; that we may perfectly love him, and worthily magnify his holy name;" and for this we appeal to God, as "to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid." More than a few of you, at certain seasons, publicly declare, that "the remembrance of your sins is grievous, and the burden of them is intolerable." Now, what apprehensions can such of you have of God as can dare to use this solemn language, when your hearts mean no such thing? Is not this to take his name in vain in the grossest manner? Is it not plain that you think him altogether such a one as yourselves<sup>\*</sup>; nay, more easily imposed upon, and more safely to be trifled with, than a fallible mortal? Strange it is to think, that many can, not only content themselves with this lip-service, but make it the meritorious ground of their hope, and conceit themselves religious because they come so

often to church to mock the Power that made them! But hardly can any wickedness be imagined more daring, and more dreadfully provoking to the Most High, than such a religion as this. To all such worshippers I may address those striking words of St. Peter to Ananias, "Thou hast not lied unto men but unto God<sup>†</sup>."

6. The whole lives of those who live in the allowed practice of known sin, under the profession of the Christian name, may be considered as one continual breach of this command. In all you say and do, you blaspheme that holy name by which you are called; and still more so, if you are declared friends and favourers of evangelical preaching. By your means, "the ways of truth are evil spoken of\*." You give occasion to those offences of which it is said, "Wo to that man by whom the offence cometh." You injure the cause of Christ, stumble the weak in the faith, grieve the hearts of all who love the Lord, and make his enemies rejoice. "Better it would have been for you never to have known the ways of righteousness<sup>†</sup>," than thus to abuse your knowledge. You are now mingled with his faithful servants, as the chaff is blended with the wheat upon the floor<sup>‡</sup>. But, "behold, the Judge standeth at the door." His fan is in his hand; he will thoroughly purge his floor; and when he gathers the wheat into his garner, you will be consumed, like stubble, before the flame of his indignation. What distress and remorse will seize your hearts, when you shall see them with whom you have often joined in the same ordinances, that have lived with you under the same roof, dined at the same table, perhaps slept in the same bed, when you shall see them received into the kingdom, and you yourselves excluded, and thrust into that utter darkness<sup>§</sup>, where there is weeping and wailing, and gnashing of teeth, for ever!

From this subject we may observe, by way of inference and application,

1. The truth and propriety of that Scripture, "We know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them that are under the law; that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become

guilty before God||." What person in this assembly can plead guiltless to every part of this charge? Must we not all stand silent and self-condemned? And if you are a transgressor, what can you do, either to repair the dishonour you have offered to the Divine Majesty, or to prevent the contagious effects of your own evil example? Nothing can be more false, than a too frequent form of speech amongst us. When a man of some amiable qualifications in social life tramples without fear upon the laws of God, how often is it said, by way of extenuation, he is no one's enemy but his own! when indeed his practice declares him to be an enemy of God, an enemy to his holiness and government; and he is a most mischievous enemy to all who live under his influence, and within the circle of his acquaintance, by tempting and encouraging them to sin, to the hazard of their souls. Things standing thus with all men by nature, with what language can we answer the law's demands? Must we not adopt the pathetic confession of the prophet? "For this our heart is faint; for these things our eyes are dim. The crown is fallen from our heads: wo unto us that we have sinned\*!"

2. The necessity and value of the Gospel; otherwise how can you escape the penalty, and stand acquitted before the Supreme Judge? If you refuse this, "there remaineth no other sacrifice for sin<sup>†</sup>." But if you humble yourself, and apply to Jesus, there is yet hope. He died for sinners, the chief of sinners, and the greatest of sins. For his sake, all manner of sin and blasphemy is pardonable: "He is able to save to the uttermost." But he must do the whole, and have all the glory. Believe in his name. This is the first step; without grace derived from him, you can do nothing. Remember his agony and bloody sweat, his cross and passion; and that he is now exalted a Prince and a Saviour, on the behalf of those who are ready to perish. Let this be your plea and encouragement to draw near to a Throne of Grace. Pray for his Spirit to reveal his righteousness, power, and love to your soul; and as your knowledge of him increases, your repentance will be more spiritual, evangelical, and effectual. Entreat him to enable you to forsake your former evils, to set a guard upon the door of your lips, and to inspire you with an awful veneration of that holy name which

you have hitherto profaned. He can teach your polluted lips to shew forth his praise.

And let the redeemed of the Lord, whom he has delivered from the guilt and power of this iniquity, adore the grace and mercy that has saved them. Look back upon your past lives, and rejoice with trembling. How often have you defied his vengeance and power, and perhaps madly uttered horrid imprecations against yourselves! Why have others been cut off in these sins, and you spared? Yes; "such were some of you; but ye are washed, ye are sanctified, ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God\*." And now your tongues, which once uttered blasphemies almost with every breath, or, under a form of godliness, pronounced a language foreign to your hearts, delight in extolling the name of Jesus, and celebrating the wonders of redeeming love. Now, when you speak of the great God, your hearts are awed with an apprehension of his majesty, yet comforted with the thought, that this God is your God, your almighty Friend, your everlasting Portion. Now you feel the influence of the Spirit of adoption, whereby you cry, "Abba, Father." Little did you think, in the days of your ignorance, that the God whom you was presumptuously offending, had, in the counsels of his everlasting love, chosen you to salvation by Jesus Christ\*. But he was found of you when you sought him not. He passed by you when you was lying in your blood, and bid you live. This was the secret reason why you could not destroy yourselves. And at length his time of love came, the hour which he had appointed to open your eyes, to shew you mercy, to deliver you from the power of darkness, and to translate you into the kingdom of his dear Son. Do not your hearts glow with a sense of your obligations to him who hath loved you, and washed you from your sins in his own blood? Will you not live to him who has saved you from so great a death? Yea, doubtless, you will count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus the Lord. You will use all your influence to diffuse the savour of his precious name. You will take shame to yourselves, and ascribe glory to him. You will be zealous for his cause, and have a tender compassion for poor sinners,



who know not what they do, remembering, from your past experience, the misery and gall of an unconverted state. Let as many of us as have received mercy be thus minded; let it be our great study to shew forth the praises of him who has called us out of darkness into his marvellous light, till the welcome hour shall arrive, when he will say to all who fear and love him, and long for his appearance, "Come, ye blessed of ray Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world<sup>†</sup>."

## **SERMON XVI**

### **THE CHRISTIAN LIFE COMPARED TO A RACE**

—So run that ye may obtain. 1 COR. 9:24.

THE Scripture teaches us to derive profitable lessons from common occurrences: and since we cannot avoid seeing and hearing the vanities of those who know not God, unless we would go wholly out of the world, we may learn some instruction from them at a distance. The country of Greece, and especially the neighbourhood of Corinth, was famous for trials of skill in a variety of exercises, such as racing, wrestling, fighting, and the like. And because the children of the world are very wise in their generation, and spare no pains to accomplish the point they have in view, the Apostle would stir up believers to diligence from their example; and therefore, in several places, compares the Christian life to one or other of the contests which were managed in the public games, and here particularly to a race. In those ancient races much solemnity was observed. The ground or course was exactly marked out; those who were to run went through a strict regimen and exercise beforehand; a vast concourse of people were assembled as spectators; authorised judges were appointed to award the prize, which was a crown of laurel or oak leaves, to the winner: and before they began, a herald publicly

proclaimed the rules to be observed by the competitors; which unless strictly complied with, all their pains and endeavours issued only in disappointment and shame. To each of these particulars the Apostle alludes in different parts of his writings.

Let us then briefly consider wherein the allusion holds, and take notice of some things in which there is a remarkable difference.

I. That the Christian life is compared to a race, may intimate to us,

1. That it is a laborious and strenuous service, and incompatible with an indolent and careless frame of spirit. Not that we can do any thing of ourselves: in this sense, "it is not of him that willeth, or of him that runneth\*." But when a believer is animated by a view of Jesus, and the prize of the high calling, to run the race set before him, he finds that it demands his utmost strength, courage, and patience. A spectator may divert himself with the prospect, or the company; he may make observations upon what passes around him, and ride as softly as he pleases: but then he has no pretensions to the prize. But those who are actually candidates for it, may be easily distinguished without being pointed out: they have no leisure for amusement; their eyes are fixed, and their thoughts wholly engaged, upon what they have in hand; and they exert all their powers, and strain every nerve, to reach the goal. How inconsistent is the conduct of many professors? They enter the lists, they inform themselves of the rules, they even presume to expect the prize, though they while away their whole lives, without once attempting to run in good earnest. Not so those who are taught and called of God: a sense of the worth of their souls, of the love of Christ, of the glory that shall be revealed, of their own weakness, and of the many obstacles that withstand their progress, stirs them up to watchfulness, diligence, and prayer, and excites a holy jealousy, "lest, a promise being made of entering into his rest, any of them should come short of it\*."

2. That we should still press forward, and not rest in what we have received. If a man sets out in a race with the greatest speed, and

seems to outstrip all his antagonists; yet if he does not persevere to the end, he will be sure to lose. The Apostle alludes to a race in another place, where he says, "forgetting the things that are behind, and reaching forth to those that are before<sup>†</sup>, I stretch forward." The Greek word beautifully expresses the earnestness and energy of those who run, and are determined to be first: they make no account of the ground already passed over, but exert themselves to the utmost, labour with their hands and feet, and strain every joint to the utmost, as though the whole success depended upon each single step. We see too many instances of persons who begin warmly, and seem to run well for a season; but they are hindered in their progress, slacken their pace first, and then stop short. Take notice of the exhortation in my text, "So run that you may obtain:" for it will be a dreadful disappointment if you should be set aside disapproved, when others receive the prize.

II. The heralds or criers in the Christian race are the ministers of the Gospel; and their proper name of office is expressed by the same word. They have it in charge to invite all to run, and to declare the prescribed rules: and these must be carefully attended to; for if, or, as it might be rendered, although, a man strive\*, although he wrestle, and fight, and run, weary himself, and excel others; yet, after all, he loses the prize, he is not crowned, unless he strive lawfully, unless he strictly conforms to the prescribed regulations: he will be judged unqualified, though in other respects skilful and diligent, unless he runs in the limits marked out, fights with the usual weapons, and observes in all points the discipline of the place. We are bound in duty, at the same time that we proclaim the race, and point out the prize to your view, to tell you, that without faith and holiness<sup>†</sup> there can be no acceptance. And we cannot but be grieved to see how little these cautions are regarded by multitudes. Some are labouring, as it were, in the fire, to establish a righteousness by their own works, and refuse to believe in Christ for salvation. Others, who profess indeed to believe in him, call themselves his people, and affect to speak highly of his Gospel, yet eventually deny him by their works and conversation. But unless you can alter the sure determinations of the

word of God, there must be an alteration in yourselves, or else, when you think you have attained, and shall confidently demand the prize, you will hear him say, "I know you not whence ye are; depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity‡."

There is a circumstance in this resemblance which I would not pass over, because it is peculiar to the Christian race. The ministers or heralds are not only to invite others, but are likewise to run themselves. To this the Apostle alludes, when he says, "lest, when I have preached to others, I should be myself a cast-away\*;" or be disapproved of the Judge for breaking those regulations himself which he had been authorised to propound to all. We have need to preach to ourselves no less than to you, and to entreat your prayers for us, that we may stand perfect and complete in the whole will of God. And the caution may be proportionally extended to every one that is entrusted with any measure of gifts for the edification of the people of God. Keep close to his word; pray for his Spirit; be diligent and temperate in all things; and maintain a watchful jealousy over your own hearts: these are the means by which the Lord keeps his people from falling. But trust not to any outward talent, calling, or usefulness; for it is possible for a man to be instrumental to the good of others in families and societies, and yet to come short of the kingdom himself at last.

III. I have observed, that a great concourse of spectators attended at the ancient games. The Christian, in his race and warfare, has likewise innumerable eyes upon him, a great cloud of witnesses. We are exhibited a spectacle to the world, to the whole universe, both to angels and to men † . Though he may be placed in an obscure situation, yet his neighbours at least will observe him, to see how his profession and practice agree. Invisible beings attend him in every step; the good angels‡ rejoice over the returning sinner; and it is probable, by God's appointment, support and refresh him in ways which are beyond our apprehension. The powers of darkness watch him with subtilty and envy, and go to the utmost bounds of their commission, in their endeavours either to divert him from his

course, or to make it uncomfortable to him. How should this thought both animate and humble every sincere soul? Be not discouraged, because to appearance you are almost left to serve God alone. If the veil of flesh and blood could be drawn aside, you would see you are not alone; all the host of heaven are on your side; the glorious company that are before the Throne of God day without night, rejoicing, are engaged in your cause, and drink of the same fountain from which you are supplied. The spirits of just men made perfect, who are now all eye, all ear, all love, were once as you are, partakers of the same infirmities, sorrows, and cares; and you ere long shall be as they are, clothed with light, and freed from every burden. And Jesus, the Lord of angels, the King of saints, beholds your toil and conflict with complacence, and says, "Hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown\*." He is always near to succour, strengthen, and to save. Rejoice, therefore, that you run not as unnoticed, but rejoice with trembling. Be ashamed to think how disproportionate your efforts are to the company that behold you, and to the prize that awaits you. Remember likewise other eyes are upon you; Satan envies your privileges, and scorns your profession; he is every minute waiting permission to sift you as wheat<sup>†</sup>; he is incessantly spreading snares for your feet, and preparing his arrows against you: therefore be not high-minded, but fear, and give all diligence so to run that you may obtain.

IV. The Judge who presides at the end of the race is Jesus, the Judge of all. He holds forth the prize full in view to the eye of faith, and shall shortly crown the conqueror with his own hand. How sweetly does the Apostle spiritualize upon this circumstance! "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course; I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of life, which the Lord, the righteous Judge" (who does not decide by appearances, nor can be influenced by partiality, as is too frequent amongst men) "shall give me at that day; and not to me only, but to all who love his appearing\*." Be of good cheer, believer: your case may be misrepresented, or misunderstood by men; but the Lord, the righteous and unerring Judge, will vindicate, approve, and reward in

the great day, when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and admired in all them that believe.

Thus much concerning the resemblance of the Christian life to a race, to which the Apostle alludes. I shall briefly take notice of some particulars in which the resemblance fails; and a very interesting and important difference may be observed,

1. In the reward. The bodily exercise<sup>†</sup> employed in the games (for to these the Apostle refers) profited little: a crown of oak or laurel, or some such bauble, was their highest aim; and this the most of the competitors came short of, for though all ran, but one received the prize. Of little more value, and equal uncertainty, is the prize that has engaged the time and thoughts of many. But godliness (the whole course and conflict in which the believer is engaged) is profitable for all things, or in every view, having promises to support the life that now is, and to crown that which is to come. "He that overcometh, saith the Lord, shall inherit all things. I will be his Father, and he shall be my son. I will give him to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God. I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out; yea, I will grant him to sit down with me in my throne\*." The Lord will give grace here, and will withhold no good thing from those who walk uprightly; and hereafter he will crown grace with glory, and place his servants out of the reach of every trouble and enemy, in the kingdom which his love has prepared for them from before the foundation of the world. "Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord<sup>†</sup>."

2. In races, though many run, one only can receive the prize. But, thanks be to God, it is not so in the Christian race. All who run as the Lord has appointed, shall be sure to win. No opposition can prevail against them, nor will the number of the candidates be any diminution to the happiness of each individual. The inheritance of the saints in light, like the light of the sun, is not diminished by being

shared amongst many; each one possesses the whole, in the same perfection as he could do, if there was none to enjoy it but himself.

3. In the races the Apostle alludes to, none were compelled to run. The proclamation was general; but those who did not choose to engage, suffered no disadvantage. But it is not so in the race to which you are invited by the Gospel. The Lord is greatly offended with those who slight the message, and refuse to enter the lists. If you only give his ministers a hearing, and return to your farms and merchandise ‡, forget the worth of your precious souls, and suffer your thoughts to be engrossed with the cares and pleasures of this life, to the neglect of this one thing needful, the Lord will account it a contempt offered to himself, and will ere long call you before his tribunal to answer for it.

4. Those who run and did not win the prize, only lost their labour, or at the worst were exposed to shame, but they were liable to no positive punishment. But you who are professors of the Gospel, if you come short at last, will be lost for ever. "So run that you may obtain." Be not content with having set out; the promise is made to perseverance. "He that endureth to the end shall be saved\*;" but if any draw back, or stop short, the Lord will have no pleasure in them. They will not only lose the prize, but will receive a heavy and aggravated doom. It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them. If you were forced to run for your lives, you would be very thoughtful about the event. But if you are not found amongst those who come in for the prize of eternal life, you will be cast into outer darkness, and sink under the curse of God for ever.

Fain therefore would I persuade you to address yourselves with earnestness to run the race set before you. Flee from approaching wrath. The wrath of God is already revealed against all unrighteousness, and soon it will be poured forth upon the head of every transgressor. Though God is patient and forbearing, he is angry

with the wicked every day. If he turn not, he will whet his glittering sword; he hath bent his bow, and made it ready. He hath also prepared for him the instruments of death; he hath ordained his arrows against those who shall finally disobey his great command, to receive the Gospel of his grace. It is impossible to elude his eye, or to withstand his power. You are upon the brink of danger, if you are not already entered in this race: you stand upon a precipice, and hell from beneath has opened its mouth to receive you. But a respite is still afforded; the Lord waits to be gracious; and as yet there is room. The gate of mercy is not yet shut; "turn therefore to the strong-hold, as prisoners of hope:" no longer refuse his gracious invitation, or trifle with your precious souls; seek to Jesus, that you may live; apply to him for faith and repentance; and, in his strength and name, prepare to run this important race. Meditate upon the glorious prize which is provided for all who endure to the end; it is freely proposed to all who run. Pardon, grace, and eternal life, are promised and bestowed, without money, and without price. If, after so many repeated calls, you still harden your hearts, and stop your ears, and determine that you will not come unto Jesus that you may have life, you must assuredly perish, without mercy, and without excuse.

But if you are desirous to run, remember the admonition in my text, "So run that you may obtain." Your steps must be regulated by the word of God, or you will wander wide from the good old way; you must derive your sufficiency and strength from Christ by faith and prayer, or you will faint, and be unable to endure to the end. We read of some\* that ran well for a season, but were afterwards hindered, and turned aside. Be upon your guard; for there are many that will strive to divert you from your course. Satan, the world, and your own evil hearts, will combine, and form various attempts to slacken your pace, and to withdraw your attention from the one thing needful. Dread the thoughts of stopping short, or turning back; and the more you meet with opposition, be so much the more earnest to redouble your diligence, and especially to cry mightily to him who is able to keep you from falling, to preserve you unblameable in love while



here, and at last to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy.

Believers, why are not we as wise in our generation as the children of the world? We see how those who are fond of a common horse-race are thinking and talking of it, and preparing for it every day. Does not their diligence shame us, who are so cold, faint, and dilatory, in the most important and honourable concerns? Let us gird up the loins of our mind; some of you have not far to run now; you have taken many a weary step since you were first called; but the end is at hand; the period of your complete salvation is now much nearer than when you first believed\*. Think of Jesus the Forerunner and the Judge; he has already entered within the veil for us; his eye is upon us; he is near to assist, and waiting to receive us. May his Spirit and his example animate us to press forward to the prize of our high calling, to tread down every difficulty, and to be faithful unto death, that we may receive the crown of life†.

## **SERMON XVII**

### **NO ACCESS TO GOD BUT BY THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST**

Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God? - MICAH 6:6–8

THERE is no question that can arise in the mind of man, that is of so high importance as this in my text, and yet, alas! how seldom is it

laid to heart! May the Spirit of God impress it upon all your consciences! You are now come before God to worship; ask yourselves, wherewith? On what do you ground your hope, that you offer him acceptable service? You must shortly appear before him in judgment. Are you prepared to meet\* him? What plea have you provided? Take heed in time. Be sure that it is such a one as he will admit, lest your hopes should fail, and you perish in his presence as chaff before the devouring flame.

The passage plainly expresses the inquiry of an awakened mind. It is to be feared many of you have often read these words without being suitably affected with their meaning. But if you can indeed make them your own, if you are truly solicitous how you are to come before God both here and hereafter, I hope his good Spirit will enable you to receive satisfaction from the answer given by the prophet.

If you can speak these words from your heart, you will readily acknowledge that they imply the following things.

1. A sense of duty: that you are under an obligation to come and bow before the high God. You are sensible that you ought not, and you find that you cannot live without paying him homage and worship, but that he has a right to your service, and expects it. Too many shew, in this respect, that they are dead while they live; dead to God, insensible and regardless of their many obligations to him, in whom they live, and move, and have their being. They live without prayer; they offer no praises to the God of their lives, but rise up and lie down, go out and come in, without one reflection on his power, goodness, and providence, even like the beasts that perish. But the awakened soul cannot do so. He trembles to think, that he once could neglect that God whom all the hosts of heaven worship; and is convinced, that however fair his character might have been amongst men, he justly deserved to have been struck to hell for so long restraining prayer before God.

2. A sense of the majesty and glory of God. Whoever seriously asks this question, has an awful view of the Lord, as the high God. Many who do not wholly neglect prayer and worship, yet have no spiritual and humbling apprehensions of the God whom they profess to serve. Their prayers, whether in public or private, are only lip-service, as though they thought him altogether such a one as themselves. Their petitions are not guided by their desires, but they utter with their mouths what they find in the book, though their hearts have no love or relish of the things they ask for. How often is God mocked by those who join in our Established worship? Has he not been so this morning by some of you? How little he is revered by many, is plain from the little regard they pay to his commands. They will break his Sabbaths, blaspheme his name, live in drunkenness, whoredom, anger, and malice, and yet pretend to worship him. But those who rightly understand the inquiry in my text, cannot do thus. They consider him as the high God; they know that he humbles himself to behold even the worship of heaven, and are therefore struck with this thought, Wherewith can I, a poor worm, who am but dust and ashes, come before this high God?

3. A sense of guilt. Alas! says the soul that is enlightened to see itself, I am not only mean but vile. "I have sinned; what shall I do unto thee, O thou Preserver of men?\*" wherewith shall such a polluted, obnoxious creature as I am, appear before a holy God? Can my services atone for my sins? or what service can I perform that is not defiled and rendered unworthy of acceptance by the evil of my heart? But could I perform ever so well from this day forward, what would this avail for what is past? If I had offended a man like myself, I might think of making some amends; but my sins are against God. His justice, wisdom, holiness, and truth, have all demands upon me. What then can I bring? Will sacrifices appease him? No: these, though of his own appointment, are not of themselves sufficient. "It is not possible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins\*." Though all the beasts of the forest, and the cattle upon a thousand hills were mine, though I should offer all Lebanon, hills of frankincense, rivers, yea, ten thousands of rivers of oil, all would not

do. Or should I give my son, my only son, the fruit of my body, neither would this atone for the sin of my soul.

Here then you may see, that to an awakened sinner sin is the heaviest burden imaginable. He is willing, and would be glad (if it might be), to purchase the pardon of sin with the loss of every thing he accounts most valuable. If he had the whole world, he would freely part with it to be free from guilt. But at the same time he finds it a burden that he cannot shake off: he knows that he never can be delivered for any thing he can do or propose, and therefore the great subject of inquiry always upon his mind is, Wherewith or how shall I appear and stand before the high God?

I hope some of you are thus minded: to you I have a comfortable message from the other part of my text. But as I cannot hope thus of you all, I must previously take notice, that there is hardly any one passage in the Bible more generally misunderstood, and which ignorant and careless men are more prone to wrest to their own destruction, than the verses under our present consideration. Not a few, having their eyes blinded by the god of this world, and their hearts enslaved to the love and practice of sin, are content to understand it as if it was rather a rebuke than an encouragement to them, who, like<sup>†</sup> the jailor, are deeply affected with a concern for the salvation of their souls. Their comment is to this purpose: "He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good;" that is, You need not terrify yourself at this rate; there is nothing so evil in sin, or so awful in God's threatenings, as you suppose. He has said indeed, "The soul that sinneth shall die\*;" yet here you see an easy way to escape. "Do justly,"—(which is, being interpreted,) Do not grossly cheat and injure your neighbour; abstain from robbery, extortion, and heavy oppression,—and "love mercy;" that is, be ready to do what are commonly called good-natured offices, and to give a shilling, or a guinea (according to your circumstances), now and then to the poor, and you will be safe enough. How they explain the other clause, "walk humbly," upon this plan, I confess myself unable to conceive, and therefore I believe they are glad to omit it; for I am sure, light

cannot be more contrary to darkness, than such language as this is opposite to the idea of walking humbly with God.

According to this opinion, to do justly, and to love mercy, are the whole of religion. They are, indeed, essential parts of it; and miserable will you be who talk in this strain, if God, at the great day, should judge you by this text to which you now presumptuously appeal. How wonderful is the pride and arrogance of fallen man, who will dare to urge a plea before God which must issue in his own confusion! Do you indeed deal justly? It implies something more than not being an arrant knave. Do you at all times, and in all respects, behave to every person as you would they should do unto you? Did you never take the least advantage of the ignorance or necessity of your neighbour? Did you never speak or report any thing to his prejudice, without sufficient warrant and sufficient cause? You feel how tender you are of your own character and interests. Have you been equally tender of the interests of others, of all others with whom you have had connections, without being influenced in any instance or degree by partiality or mercenary views? If you cannot appeal to the Searcher of hearts that you have walked in this integrity, your pretence that you have done justly, is vile hypocrisy, and you may tremble to think how easily you may be condemned out of your own mouth. Alas! if God, to whom all your thoughts and actions have been incessantly exposed, should enter into judgment with you, how unable would you be to answer him in one of a thousand?

Again; Do you love mercy? Do you love it as a miser loves money? Is it the pleasure of your hearts to overcome evil with good? If your brother or neighbour offend you, not seven times, but seventy times seven\*, do you find it delightful to repeat your forgiveness, to bless them that curse you, to pray for them that despitefully use you, and to requite repeated injuries with repeated acts of kindness? If not, what have you to do with mercy, either to pretend that you love mercy yourself, or to indulge a hope of obtaining mercy from God, if you knew no better way of seeking it than by your own works. But

suppose you was less culpable in these particulars, can you say that you walk humbly with God? Alas! how impossible is this, while you trust in your own righteousness, while you slight and despise his threatenings, while your hearts rise against his Gospel. Are you not impatient under the afflictions which he sends, and unthankful for innumerable mercies which he is daily bestowing upon you? And is this to walk humbly with God? Bear with me for a plain word, which I purposely speak plainly, that it may not be forgot: I say, that if any man or woman can be saved in this way, that is, upon the account of doing justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly with God, then Satan himself has no cause to despair.

I return now to those who see and acknowledge themselves to be sinners, without righteousness and strength, and are desirous to appear before God with comfort. To you I bring good tidings; the Lord help you to believe and rejoice. He hath shewed you that which is good, which is the only and sufficient ground whereon to build your hopes: he has shewed or revealed it, for otherwise you could never have found it out. What the law cannot do in that it is weak and ineffectual through the flesh, God has done by sending his Son in the likeness of sinful flesh\*. The Lord Jesus Christ is that good to which the prophet refers; Moses and the Prophets, and all the Scriptures, testify of him, and Micah among the rest. One of the most illustrious testimonies to the person and office of our Immanuel in the Old Testament, is to be found in the chapter preceding my text. "But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting. And he shall stand and feed in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God; and they shall abide: for now shall he be great unto the ends of the earth. And this man shall be the peace † ." All other sacrifices and saviours are insufficient; but Jesus, by the one offering of himself once offered up, hath made a full, perfect, and everlasting atonement; and now he reigns in our nature, possessed of all the fulness of grace, exercising the power of God in the salvation of men. Would you then come

before the High God, come in the name of Jesus, and you shall find acceptance. In him God is well pleased\*; and for his sake he is well pleased with all who honour his beloved Son, and put their trust in him. He has authority and compassion sufficient to save the most deplorable and the most unworthy. If you read the history of his life and death, you will read of a display of love and grace beyond expression; and he is the same still. Before he ascended, he left an assurance for your encouragement, that whosoever cometh unto him he will in nowise cast out. If you say, I want faith, remember it is his gift, and he has promised to do whatever you ask in his name. Therefore, fight against unbelief, resist Satan with the sword of the Spirit. If it is suggested that you are a great sinner, you cannot deny it, nor need you; avow the charge, take shame to yourselves, and give glory to God: but it is equally true, that Jesus is a great Saviour; he is able to save to the uttermost; and though your iniquities are great, yet cast not away your hope, for his mercy is greater than the heavens.

When you come in this way, what does the Lord require of you? Is it to make your own peace? He would as soon require you to make a new heaven and a new earth. Is it to keep your own soul? No more than he requires you to keep the sun in its course. His own arm has wrought salvation, and he will secure it. He requires none of your help here; nay, he disdains the thought: you might as well offer to help him to govern the world. But this he requires of you, "to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God;" and the methods of his grace will enable you to do so.

1. "To do justly." We are by nature attached to worldly goods, and wholly influenced by selfish principles. But faith in Jesus communicates new motives, views, and aims, to the soul: it teaches us to have our treasure in heaven: to sit loose to the world; to be satisfied with that station and competence which Divine Providence has allotted us; and to love our neighbours as ourselves, because they are our fellow-sinners, and are capable of being called to a participation with us in the honourable relation and privilege of the

children of God. Upon these principles the practice of justice is attainable, but upon no other; for though there are many characters honourable and blameless in the outward concerns of life, and in the judgment of men, there is no person upon earth who does or can love or practise justice in its full extent, till he has received the Spirit of Christ, and lives upon him by faith, for wisdom and strength from day to day.

2. "To love mercy." None can truly love it but those who have tasted it. When your hearts feel the comforts of God's pardoning love, you will delight to imitate him. When you can truly rejoice that he has freely forgiven you that immense debt, which is expressed by ten thousand talents\*, you will have no desire to take your fellow-servant by the throat for a few pence. This sense of God's goodness, and the continual need you find of his renewed mercy from day to day, will soften your spirit (if you are a believer), disarm and gradually weaken every proud thought that would plead for the exercise of anger and resentment towards those who have offended you. You will be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; you will put on (as the beloved of God) bowels of meekness\*, long-suffering, and compassion, forbearing and forgiving, if you have ought against any; because God for Christ's sake has freely forgiven you. If you find this practice difficult, it is owing partly to the remaining depravity of your nature, and partly because you have had but a faint sense of his mercy. Pray for a more powerful manifestation of it, and you will do better; mercy will be your delight.

3. "To walk humbly." "Can two walk together except they are agreed? †" When Christ is your peace, you will delight in God; you will set him before you, commune with him, study to please him, and to keep all his commandments. This is to walk with God; and you will walk humbly, remembering how much you owe to free grace, and how far you fall short in your best endeavours. These considerations, impressed by the Holy Spirit, will humble you, will keep you from being high in your own esteem, wise in your own conceit, and from seeking great things for yourself. You will be habitually thankful



when the Lord gives, content when he withholds, patient when he afflicts. You will confess yourself unworthy of the smallest mercies you possess, and acknowledge in your heaviest trials that he has laid far less upon you than your iniquities have deserved.

This is the pattern we are to copy after, and this is the certain tendency and effect of his grace. A measure of this disposition is found in all who are Christians indeed. Yet we may take shame to ourselves, that we are still so far defective in every branch of our duty. Let us stir up ourselves to greater diligence, watchfulness, and prayer, that we may obtain more lively, abiding, and transforming views of that which is our true good, that so we may be enabled to glorify our heavenly Father, and to adorn our profession, by doing justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly with our God.

## **SERMON XVIII**

### **OF A LIVING AND A DEAD FAITH**

For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also. - JAMES 2:26.

WHOEVER has read the Scriptures with attention, must have observed several passages which, at first view, and till thoroughly examined and compared, appear hard to reconcile to each other. No instance of this sort is more remarkable than the seeming difference of judgment between St. Paul and St. James on the point of justification. St. Paul having said, "That a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law\*," produces the example of Abraham to confirm his assertion. St. James (in the chapter before us), from the example of the same Abraham, draws a conclusion which seems directly to contradict this: "Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only\*." Can any two opinions be more opposite in appearance? How then can both be true; or how can we believe both writers infallible in their doctrine, and influenced by the

unerring Spirit of God? Must we cleave to the one, and reject the other? and if so, how shall we know which is the real truth?

We may confidently answer, The Apostles are both right; their doctrine is equally from God, and does not clash in any particular. The darkness and difficulty is in the apprehensions of men, and not in the word of God. Yet a difficulty there is, and I hope I shall not detain you unprofitably at this time, by endeavouring to clear it, and afterwards to press upon you the words of my text as a proper inference from the whole.

When men who are strangers to Christian experience, and who trust more to their own sagacity and learning than to the word and Spirit of God, attempt to resolve cases of this sort, they make strange work. And it is no wonder; for how can any one explain what he does not understand? It would tire you if I should relate a tenth part of the conjectures of learned men upon this very subject. I shall mention one or two as a specimen. A writer of some eminence in the world confesses the difficulty I have noticed in its full strength. He allows and affirms that it is not only hard, but impossible, to reconcile the Apostles to each other; and concludes, that since it is impossible to hold both their sentiments, we must abide by him who wrote the last. This, from many arguments his learning furnished him with, he thinks to have been St. James. Accordingly, he gives up the other, and his doctrine of faith without works, to shift for themselves. He supposes that St. Paul, in the heat of his argument, carried the matter a little too far, and that St. James wrote afterwards to correct him.

But to shew you (excuse a familiar expression) how doctors differ, and at the same time to warn even true believers against hastily judging beyond the line of their experience, I would observe, that the great servant of God, Luther, soon after he began to preach the Gospel, made a mistake no less bold and presuming on the other side of the question. He had felt the power of St. Paul's doctrine in his own soul, and would have defied an angel that should have dared to

oppose it: therefore, when his adversaries pressed him with the authority of St. James, not having, at that time, light to give a more solid answer, he ventured to deny the authenticity of the whole Epistle, and rashly insisted, both in his sermons and books, that St. James never wrote it. But Luther, though mistaken in this point, was under the Lord's teaching; he went on from strength to strength, increasing in knowledge and grace; and when his judgment was better informed, he publicly retracted his former unguarded assertion.

Leaving, therefore, the authority of men, let us betake ourselves to the word of God, and humbly seek the light of his Spirit, who is promised to guide his people in their sincere inquiries after truth.

Now, if you consider the scope and design of our Apostles, and take in the context, I hope this seeming opposition will be soon removed. St. Paul is evidently treating on the great point of a sinner's justification in the sight of God; he shews that it cannot be of the law, because by the law all men were already condemned, and because then boasting could not be excluded; but that it was freely by grace, through the redemption that is by Christ Jesus. His reasoning will appear to greater advantage by perusing the whole passage, than by producing a few detached sentences. After he had summed up the evidence with respect both to Jews and Gentiles, and pronounced his verdict, that every mouth must be stopped, and that the whole world stood guilty before God, he proceeds thus: "Therefore by the deeds of the law, there shall no flesh be justified in his sight; for by the law is the knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all, and upon all them that believe; for there is no difference: for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; being justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ: whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation, through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; to declare, I say, at this time his

righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus. Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? Nay; but by the law of faith. Therefore we conclude, that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law\*." And because the Jews had a high opinion of Abraham, he proceeds in the next chapter to shew that Abraham was justified in the same way. "For what saith the Scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness. Now to him that worketh, is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness † ." The circumstance in Abraham's life referred to is, when he believed the promise of God, that though he was then childless, he should be the father of many nations ‡ ; and that particularly from him should proceed the Messiah, the promised Seed, in whom both he himself and all the families of the earth should be blessed.

St. James expressly treats of those who rested in a notion which they called faith, and accounted sufficient for their salvation, though it had no influence upon their hearts, tempers, and conduct. He shews that their hope is vain, because such a faith as this the devils have. And he proves, by the example of Abraham, that his faith was very different from theirs, because it enabled him to perform the hardest and most painful act of obedience, the offering up his only son. "What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can (this)§ faith save him? If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food; and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be you warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit? Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works. Thou believest that there is one God; thou dost well: the devils also believe, and tremble. But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead? Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith

wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? And the Scripture was fulfilled (confirmed), which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the friend of God. Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only\*." It is exceedingly plain, that he had not the same thing in view which St. Paul had; for the incident to which he here refers, happened a great many years after Abraham had been declared justified in the sight of God.

The sum is; The one declares that nothing renders us acceptable to God but faith in the Lord Jesus Christ: the other, that such a faith, when true and genuine, is not solitary, but accompanied with every good work. The one speaks of the justification of our persons,—this is by faith only; the other of the justification of our profession,—this is by faith not alone, but working by love, and producing obedience.

St. James has the same view in speaking of Rahab † ; and, by producing her as a confirmation, it is still more evident, that he is only considering works as the proofs of our sincerity. We have no sure ground to conclude, that Rahab, in the act of receiving the spies, and at that time, had any saving faith, or any view to the Messiah and the covenant of grace: though it is most probable she had, after she was joined to the people of Israel, and became acquainted with Divine revelation. But in Jericho her thoughts seemed to have been confined to a temporal deliverance: and the profession of faith which she made to the spies implies no more. "And she said unto the men, I know that the Lord hath given you the land, and that your terror is fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land faint because of you. For we have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea for you, when you came out of Egypt; and what you did unto the two kings of the Amorites. And as soon as we had heard these things, our hearts did melt; neither did there remain any more courage in any man, because of you: for the Lord your God, he is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath. Now therefore, I pray you, swear unto me by the Lord, since I have shewed you kindness, that ye will also shew kindness unto my father's house; and give me a true

token\*." Had she said thus, and yet delivered the spies up to the king of Jericho, it would have proved that she did not speak from her heart; but her profession was justified by receiving them into her house, concealing them from the search made after them, and sending them away in peace. Surely this conduct of Rahab will be sufficient to condemn many who would be thought Christians.

We may therefore deduce two propositions, perfectly consistent with each other, from the passage in question.

1. That there is no acceptance for any of the sons of Adam, with the just and holy God, but through Jesus Christ as our righteousness received by faith, and that in this concern works of every kind are absolutely excluded.

This is the capital doctrine of the Gospel: it is not only clearly asserted in innumerable passages both of the Old Testament and the New, but is St. Paul's express subject and design in his Epistles to the Romans and the Galatians. Though he was yielding and compliant in many things of less importance, and was willing to become all things to all men, yet he would not give place, no not for an hour, to any who offered to invalidate this foundation-truth. He declares, that to mix any thing, to contend for any qualification or observance, as of necessary influence to concur with the perfect work of Christ in the justification of a sinner, is to darken, alter, and destroy the Gospel which he preached; and denounces an anathema against everyone who should be guilty of this presumption, yea, though he should be (if such\* a thing was possible) an angel from heaven. How cordially he rested his own hope upon the truth which he proposed to others, he declares elsewhere, "Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ; and be found in him<sup>†</sup>, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the<sup>‡</sup> law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness of God by faith."

If this is the Scriptural doctrine, let each one examine on what ground you stand. Has God appointed one way of salvation, and will any of you dare to propose another? This would be both wicked and dangerous: "Other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ\*." You may please yourselves now with what you account your good works; but when God shall "lay judgment to the line, and righteousness to the plummet<sup>†</sup>," none will be able to abide his appearance, but those who can plead a righteousness perfectly answerable to the law's demands, which can only be found in Jesus Christ, the righteous one.

And as this doctrine is of so great and essential importance, beware how you listen to any other. Take heed how you hear<sup>‡</sup>; be not influenced by the names, characters, or stations of men, when the salvation of your souls is at stake. Prize the liberty which, as Protestants and Britons, you enjoy, of bringing every doctrine to the trial of God's word, and freely use it. I account it my honour and happiness that I preach to a free people, who have the Bible in their hands. To your Bibles I appeal. I entreat, I charge you to receive nothing upon my word, any farther than I prove it from the word of God; and bring every preacher, and every sermon that you hear, to the same standard. If this is the truth, you had need to be well established in it; for it is not the current and fashionable doctrine of the times. Let me then farther recommend to you (it is a direction our Lord has given), to examine doctrines by their effects: "By their fruits ye shall know them\*." The truths of God, when faithfully preached, in humble dependence upon his blessing, will be attested by his power. At such times, and in such places, a visible change will soon be observable in some or more of the hearers: they cease to do evil, they learn to do well: they acknowledge God in all their ways, and glorify him before men, by living according to his precepts. And if you ask them the reason of this change, they will freely ascribe it to the blessing of God upon that sort of preaching, which by too many is accounted foolishness<sup>†</sup>.

On the other hand, we are not afraid to challenge those who are most acquainted with men and books, to produce instances of the same effects wrought by any other doctrine than that which commends the Lord Christ in his person, offices, and power, as the only object of a sinner's hope. How much is said and written to tell people what they should be, and what they should do! yet where these principles are not enforced, there is nothing effectually done, nothing indeed attempted, beyond a formal round of dull and heartless service: a little something that looks like religion on the Lord's day, to appear in church at the summons of the bell, to repeat words because other people do the same, to hear what is delivered from the pulpit with little attention or affection, unless something occurs that is suited to exalt self, or to sooth conscience, and then to run with eagerness into the world again.

Or if here and there a person is truly touched by the secret influence and guidance of the Spirit of God, where this evangelical doctrine is not publicly maintained, the consequence always is, that they renounce the things which they before held for truths, are brought into that way of thinking which is agreeable to St. Paul's doctrine, and receive it gladly whenever it comes in their way.

It must be allowed, however, at the same time, that there are counterfeit professors, whose religion lies in notions, and who, while they profess to believe in God, in works deny him; by reason of whom the ways of truth are evil spoken of\*. This the Apostles have taught us to expect; nay, it was so from the beginning, even while the Apostles were themselves personally with the churches. To such St. James addresses the passage I have been reading to you, of which my text is the conclusion; and as I dare not hope that there are none such in this great assembly, it is highly proper, that before I conclude I should take notice of a second proposition which naturally offers from the subject we have had in hand; and more especially from the reasoning of St. James, and from the words of my text.



2. That true faith in the Lord Jesus Christ has a prevailing and habitual influence upon the hearts and lives of those who possess it; and that they are vain men, and deceivers of themselves, who pretend to faith in him, while their lives and conversations shew them to be enslaved to the love of the world, and the dominion of sin. The Apostle, to inspire us with a just abhorrence of this false profession, makes use of two comparisons which are exceedingly striking. May God open the eyes of those who are concerned in it, to perceive and tremble at the justness and horror of the resemblance.

Ist, He compares it to the faith of devils: "Thou believest there is one God; thou dost well. The devils also believe, and tremble\*." Are there any here whom it is needful to address in this harsh manner? My dear brethren, bear with me; I wish you well, and would willingly rejoice in every good appearance; but, alas! how little does it signify what you believe, or what you say, unless your acknowledged principles have an effect upon your conduct!

Do you believe that Jesus is the Christ? so does Satan? Do you believe the election of God, the sovereignty of grace, the perseverance of the saints? It is possible the devil may have a more extensive [knowledge in these doctrines than the wisest of men; yet this benefits him not; it is not want of knowledge, but want of love, that makes him what he is.

The only effect mentioned of the faith of devils is, that it increases their terror, and aggravates their guilt. They believe (there are no sceptics in hell), and tremble. Is not this too much the case of some of you? If you knew less, you would be easier at least, and less inexcusable; and yet perhaps you mistake your state, and think yourselves on this account far less blameable than you really are. Perhaps sometimes, when you reflect sincerely on your ways, and how strangely you are hurried to act contrary to the convictions which the preaching of the Gospel forces upon you, you are ready to charge the Lord and his dispensations hardly, and to say, O that he would give me his grace! but if not, what can I do without it? Let

conscience now speak faithfully, and it will tell you, that if you are condemned, it will not be for what you cannot do, but for wilfully refusing to improve the power already given you. When I tell you, that without holiness no man shall see the Lord with comfort, and that you must break off from your vain company and evil practices, if you expect or desire to be saved, you know that I speak the truth; and your looks often testify that you feel the force of it. Now, while the word of God is sounding in your ears, you perhaps are thinking, "It is time, high time indeed, to break off; though the Lord has forbore me long, he will surely strike at last, if I go on thus." And yet, alas! what I have formerly seen gives me much cause to fear, that to-morrow, or the next time they entice you, you will consent again. But could I tell you, that by going a different way you might gain a sum of money; or could I make it appear, that the next time you went to such a place your house would certainly be robbed, I make no doubt but you would forbear. And yet gold is not grace. It is then plain, that you have power, but your will is in fault. God has enlightened your conscience; but you rebel against it. O repent, while there is yet space afforded. Call upon the name of Jesus; who knows but he may even yet deliver you?

2ndly, He compares it to a dead carcass, which is not only unprofitable, but loathsome and offensive. May God shew you to-day, how odious your profession is in his sight! for by assenting to the truths of the Gospel, and outwardly favouring the cause, and the instruments whom the Lord has raised up to promote it, you are so far professors. May he enable you to be not only almost, but altogether Christians! for while you thus halt between two opinions, and stand divided between God and the world, you are an abomination to God, a grief to his people, a stumbling-block to the ignorant, and are (if this was of any weight in comparison of what I have already said) secretly despised by those who pretend to court your acquaintance. Your guilt is in some respects more aggravated, and your example unspeakably more mischievous, than either would be if you openly rejected the truth. You stand in the rank of those wicked servants who know their Master's will, but do it not. The

great Judge has determined concerning these, that they shall be beaten with many stripes\*." Awake to righteousness, and sin not; look up to Jesus, who is exalted to bestow both faith and repentance, that you may no longer be torn in pieces by those inward contentions, but experience that peace which passes all understanding†.

## **SERMON XIX**

### **GUILT REMOVED, AND PEACE RESTORED**

O Lord, open thou my lips, and my mouth shall shew forth thy praise. - PSALM 51:15

THE history of David is full of instruction. Every thing recorded of him affords us either consolation or caution. In his example, we see much of the sovereign power and providence of God. When a youth, though the least of his father's house, he was singled out, and called from following sheep, to rule a kingdom. We see him supported through a variety of difficulties, and at length established in his throne, to the amazement and confusion of his enemies. In him likewise we have a striking proof of the evil that is in the heart of man. Who would have thought it, that David, the man so highly favoured, so wonderfully preserved, the man after God's own heart, who in the time of his distress could say, "My soul thirsteth for God, even for the living God\*;" that he should be in an unguarded hour seduced, surprised, and led captive of the devil! From gazing he proceeds to adultery, from adultery to murder, and at length sinks into such a stupid frame of mind, that an express message from God was needful to convince him of his sin. And in this circumstance we farther see the riches of Divine grace and mercy; how tenderly the Lord watches over his sheep, how carefully he brings them back when wandering from him, and with what rich goodness he heals

their backslidings, and loves them freely. David was fallen, but not lost. "The thing which he had done displeased the Lord †." Yet his loving kindness and faithfulness were unalterable. He was interested in that covenant "which is well ordered in all things and sure ‡;" and therefore, when he confessed his sin, the Lord assured him, by his servant Nathan, that "he had put away his sin, and he should not die for it §."

However, though the Lord is thus gracious in passing by the iniquity of his children, yet he will let them know, by sorrowful experience, that "it is an evil and a bitter thing to sin against him ||." Though he will not cast off, he will chasten; he will withdraw his presence, and suspend his gracious influences; and this to a sensible heart is a heavy punishment. Though David was delivered from the fear of death and hell, he penned this psalm in the bitterness of his soul. He did not consider the Lord as his enemy, but as a friend and father whom he had greatly offended. He longed to be reconciled, but could not as yet recover his former confidence. He hoped, indeed, that a time of refreshment would come from his presence; and therefore he continued waiting; but for the present he made heavy complaints, that his bones were broken, and his mouth stopped. He had lost his strength and life, and found he could not restore himself. He was struck dumb by his late fall; and therefore he breathes out this prayer, "O Lord, open thou my lips, and my mouth shall shew forth thy praise."

From these words I propose to consider that mournful case, which too often happens in the Christian life, when the believer's mouth is stopped, and his lips closed, so that he cannot shew forth the praises of his God. And in this view,

I. I shall point out to you the persons who have reason to make this complaint.

II. Explain what is implied in their lips being thus shut up.

III. Shew you by what means the Lord opens the closed lips.  
And,

IV. I shall observe, that when a person's lips are thus opened, his mouth, and all that is within him, will certainly shew forth the Lord's praise. May the Holy Spirit apply the word, and command a blessing upon the whole!

I. This petition especially suits two sorts of persons.

1. The backsliding believer; one who has formerly known the goodness of God; has rested in his love, and rejoiced in his salvation; has "tasted that the Lord is gracious\*," and walked with comfort in the way of his commandments; but at length, by an unguarded conduct, or by building wood, hay, and stubble upon the Lord's foundation † , has grieved the good Spirit of God, and he is withdrawn. The comforter‡ and instructor of his soul is far from him; and therefore he sits in darkness and silence. He only retains a sense of his loss, and can do no more than sigh out this prayer: "O Lord, open thou my lips."

2. The doubting believer. The unbelieving believer, if I may be allowed the expression; I mean one who has been deeply convinced of sin, and taught by the Spirit of God, that there is no salvation but in the Lord Jesus Christ;—one who loves the word, and ways, and people of God, who is careful to the utmost of his power to abstain from the evil that is in the world, and esteems "the loving kindness of the Lord to be better than life§;"—one at whom the enemy has often thrust sore that he might fall||, but the Lord has secretly upheld him through many a bitter hour, and he finds he is not cut off yet, though he perhaps expects it every day. Such as these have, indeed, sufficient ground to say, "If the Lord was not on my side, I had been swallowed up long ago\*\*." They have reason to conclude with David, "By this, if by nothing else, I know that thou favourest me, seeing my enemies, who have assaulted me so continually, have not yet prevailed against me††." But yet, through a sense of past guilt, a sight

of present corruptions, the prevalence of unbelief, the workings of a legal spirit, the want of a clear apprehension of the Lord's way of justifying the ungodly, and from the force of Satan's temptations, who is exceeding busy to press all these things upon the heart, their mouths are stopped likewise. They cannot believe, and therefore they cannot speak. However, there are seasons and intervals when they obtain a little glimpse of hope, and then the whole desire of their souls is expressed in the words of my text: "O Lord, open thou my lips, and my mouth shall shew forth thy praise."

II. I proceed to consider what may be included in this case, what it is to have the mouth stopped. The persons I have mentioned have the same liberty of speech in common affairs as others; but, because they cannot converse freely with him who, notwithstanding all their doubts, and fears, and follies, still maintains a secret hold of their souls, they account themselves no better than dumb. They cannot speak to the Lord, nor of him, nor for him, as they wish and ought to do. These are the three heads of their complaint; and therefore they sigh, and say, "O Lord, open thou my lips."

1. 'Alas!' says the believer that has sinned, and lost his strength, "O that it was with me as in times past!\*" I well remember when I had freedom of access, and found it good to draw near to my God; when I could pour out all my complaints and cares before him, and leave them with him. I remember the time when my heart was overwhelmed within me, and my spirit was burdened<sup>†</sup>. I saw myself a wretched, helpless sinner. Innumerable evils took hold of me. I thought I was marked out for destruction. I found Satan at my right hand, waiting for a permission to seize my soul, and make me his prey for ever\*. I looked round, but saw no way to escape, and gave up all for lost. But, O! I remember, when none in heaven or earth could help me, how the Lord drew "near to me in the day of my distress<sup>†</sup>, and said unto my soul, Fear not, I am thy salvation." He revealed himself as an almighty, suitable Saviour. He said, "Deliver him from going down to the pit, I have found a ransom<sup>‡</sup>." "He brought me out of the horrible pit and miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock<sup>§</sup>." "He

brought me into his banqueting-house, and his banner over me was love. I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet unto my taste||." This was the beginning; but it was not all. Many a gracious visit he favoured me with afterwards. O the sweet hours of secret prayer! O the happy communion in which I walked with him all the day long! "Then, in the multitude of thoughts within me, his comforts refreshed my soul\*\*." Then I could smile at Satan's rage, and face a frowning world. Every blessing of common providence was doubly welcome, for I could read his name of love written upon it; and every affliction brought resignation and peace, because I saw my Father's hand in it, and found at a Throne of Grace renewed strength always suited to my need. Happy were those times: but, alas! they are gone. I could hardly then persuade myself that I should be moved any more. I little thought there was such desperate wickedness in my heart, that, after so much experience of his goodness, I should foolishly wander from him again. But, O! what a change have I lived to see! I have grieved that good Spirit of God by which I was sealed, and now I find myself in the hands of my enemies. The Lord hides himself, and stands afar off; and I have lost the power of prayer. Those precious promises which once were the joy of my soul, which I could boldly plead at the Throne of Grace, and say, All these are mine, have no longer any power or sweetness; I read them, but I cannot feel them; and my trials and sins, which once I could cast upon my Saviour, and find instant relief, are now a heavy burden, too great for me to bear. Mercies have lost their relish, and afflictions have lost their usefulness; since neither the one nor the other are of force to stir up my soul to prayer, "O Lord, open thou my lips."

'I remember likewise, when I had this freedom in speaking with God, how pleasing it was to me to speak of him. My heart was full, and running over with a sense of his goodness, so that it was my meat and drink to say, "Come unto me, all ye that fear God, and I will tell you what he hath done for my soul\*." Then the company of his people was delightful indeed. The meanest of his children that would sit and hear me speak of his loving kindness, was precious to me: I

esteemed them the excellent of the earth<sup>†</sup>, in whom was all my delight. "We took sweet counsel together and walked to the house of God in company<sup>‡</sup>." And I thank God I love them still; but I can neither help them, nor be helped by them, as in times past. In vain they say unto me, "Come, sing us one of the songs of Zion. Alas! how can I sing the songs of the Lord in a strange land? My harp is hung upon the willows, my tongue cleaveth to the roof of my mouth<sup>§</sup>." I dwell in darkness and silence, as those who have been long dead. "O Lord, open thou my lips."

And when I could thus speak to God, and of him, I had likewise liberty to speak for him. "I was then very jealous for the Lord of hosts\*." It wounded my soul to hear his name profaned, to see his commandments broken, and his Gospel slighted. I had a tender concern for poor sinners. I could not but wish, that, if possible, every person I met might know what I knew, and feel what I felt. And especially where I had friendship or influence, I was ready to improve it to the best purpose. "The love of Christ constrained me to lay myself out for his service<sup>†</sup>." I could not but oppose sin and self-righteousness, and plead the cause of my Saviour upon every occasion. "I was not<sup>‡</sup> ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, for I felt it the power of God unto salvation in my own soul, and durst recommend it to every one as the only balm for sin and sorrow." But now "the crown is fallen from my head; woe unto me that I have sinned<sup>§</sup>." I am shut out from the fountain, and all my streams are dried up. My comforts and my usefulness are declined together. "O Lord, open thou my lips, and my mouth shall shew forth thy praise." '

Such is the complaint of the backslider in heart, when he is filled with his own ways.

And, 2. This, with a little variation, will suit the doubting, tempted soul too. These will confess, that the experience I have described is the desire of their hearts. Such communication with God, such a freedom in his ways, such a zeal for his service, is the very thing they mean, when they entreat the Lord to open their lips. And indeed they



cannot, they dare not deny, but they have at times had some little tastes of them, otherwise they would not know what I mean. For these things are to the natural man the merest folly imaginable: he understands them not, therefore he despises them; nay, he hates them with a perfect hatred, and opposes them with all his heart. But still they complain under a present burden. One dark hour of temptation blots out all the traces of comfort they have known, and they refuse consolation. They will insist on it, I have neither part nor lot in the matter; I cannot get near him, and I fear I never shall. When I attempt to pray, a sense of my sins and sinfulness stops my mouth. I see the Lord not upon the golden mercy-seat, but upon the fiery throne of justice, and I am ready to call upon the rocks and mountains to hide me from his presence. When I would commune with his people, I am silenced by that dreadful word, "What hast thou to do, to declare my statutes, or to take my covenant into thy mouth?\*" When I would bear my feeble testimony for him in the world, conscience alarms me, and says, "Thou that teachest others, teachest thou not thyself?†" And then "the enemy comes in like a flood‡," with, "God has forsaken him; persecute and take him, for there is none to deliver him§." Thus "I spend my days in groaning, and water my couch with tears||."

This is a heavy case indeed; and would be insupportable, but that the faithful Shepherd, in a secret unseen way, affords timely succour, and sets bounds to the raging enemy, beyond which he cannot pass. "Hitherto shalt thou come\*\*;" thus far thou art permitted to vex, and wound, and tear, but no farther. The Lord knows our frame, and has promised with "every temptation to provide either strength to endure, or a way to escape\*."—Two things are proper to be mentioned for the encouragement of such souls, to wait on, and expect deliverance.

The first is, The examples of the saints. Think not your lot strange, as though some new and unheard-of thing had befallen you. Thousands, and ten thousands, now in glory, have tasted, yea, drank deeply of this cup before you. And many yet upon earth, who are now

rejoicing in the light of God's countenance, have said in times past, as you say now, "I shall one day perish by the hand of these enemies; the Lord hath cast me quite off, and I shall never live to see his goodness in the land of the living<sup>†</sup>." Or, if you choose Scripture proofs, you need only read the Book of Job, the Psalms, and the Lamentations of Jeremiah, to be convinced, that some whom you number amongst the Lord's most eminent and highly favoured servants, have been induced to use such expressions as suit your case, no less than if they had been written for you alone. Do not they say, that "they were broken with breach upon breach;" that "the arrows of God stuck fast in them;" that "the Lord wrote bitter things against them, and counted them his enemies;" that he had "shut them up within stone walls, and covered himself with a cloud, that their prayers might not pass through<sup>‡</sup>?" These are but a small part of their complaints; and what can you say more than this?

Again; Consider the precious promises of the word. Are they not expressly directed to you? Do you account yourself a backslider? "Return unto me, ye backsliding children, and I will receive you, saith the Lord\*." Do you think yourself a sinner of uncommon size? Yet, saith the Lord, "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool<sup>†</sup>." Do you say your neck is as an iron sinew, and your brow brass? Yet hear the word of the Lord, "Hearken unto me, ye stout-hearted, that are far from righteousness. I bring near my righteousness; it shall not be far off<sup>‡</sup>." Is there something peculiarly dreadful in your case, something that you could hardly be prevailed on to entrust to your dearest friend? Yet be not afraid; for Truth has said, "All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon||." But still, when we have said all, we are but miserable comforters. Even with the word of God in our mouths, we speak too often in vain. It is the Lord alone that can open the lips. And, O! that this may be the happy opportunity of his gracious appearance in favour of all here present,

that our wounds may be healed, and our tongues unloosed to proclaim his praise! Lift up your hearts to him, while I endeavour to shew you, by what means, or in what manner, the Lord is pleased to open the lips that have been long closed. This is the third particular I proposed to consider from my text.

III. I say then, that when the Lord is about to open the lips, he proceeds by the following steps.

1. He opens the eyes. We are often in a similar case with Hagar in the wilderness. The water was spent in the bottle, and she sat down in despair. There was a well or fountain close to her, sufficient to have supplied her with water to her life's end; but she saw it not till God opened her eyes\*." Just so, many a poor soul is distressed, and says, My stock is spent; I had but little grace at the best, and, alas! that little is gone. And now if the Lord should ask some hard thing, would you not do it to obtain a supply? You would willingly take a long journey, or part with all your wealth, to have grace abounding in your hearts; but you know you cannot expect help in this way. It is true, all contrivances of our own will have no effect; but, blessed be God, they are as needless as they would be useless. We need not dig in the earth, nor climb the skies, nor cross the seas; our remedy is near†. We need no costly offerings of silver or gold; our remedy is cheap. Come, pore no longer upon your empty bottle, but look to the fountain, the river, the ocean of all grace. May the Lord open your eyes (as he did the eyes of Elisha's servant‡) and I will undertake to point you to an object that shall answer all your wants. Look unto the Lord Jesus Christ; look unto him as he hung naked, wounded, bleeding, dead, and forsaken upon the cross. Look unto him again as he now reigns in glory, possessed of all power in heaven and in earth, with thousands of thousands of saints and angels worshipping before him, and ten thousand times ten thousand ministering unto him; and then compare your sins with his blood, your wants with his fulness, your unbelief with his faithfulness, your weakness with his strength, your inconstancy with his everlasting love. If the Lord opens the eyes of your understanding, you would be astonished at

the comparison. Would you compare a small grain of sand upon the shore, with the massy mountains which hide their heads in the clouds, and spread their roots from sea to sea? or the spark of a glow-worm with the noonday sun? yet there is less disproportion between these, than between the utmost capacity of your desires and wants, and the immense resources provided for you, in the righteousness, compassion, and power of our dear Redeemer. "He is able to save to the uttermost\*;" and all our trouble arises chiefly from this, that our eyes are holden, so that we do not know him†. Therefore the first step towards opening the lips is to open our eyes, that we may see him, and look upon him by such a sight as unloosed the tongue of unbelieving Thomas, and constrained him to cry out, "My Lord and my God!‡"

2. When the eyes are thus opened, the Lord, in the next place, and by that as a means, opens the ear. When Christ is out of sight, we are deaf to all the calls, invitations, and promises of the Scripture. But a believing view of him who died that we might live, rouses the attention, and makes us willing and able to hear what the Lord will speak§ to his people. And what does he say from the cross? "Look unto me, and be ye saved. If I be lifted up, I will draw all men to me. Behold my hands, my feet, my pierced side; all this I bore for you. Be not afraid, only believe. O thou of little faith, wherefore dost thou doubt? See, sinner, how I have loved thee. I have trodden the winepress alone. I have destroyed death, and him that had the power of death. There is henceforth no condemnation to them that believe in me\*." And what does he say from his kingdom? "I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not. For a season you have sorrow; but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice. Him that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out. I am the first and the last: that was dead and am alive. I keep the keys of death and hell, and save whom I will. Cast thy burden upon me, I will sustain thee. I will take away thy iniquity. Be of good cheer, thy sins are forgiven thee. Go in peace, and sin no more†." My Saviour, my God, what words are these!

3. By opening the eye to see his excellence and power, and the ear to hear his gracious words, he, in the next place, opens the heart. He breaks the prison-doors, forces for himself an entrance, and sets the prisoner at liberty. He touches the rock, and the waters flow<sup>‡</sup>. Now a true and filial repentance takes place; now sin appears exceedingly sinful indeed. There was a sorrow before, but it was fruitless and ineffectual; but the sight of him who was pierced for our sins, and the welcome sound of pardon proclaimed in the conscience, produces a sorrow after a godly sort, a repentance never to be repented of. Thus it was with the woman who washed our Lord's feet<sup>§</sup>; she had been a great sinner; much was forgiven her, and therefore she loved much. Thus it was with Peter: he had been a grievous backslider; he had been with Jesus upon the mount, and saw the excellent glory; he was stout in his protestation, "Though all men deny thee, yet will not I:" but he shrunk at the voice of a girl, and said, "I know not the man." When the servants spoke to him, he cursed and swore; but when Jesus looked upon him, he wept\*. Do you think our Lord looked upon him with disdain and indignation? rather with a look of love; a look that at once convinced him of his sin, and gave him to understand that the Lord pitied and forgave him. This look broke his heart in pieces. He went out, and wept bitterly. And afterwards, though greatly humbled as to confidence in himself, yet, when asked the question, he could boldly appeal to the Searcher of hearts, "Lord, thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee<sup>‡</sup>."

And when the eyes, the ears, the heart, are thus opened; when the understanding is enlightened, the will engaged, and the affections inflamed, the cure is wrought. Then the lips will open of course, and the mouth be filled with thanksgiving and praise. O that it would please the Lord to give to me, and to each of you, a clearer knowledge of this blessed change from heart-felt experience, than is in the power of words (of my poor words especially) to describe! "Come," my friends, "let us return unto the Lord; for he hath wounded, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up<sup>‡</sup>." Verily we are all guilty in this matter; we have all provoked him by unbelief, and wandering from his good way; and therefore we live so far below

our privileges, and are so often heavy and sorrowful, when we have in him grounds of continual joy. Now let us unite in this prayer, "O Lord, open thou our lips, display thy power in the midst of us, heal all our breaches, rend the veil of our unbelief, blot out the thick clouds of our sins, cleanse us from all our iniquities and idols, and teach our stammering tongues, and barren hearts, to shew forth the praise of thy abundant goodness."

I proceed to observe, in the last place,

IV. That if the Lord is pleased to answer our desire, and to open your lips in this manner, then you will surely praise him. You will praise him with your mouths, and in your lives; you will thankfully acknowledge his mercy, his power, and his wisdom.

1. You will praise his mercy.—Is the cooling stream welcome to the thirsty soul? is a reprieve acceptable to a poor condemned malefactor? still more welcome is a sense of pardoning love to a soul that has felt the evil and effects of sin. What! to be taken from the dunghill\*, and made a companion with princes! to have all our guilt and complaints removed at once! to be snatched as it were from the brink of hell, and placed in the very suburbs of heaven! to be able to say, "O Lord thou wast [justly] angry with me, [and I went mourning under a sense of thy displeasure]; but [now] thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortedst me! †" Is not this a mercy? especially considering how undeserving we are of the smallest favour! And, farther, the way in which it was conveyed! that the pardon, though free to us, is a pardon "bought with blood:" that it cost the Lord Jesus his life, his soul, to effect that blessed reconciliation in which we are beginning to rejoice! Still more, that all we can now receive of his love, is but a taste, a small thing, in comparison of what he has reserved for us! O what mercy is here! O what thanks does it call for! "O Lord, open thou our lips, and our mouth shall shew forth thy praise."

2. You will praise his power.—'I thought,' says the poor soul at such a time, 'I was fallen so low that there was no help. The more I toiled and laboured in my own strength, the farther the blessing seemed from me. I know, by experience, that none but an Almighty arm could relieve me. Creatures, means, and contrivances I had tried, and tried again, but found them all physicians of no value. But now "the right hand of the Lord has done wonderfully, the right hand of the Lord has brought mighty things to pass\*." "What shall I say? he hath both spoken himself, and also hath done it†." The work is his; to him be all the glory. I got not this victory by my own bow‡, neither did my own arm save me, "but the Lord himself has been pleased to shew the exceeding greatness§ of his mighty power in my behalf." Therefore, "not unto us, but unto thy name, O Lord, be the glory and the praise||."

3. You will praise his wisdom.—"What I do," said our Lord to Peter, "thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter\*\*." The mourning soul often asks the question with David, "I will say unto God my rock, Why hast thou forsaken me? why go I mourning because of the enemy?\*" When the Lord turns your mourning into joy, you shall know why. You will then see that there was a need† of all these things. It is to shew you what is in your hearts, to mortify the spirit of self-righteousness, "to teach you, that without him you can do nothing‡;" to make you wise and experienced against Satan's devices; to give you a tender sympathy and fellow-feeling in the sufferings and infirmities of your brethren, and to enable you to encourage and comfort others§ who shall be hereafter in your case, by relating what you have seen and known yourself in your various conflicts and strivings against sin. These are some of the reasons why the Lord suffers his dear children to groan, being burdened, and sometimes permits their enemies to gain a short advantage over them, that he may humble and prove them||, in order to do them good in their latter end. And, oh! with what wisdom is all this appointed! A little of it we may see at present, but we shall not have a complete view till we get safe home. Then to look back upon the way

by which he led us through the wilderness, will furnish matter for eternal praise.

Farther: not only your mouths, but your lives shall praise him. What is the language of a believing heart, when the Lord pardons his sins, and binds up his wounds? It is this, "Now, Lord, I am thine, thy vows are upon me, for thou hast redeemed me, O Lord God of truth. Shall I continue in sin because grace has abounded? God forbid! I am crucified with Christ, crucified to the world, and the world to me. The love of Christ constrains me. The time past is sufficient to have lived in vanity; henceforth I am the Lord's. He has bound me by his tender mercies to present myself, body and soul, to his service. Here, O Lord, I offer my whole self, all that I am, and all that I have, a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to thee. O let me never, never wander from thee again, but walk in the light, as thou art in the light, and have communion with thee here below, till thou shalt remove me out of the reach of sin and sorrow for ever\*."

If there are any here who have neither known the loving kindness of the Lord, nor mourned under the sense of his displeasure, I am sure your lips are closed to this hour. And should you die thus incapable of praising the God who made you, and the grace which has brought the sound of the Gospel to your ears, it were better for you that you had never been born<sup>†</sup>. You have much reason to cry out, "O Lord, open thou my lips." Open my eyes to see my danger, to see the evil of my nature and life. Open my lips to confess my wickedness. Open my heart to receive thy word, that I likewise may bear a part in the praises thy people pay thee, and not perish (as without thy mercy I must do) with a lie in my right hand<sup>‡</sup>.—Consider, the time is short§; death is near, and may be sudden. May the Lord enable you to consider the things belonging to your peace||, before they are hid from your eyes!

And you, my friends, who at present enjoy the light of God's countenance, who know your sins are forgiven\* for his name's sake, and have a happy freedom of access at a Throne of Grace, O be



mindful of your privileges; beware of sin, beware of self, beware of Satan. Your enemy envies you your liberty: he watches you with subtilty and malice; he spreads snares for your feet; he desires to have advantage of you, "that he may sift you as wheat<sup>†</sup>." Therefore be upon your guard, be humble, make much of secret prayer, keep close to the Scriptures of God—by the words of his lips you shall be preserved from the paths of the destroyer<sup>‡</sup>—attend diligently upon the ordinances; and speak often one§ to another, in love and faithfulness, of what the Lord has done and prepared for you, and of what|| manner of persons you ought to be, in all holy conversation and godliness. Thus you shall be kept safe from evil. Jesus has prayed for you, that your faith may not fail<sup>\*\*</sup>. Fix your eye<sup>††</sup> and your heart upon him, as he that must do all for you, all in you, all by you. And he has said, "yet a little while, and, behold, I come quickly<sup>‡‡</sup>. Hold fast that which thou hast. Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life. Amen. Even so, come Lord Jesus§§."

## **SERMON XX**

### **OF THE ASSURANCE OF FAITH**

And we know that we are of God. - 1 JOHN 5:19.

A WELL-GROUNDED and abiding persuasion, not only that the doctrines of the Gospel are (true in themselves, but that we through grace are surely and unchangeably interested in them, is highly desirable. If we may be safe, we cannot be happy and comfortable without it, when once we have received an experimental knowledge of the deceitfulness of our own hearts, and the variety, subtilty, and force of Satan's temptations: and He who knows our frame and situation, has, in his holy word, made a full provision for us in this respect, and declared it to be his intention, that those who flee for refuge to the hope he has set before them, might have strong

consolation\*; not be left at an uncertainty in a concern of the highest importance, but be rooted, grounded, established, and settled in the knowledge of his love, and be enabled to maintain it as an unshaken principle, through every change of dispensation and frame, "that he who hath begun a good work in them will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ<sup>†</sup>."

This animating confidence, so well suited, and so necessary, to render the soul superior to all the trials of life, to inspire a noble disdain of the sinful pleasures and vain pursuits of the present evil world, and to engage the grateful exertion of every faculty and power in the service of God, is generally expressed by the word Assurance. But though the word is in frequent use, the thing itself has been, and still is, a subject of much dispute and controversy amongst professors of the Gospel. Many, not being conscious of such a cheering persuasion in themselves, and too hasty in supposing their attainments must be a standard to others, have ventured to deny the possibility of such an assurance, and treated every claim to it as visionary and enthusiastic. On the other hand, some have maintained the opposite extreme, and held assurance so essential to faith, that without it no person has a Scriptural warrant even to hope that a work of grace is begun in his heart. This sentiment, especially when asserted by persons of undoubted character for gifts, graces, and usefulness, has greatly startled and discouraged weak and feeble-minded souls, and been too often an occasion of adding to the distress of those who rather ought to have been comforted.

Great differences of judgment have likewise obtained concerning the means whereby, the manner in which, and the persons to whom, this assurance is communicated, supposing it attainable. It is not needful to insist on particulars. Perhaps, the best way to prevent or remove mistakes, is to propose the truth simply; which, so far as it takes place, will necessarily prevent the entertainment of error. I only mention in general, that there is a variety of sentiments on this point, and the most of them supported by respectable names, in order to caution you against paying too great a deference to human authority,

and to urge you to praise God for your Bibles, and to be diligent in the perusal of them. If you search the Scriptures, and pray for the Spirit, you may arrive to a clear satisfaction for yourselves, no less than if all the learned were of one mind, and all of your side.

My text assures us, that this assurance was possessed in the first ages of the church. There were some who could say, without hesitation, "We know that we are of God;" and though they are an apostle's words, he uses them not exclusively as an apostle, but generally as a believer.

The greatest part of the chapter, and indeed of the Epistle, shews that he considers those to whom he was writing as partakers with him in the common privileges of Christians. So likewise St. Paul joins the believing Corinthians with himself, when he says, "We know, that, if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens\*." And elsewhere he takes it for granted, that they (some of them at least) had this assurance, and presses them to a lively discharge of duty upon that consideration: "Forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord<sup>†</sup>."

And we need make no scruple of affirming, from the fullest evidence, that this precious privilege was not confined, or designed by God to be so, to the first ages of the Gospel. There have been, in all periods of the church, where the word and ordinances of Christ have been faithfully administered, many who could say, "We know that we are of God;" and we trust there are more than a few who can say so, and give a solid Scriptural evidence of the hope that is in them, even in this degenerate day. But because arguments from facts, which must depend upon persons' testimony, in their own cases, are not allowed to be fully conclusive; and because the greater part of those who, we hope, sincerely love the Lord Jesus, live far below their just right and privilege, and are perplexed with doubts and fears, which dishonour their profession, weaken their hands, and make their lives uncomfortable; I shall endeavour at this time to state and explain the

nature of assurance, to prove that it is attainable, to point out the means by which we are to expect it, and to take notice of the hindrances which keep so many who are interested in the Gospel salvation from enjoying their privilege, and make them unwilling or afraid to say "We know that we are of God." What I have to offer on these particulars, will occur under one or other of the following propositions.

I. Assurance is not essential to the being of faith.—It is a strong faith; but we read likewise of a weak faith, little faith, faith like a grain of mustard seed\*. True saving faith in Jesus Christ is only distinguishable by its different degrees; but in every degree, and in every subject, it is universally of the same kind, and produces (according to its degree) the same uniform effects. It purifies the heart from the love and practice of sin; it works by love to the Lord Jesus Christ, his ordinances, ways, and people†; and it enables the professor to overcome the world, to stand fast against its frowns, and to resist the more pleasing but not less dangerous influence of its smiles. Each of these effects is beyond the power, and contrary to the inclination, of the natural man. "No man can say that Jesus Christ is the Lord\*," that is, can give him the honour due to his name, renounce every other hope of salvation, "and count all things but loss and dung that he may win Christ," "but by the Holy Ghost." Yet thus far many have undoubtedly attained, who have not assurance; but while they give sufficient evidence by their conduct that they have received precious faith in their hearts, they go mourning all the day long, and almost pass sentence against themselves as unbelievers. Now, what these mourners want, in order to their establishment and assurance, is not some new principle which they have not yet received, but only a stronger degree of that faith which they already possess. Some good writers speak of faith of reliance, faith of adherence, faith of assurance, direct and reflex acts of faith, &c.; but these are not Scriptural modes of expression, nor do they appear to me to throw light upon the subject, but rather to increase the perplexity of plain people, who are apt to imagine these are so many different kinds of faith. The Scripture mentions only two kinds; "a

living and a dead faith<sup>†</sup>." The true faith is faint and in its beginnings, like the life of a new-born infant; but it is growing up to maturity, and shall increase with the increase of God, "unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ<sup>‡</sup>." From hence it follows,

II. The grounds and principles of faith and assurance are exactly the same.—The first and lowest act of saving faith necessarily includes three things.

1. An apprehension of the sufficiency and authority of Christ to save. —Men that live in their sins will rest upon a slender hope; but a conscience truly awakened must have sure grounds to go upon, and, without the discovery of such a Saviour as is revealed in the Gospel, would sink into despair. It is afraid of being deceived, and is so far enlightened, that it cannot be easily imposed upon; a sense of the sinfulness of sin, an impression of the majesty of God, will not suffer it to rest in any thing short of a perfect atonement and a perfect righteousness. But when the eyes of the mind are opened, and Jesus is seen as revealed by the word and Spirit of God, all scruples of this sort are silenced, and the soul perceives and feels that he is fully equal to the mighty undertaking.

2. An application to him.—This of course follows a persuasion of his ability to save; for who will sit down and perish when there is a possibility of relief? There is, perhaps, a great questioning of Christ's willingness; but still, since there is a peradventure, a sense of distress on the one hand, and a view of his power and grace on the other, will extort a cry, "Lord save me, or I perish\*."

3. From hence there arises a hope in his mercy, which is fainter or stronger, according as the knowledge of Jesus is more or less distinct, and the surrender unto him more or less simple and unreserved; and therefore, in general, it is very faint at first; for the knowledge of Christ in a measure depends upon our knowledge of the Scriptures, which testify of him, and on the proofs we have had of

his wisdom, grace, and love to ourselves: but the young convert, in whom the seed of faith is but lately sown, has but little acquaintance with the word; for he has but just begun to know the value of it; and he has but little experience; though his eyes are opened, his sight is not yet confirmed, nor his spiritual senses exercised.

Farther: Though he is sincerely convinced of his need of a Saviour, there is still much of a legal bias, and a principle of self-righteousness in his heart, which, so far from being removed, is not yet discovered to himself; and while he thinks he looks to Christ alone, he is looking in himself for qualifications to recommend him, and afraid to draw near with confidence, because he cannot find them. These things discourage his hopes, and demonstrate his faith to be but weak.

But the strongest and most lively assurance that we can conceive attainable in the present life, is wrought and maintained by the very same principles which have so faint an influence in the infancy of faith. Let us hear the great champion St. Paul, in the close of an exemplary, laborious life, giving an account to a dear and intimate friend of the hope that was in him. He had been honoured and distinguished for grace, gifts, and usefulness, in a peculiar manner; he had laboured more abundantly than all the Apostles; he had fully preached the Gospel, and gathered churches throughout a very large part of the Roman empire\*: his first call was extraordinary, by the Lord's appearing to him in glory; and some of his succeeding experiences had been no less singular, for he had been caught up into the third heavens†: finally, his suffering for the Gospel had been as great and remarkable as his services. But when he expresses his assurance of support and salvation, he says not a syllable of these things, but rests the whole upon such points as are common to him with all believers: "I know whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day\*." We see there St. Paul's assurance was founded on, first, A knowledge of Jesus Christ, the object of his faith: secondly, A consciousness of transactions which had passed between

him and his Saviour; he had committed something to him,—that was, his soul, with all its interests: thirdly, A persuasion of his ability, willingness, and faithfulness, to secure and preserve what he had taken charge of. And these are the very same principles which are necessary to the first act of weak faith; only here they exert themselves with their proper power and efficacy. From hence,

III. Assurance is equally open to all believers.—It is not the exclusive privilege of great services or sufferings; it is not confined to ministers, martyrs, or apostles; but it is a prize set before all who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity, being no other than the growth and establishment of that faith which they have already received. The reasons why all who believe are not happy in this assurance of hope, are to be sought, not in the will of God, who has made abundant provision for our comfort, but in the perverseness, ignorance, and misapprehensions of our own hearts, and from inattention to his revealed word. We are not straitened in him, but in ourselves. It is not easy to enumerate the many ways in which our depravity works to keep this good thing from us. A few of the principal are these.

1. Insincerity. Where grace is really implanted by the Holy Spirit, it will surely prevail at length, and subdue the whole soul to the obedience of faith. But in too many there is for a long time not only great opposition from indwelling corruption, but a secret cleaving of the will to evil. A double-mindedness\*, a kind of halting between two opinions; so that while the desire and prayer of the soul seems expressed against all sin universally, there is still an allowed reserve of something, inconsistent with light received. An habitual indulgence of known or suspected evil, or an habitual neglect of any known duty, will certainly prevent the growth of grace and consolation. For the Lord claims (what is his just due) the whole heart, and will not afford the strengthening light of his countenance, while any idol is deliberately set up in his presence. "Then," says David (and not till then), "shall I not be ashamed when I have respect unto all thy commandments." And our Lord Jesus, when asked, "How will thou manifest thyself unto us?" answered, "If a man love

me, he will keep my words, and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him †." Till the pride and naughtiness of our spirits are conquered, and we are made willing to give up all, to renounce whatever is contrary to his precepts, though pleasing as a right eye, and seemingly necessary as the right hand, it is in vain to expect a full and abiding assurance of his love.

2. Indolence.—With respect to this valuable blessing, it may be often said, "Ye receive not, because ye ask not ‡." It is too common for those who were earnest in crying for mercy, while they thought themselves under the curse and power of the law, to grow slack and remiss in prayer soon after they obtain some hope of salvation from the Gospel; and particularly they do not "give all diligence to make their calling and election sure\*," in the careful use of every means appointed for their establishment in the truth as it is in Jesus. Therefore that word is fulfilled in them, "The slothful soul desireth and hath nothing † ." They go on for months or years in a complaining, unsettled state; and deservedly, because they are not earnest in seeking, asking, waiting, knocking at the gate of wisdom, and at the Throne of Grace, for that blessing which the Lord has promised to those who persevere in wrestling prayer, and will take no denial.

3. Misapprehensions.—These arise from a neglect of examining the Scriptures, and an undue deference to the decisions of men. If assurance is supposed unattainable, it will consequently not be sought after. If it is expected as an instantaneous impression of the Spirit of God upon the mind, independent of his word, or to arise from some sudden powerful application of a particular text of Scripture, this persuasion will end in disappointment. For though it must be allowed that the Lord does at times favour his people with peculiar manifestations of his goodness, and perhaps seal some promise especially suited to their present circumstances, with a remarkable sweetness and evidence upon their minds; yet these do rarely produce the assurance we are speaking of. These are but visits, seldom vouchsafed, and quickly suspended; and those who depend



chiefly upon such impressions, instead of endeavouring to grow in the Scriptural knowledge of Christ, are generally as changeable in their hopes as in their frame. While their affections are thus engaged, "their mountain stands strong, and they think they shall never be moved\*;" but when the cause is withdrawn, the effect ceases, and they presently relapse into their former fears and inquietudes. Not to say, that expectations of this sort have a tendency to great inconveniences, and often open a door to the delusions of enthusiasm and dangerous impositions; for Satan, when permitted, knows how to transform himself into an angel of light<sup>†</sup>. If inherent sanctification, or a considerable increase of it, is considered as the proper ground of assurance, those who are most humble, sincere, and desirous of being conformed to the will of God, will be the most perplexed and discouraged in their search after it. For they of all others will be the least satisfied with themselves, and have the quickest sense of the innumerable defilements and defects, which the Scripture assures us are inseparable from our best tempers and best actions. These mistakes, with others that might be mentioned, prevent many from seeking after assurance at all, and bewilder many more, by putting them upon a wrong pursuit. But what then is assurance? and how is it to be attained? I shall attempt an answer to these questions together in the next proposition.

IV. "Assurance is the result of a competent spiritual knowledge of the person and work of Christ as revealed in the Gospel, and a consciousness of dependence on him and his work alone for salvation." What I apprehend necessary to make my meaning plain, will occur from a brief explanation of the terms I have made use of in this description.

1. By the term "spiritual knowledge," I would ascribe it to the influence and teaching of the Holy Spirit of God, and distinguish it both from that speculative knowledge of divine things which natural men may acquire from books and human instruction, and likewise from that knowledge which a real believer may attain in the same way, beyond the limits of his present experience. Those who are

favoured with great outward advantages, particularly the light of a clear Gospel ministry, may very soon arrive to a notional apprehension of the most important truths; but with respect to the spiritual and abiding perception of those truths, there is no effectual teacher but the Spirit of God: and we often find, that what we think we have learned of men, we have occasion to be taught again by the Lord the Spirit; for our acquisitions fail us when we have most need of them, and will not stand the trial of an hour of temptation. But, so far as we have received our views of Jesus, his person, offices, mediation, and promises, from him, we possess them, and should be able to defy an angel, if he was to propose to us any other doctrine than that which we have surely known and believed\*.

2. I use the word "competent," because there is not, that I know of, any determinate standard where to fix. When our knowledge is so far increased as to overpower the objections arising from inward corruptions, defects of obedience, unbelieving fears, and the temptations of Satan; when we can cut them short with that question of the Apostle, "Who is he that condemneth? it is Christ that died<sup>†</sup>," assurance follows of course. For I do not understand assurance in the strictest sense for the highest degree of certainty imaginable. Assurance itself is capable of increase; and will be so continually, while there is any darkness in our understandings, or any remaining propensity to a self righteous spirit. Then only will our assurance be perfect, when we shall see Jesus as he is, and be completely freed from all our infirmities. For these, in whatever degree they prevail, will so far affect the strength and steadiness of our confidence in God.

3. This knowledge is wrought in us by the Spirit, through the medium of the written word. He teaches no unrevealed truths. We are not to expect that he will assure us as by a voice from heaven, or by a sudden impulse upon our hearts, that our names in particular are written in the book of life; but he opens our understandings to understand the Scripture\*; to assent to, and feel, that we are such sinners as are there described; to see the dignity and sufficiency of

Christ Jesus, as God-man, the Mediator; the suitableness of his offices; the value of his atonement and righteousness; and the harmony and glory of the Divine attributes, in the adorable methods of redeeming love, which renders it just, righteous, and worthy of God to justify and save the believing sinner<sup>†</sup>. He likewise gives us to understand the freedom and security of the Gospel promises, confirmed by the oath of God, and sealed with the blood of the Son. He shews us the establishment and immutability of the covenant of grace; convinces us, that there is a fulness of wisdom, grace, life, and strength, treasured up in Christ, for the use and support of those who in themselves are poor, miserable, and helpless, and to be freely communicated in measure and season as he sees necessary, to support, nourish, and revive the believing soul, and to lead him in the path of perseverance to everlasting life. Such a discovery of almighty power and unchangeable love engaged for the infallible salvation of every believer, which they cannot lose by their own unworthiness, nor be deprived of by all the opposition which earth or hell can raise against them\*, produces a suitable assurance in the soul that receives it. And we can confidently say, "We know we are of God," when we can in this manner know in whom we have believed.

4. Such discoveries of the person and grace of Christ are connected with a heart-felt consciousness that the believer's dependence, for all the great hopes and ends of salvation, are fixed on him and his work alone. They draw forth acts of surrender and trust, and keep the mind from forming any vain scheme of hope or refuge, either in whole or in part, from any other quarter. Indeed, from the very first dawnings of faith, as I have observed, the soul is led to commit itself into the hands of Jesus; but while knowledge was weak, and the heart very imperfectly humbled, there was a secret, though unallowed, dependence upon self, upon resolutions, frames, and duties. But as Jesus rises more glorious in the eye of faith, self is in the same degree depressed and renounced; and when we certainly see that there is no safety or stability but in his name, we as certainly feel that we expect them from him, and from him only. And the Holy Spirit assists here likewise; bears a comfortable witness with our

spirits<sup>†</sup>, by drawing us to a Throne of Grace, pleading in us as a Spirit of adoption, and prompting us to renew the renunciation of ourselves, "and to glory in Jesus, as made unto us, of God, wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption\*," from day to day. And from hence arises a solid, permanent assurance. The believer, though weak and unstable as water in himself, and though continually assaulted by a powerful combination against his peace, can look through all to Jesus, and say, "I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate me from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord<sup>†</sup>."

What remains, then, but to animate and press every sincere believer to strive, in God's appointed way, for a comfortable assurance that they are accepted in the Beloved, passed from death unto life, and infallibly freed from all condemnation. Though this knowledge is not absolutely necessary to our safety, it is exceedingly needful to make us unwearied, cheerful, and evangelical, in a course of holy obedience; to the exertion of all our powers and faculties in the service of Him who has loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood; and to give us courage to endure and surmount the many difficulties and oppositions which we are sure to meet with in the course of our profession. Unbelief and distrust weaken our hands, "and make our knees feeble<sup>‡</sup>." The more steadily we confide in God, the better we shall serve him; we shall be enabled to cast all our cares upon him; to rely on his promise to make our strength equal to our day; and, having a well-grounded expectation of receiving the end of our hope, even the salvation of our souls, we shall stand fast in the evil day, and say, "None of these things move me; neither count I my life dear, so that I may finish my course with joy\*." I would only subjoin two cautions to those who are thus minded.

1. Remember that the progress of faith to assurance is gradual. Expect it not suddenly; but wait upon the Lord for it in the ways of his appointment. As it depends upon the manifestation of the Holy

Spirit, let this engage you to constancy and earnestness in prayer; and as it arises from a knowledge of Jesus, be assiduous in searching the Scriptures, which testify of him. "The blessing of the Lord and the hand of the diligent concur in the attainment of this benefit<sup>†</sup>." If you persevere in this path, you will be helped forward by the experience of every day; and every dispensation of Providence, as well as every exercise and frame of mind you pass through, will be sanctified, to give you an increasing conviction that you are nothing, and that Jesus is all in all.

2. As you cannot see or maintain a sight of your interest in the covenant, but by the light of the Spirit, beware of grieving him<sup>‡</sup>. If you indulge a careless, trifling disposition, or venture upon known sin, you will find dark clouds raised between the Sun of Righteousness and your souls. Assurance is not so invariable, but that it may be affected, weakened, and perhaps for a season quite suspended, by unfaithfulness and backsliding on our part. If you have a persuasion of your interest in the love of God, that remains always the same, though prayer is restrained, the ordinances slighted, and watchfulness intermitted; take heed lest this, instead of assurance, should be vain confidence and presumption. The hope that maketh not ashamed, endears every precept and ordinance to the soul, weans the affections from low and trivial pursuits, and strengthens the exercise of every gracious principle.

As it is thus possible and desirable for a believer to "know that he is of God;" so a concern for many here present will not suffer me to close, without desiring you to consider if you have not cause to conclude, from Scripture testimony, that you are not of God. See the case determined by an Apostle: "Whosoever doth not righteousness, is not of God\*." And again, by another, "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his<sup>†</sup>." Are not these decisions plain and absolute? If your love and dependence are not fixed on the Lord Jesus Christ, if your tempers and practice are not governed by his commands, you are not of God. Whom, then, do you belong to? The whole world is divided between two masters, and ranged under

opposite banners. A neutrality is impossible. If you are not of God, you belong at present to Satan; you are his captive‡; he leads you blindfold; and he meditates your destruction when you shall have worn out your lives in his miserable service. And will you continue fond of your bondage, and follow him like an ox to the slaughter? There is a redemption-price paid, there is an arm of power revealed, in favour of such helpless, perishing prisoners. Jesus, whom we preach, "is able to take the prey out of the hand of the mighty, and to deliver the lawful captive§." The Lord help you to apply to him before iniquity is your ruin. O may he incline you to believe and be saved!|| If you reject him, you seal yourself to an aggravated condemnation, and must perish without mercy; "But if you hear his voice, and call upon his name, he is able to save to the uttermost, and to bless you, in turning every one of you from your iniquities\*."

# **BONUS SERMONS**

## **SERMON I**

### **ON THE DECEITFULNESS OF THE HEART**

The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it? I the Lord search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings. - JER. 17:9, 10.

THE prophet Jeremiah had a hard task. He was appointed to inculcate unwelcome truths upon a vain insensible people. He had the grief to find all his expostulations and warnings, his prayers and tears, had no other effect than to make them account him their enemy, and to draw reproach and persecution upon himself. He lived to see the accomplishment of his own predictions; to see the land of his nativity desolated, the city destroyed, the people almost extirpated, and the few who remained, transported into a distant country, to end their days in captivity.

Those who have resolved, honestly and steadily, to declare the word of the Lord, have, in all ages, found a part of his trial: the message they have had to deliver has been disagreeable and disregarded. It is no hard matter to frame discourses that shall meet with some degree of general approbation; nor is it difficult to foresee the reception which plain truth must often meet with: but those who undertake a charge must perform it; and ministers are bound to declare to the people every thing that regards their welfare, whether they will hear,

or whether they will forbear. If the watchman sees the danger coming, and does not blow the trumpet, to give the most public notice possible, he is answerable for all the evils that may follow. This is applied as a caution to the prophet Ezekiel; and, undoubtedly, every one who administers in holy things is concerned in it. "So thou, O son of man, I have set thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore thou shalt hear the word at my mouth, and warn them from me. When I say unto the wicked man, O wicked man, thou shalt surely die; if thou dost not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity, but his blood will I require at thine hand;" Ezek. 33. Let this awful passage plead our excuse, if, at any time, we seem too urgent, or too plain, in our discourses. Too plain or urgent we cannot be. Our business is most important: opportunities are critical and precious. It is at the hazard of our souls if we speak deceitfully; and at the hazard of yours if we speak in vain.

In the preceding verses, the prophet gives us a striking image of the opposition between the righteous and the wicked, in their present state, their hopes, and their end. The one is compared to a tree; the other to heath and stubble; the one, planted by streams of water; the other, exposed on the salt burning desert: the one, green, flourishing, and full of fruit; the other, parched and withering: the hope of the one, fixed on the Lord, the all-sufficient Almighty God; the rash dependence of the other, on a frail feeble arm of flesh. Suitable to this difference is their end: the one, blessed, provided against all evil, so that he shall not be careful in the year of drought; the other, cursed, and cut off from the expectation of any amendment. "He shall not see when good cometh." The immediate design was, perhaps, to shew the Jews, that there was no way to avert the judgments of God, and to avoid the impending evils which threatened them, but by returning to the Lord, who had begun to smite, and who alone was able to heal them. But this they refused. They preferred their own contrivances: "they leaned upon an arm of flesh;" sometimes upon Egypt, sometimes upon Assyria: one while presuming upon force; another while upon cunning. They were fruitful in expedients; and when one broken cistern failed them, had



recourse to another. But the prophet denounces the curse of God both on them and their supports, subjoining the words of my text; which may be understood, either as a farther proof of what he had said, or an assigned cause of that obstinacy and perverseness he had complained of: "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?"

But, without confining the words to the first occasion of their delivery, I shall consider them, as teaching us a doctrine, abundantly confirmed by many other passages of Scripture, "That the heart is deceitful and desperately wicked:" which I shall endeavour to illustrate in a plain familiar way. I shall, secondly, from the next verse, enforce this observation, That the heart (bad as it is) is incessantly under the Divine inspection and examination: "I the Lord search the heart and try the reins." I shall, thirdly, consider the issue and design of this inquest; that "every man" may, in the end, receive "according to his ways and according to the fruit of his doings." And may the Lord enable us so to try and examine ourselves here, that hereafter we may be found unblameable and without rebuke before him, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

1. The heart is here characterized, first, As deceitful, and that above or in all things: second, As desperately wicked: in so dangerous, so deplorable a state, as is not to be conceived or found out. "Who can know it?" The word in the original [שגא], which we translate desperately wicked, signifies a mortal, incurable disease; a disease which, seizing on the vitals, affects and threatens the whole frame; and which no remedy can reach. This idea leads us to that first transgression, whereby man, departing from God, fatally destroyed his soul's health, and sunk into that state so pathetically described by Isaiah, chap. 1. "The whole head is sick;" all the powers of the understanding disordered: "and the whole heart faint;" all the springs of the affections enfeebled. "From the sole of the foot, even unto the head, there is no soundness, but wounds, bruises, and putrefying sores;" the evil growing worse continually, and no help or helper at hand: "they have not been closed nor bound up, nor

mollified with ointment." In consequence of this deep-rooted disorder, the heart is deceitful;—that is, it deceives and fails us in every instance: it promises more than it can perform: it misleads us with vain desires; and mocks us with unsuccessful efforts: like the faint attempts of a sick man, to perform those actions which require a state of sound health and strength. That this is indeed the case, will, I think, appear from the following particulars; to which I entreat your attention.

Scripture and reason do jointly assure us, that all we see is the work of an Almighty Being:—the heavens and the earth, the sun, moon, and stars, and even the grass and flowers of the field, loudly proclaim the presence, the power, the wisdom, and the goodness of God: yet behold the extreme insensibility of man. The wisest of our species, in those places where Divine revelation was not known, ever mistook the effect for the cause; and ascribed that honour to the creature which is due only to the Creator. This was the very best of the case; for, in general, they sunk still lower, to worship stocks and stones: nay, to the eternal reproach of the natural understanding in the things of God, the more civilized any nation was, the more renowned for arts and arms, the farther they were removed from those they termed barbarians, so much the more vile and contemptible the idolatry they established generally proved. The wisdom of the Egyptians paid divine honours to cats, monkeys, and the vilest reptiles. The fine taste of the Greeks consecrated those for gods, who, if they had lived amongst men, would have been deemed the pests of society; gods who were, professedly, both patterns and patrons of the most shameful vices. The prowess of the Romans established altars to fear and paleness. So deeply were they infatuated, so totally lost to common sense, that the Apostle Paul's worst enemies could find no more plausible accusation against him, in one of the politest cities then in the world, than that he had ventured to affirm, "they were no gods who were made with hands."

Thus stood the case with Heathens: let us now come nearer home. It is to be feared, the greatest difference between them and the

generality of us called Christians, is, that we do not partake in their gross outward idolatry. In other respects, our insensibility is perhaps as much greater than theirs, as our superior knowledge renders it more inexcusable. We acknowledge a God; that there is but one; that he is the cause of all things; that in him we live, and move, and have our being. Had the poor Heathens known this, we may judge, by their application to their mistaken worship, it would have had some influence on their practice. But what numbers of "us" live altogether as "without God in the world." I come not here to make invectives; let conscience judge, and give evidence accordingly. What do we think of the perpetual presence of God around us, and within us? We know that he is acquainted with all our thoughts, words, and actions; yet are we not more effectually restrained and awed by the presence of our fellow-worms, than by the regard of that Eye which is ten thousand times brighter than the sun? How are we affected by the works of God? Has not the appearance of a fine day, or the beauty of an extensive prospect, a force to extort a sense of satisfaction from every one? but how few are there of us that can realize and acknowledge the hand of the glorious Author of these things? How seldom and how faintly, do we adopt the reflection of David? "When I consider the heavens, the work of THY fingers, the moon and stars which THOU hast ordained; Lord, what is man that thou shouldst be mindful of him?" Ps. 8. What is our judgment of the word of God, that glorious message of love, in which he has pointed out to us the way of salvation? Is not this book the least read, the least admired, and the least understood, of any? We are presently affected, we enter with all our spirit into the moving incidents (as we term them) of a romance or tragedy, though we know they are not founded on truth, nor have any relation to ourselves; but we can read the history of Jesus Christ, his life and doctrines, his death and passion, with indifference, though we say, all he spoke, or did, or suffered, was for our sakes. What are our thoughts of that eternity to which we are posting, and to which, for aught we know, a few hours may introduce us? Is it not in the power of the meanest trifle that occurs, to hide this important point from our view? It were easy to multiply particulars; but are not these sufficient to shew the deceitfulness, the

desperate wickedness, of the heart? Let me add one more: the judgments of God are now abroad in the world for these things. We have warnings all around us. We know that many fruitful lands in our neighbourhood are, in a manner, turned into a wilderness, for the sins of the inhabitants. Every post brings us tidings of some new desolation, and we cannot tell how soon the case may be our own; but we have neither sympathy for our fellow-creatures, nor concern for ourselves. We hear, we pity, we forget, in the same instant. But these things are remote. Is then what we see and feel more laid to heart? Our friends and acquaintance are taken from amongst us daily; some of them suddenly, in the midst of their warmest pursuits, or just upon the accomplishment of their most favourite schemes: we drop an unmeaning tear, and fly to every officious vanity for relief. Perhaps we are visited ourselves, and brought down to the borders of the grave: but, even against this, we are, for the most part, proof; or, if we feel a slight impression, it gradually wears off with the disease; and we return, as soon as we recover, to our former follies with redoubled ardour.

This is a slight view of the insensibility of the human heart. Let us now consider its ingratitude. The Israelites were a sample of all mankind in this respect. God visited them, in Egypt, in the midst of their affliction. Without any application on their part, he undertook and effected their deliverance: he brought them from among their enemies "with a high hand, and a stretched-out arm:" he led them safely through the wilderness: he screened them with a cloud, from the piercing beams of the sun: he gave them light by night, in a pillar of fire: he fed them with bread from heaven, and caused streams to flow in the sandy desert: he made a covenant with them, and chose them for his peculiar people: he destroyed all their enemies before them; and, at length, put them in the full and peaceable possession of a land flowing with milk and honey. Interwoven with the history of God's gracious dealings with them, we have an account of their behaviour towards him; which was a continual series of rebellion, perverseness, murmuring, and disobedience. And are we better than they? In no wise. If we had leisure to consider the natural, civil, and

religious advantages we enjoy as a nation, it would appear that we likewise have long been a peculiarly favoured people. The eye of the Lord our God has been upon us continually for good; and we have reason to say, "He has not dealt so with any nation." The history of all ages and countries, affords us no instance of national prosperity that can be compared, either for degree or continuance, with what we have enjoyed since the Revolution: nor would it be easy, I fear, to find a parallel, in any history, of our great ingratitude. What I have said in the former article will necessarily infer this: for it is impossible that those who have so little sensibility, either of the value of the gifts of God, or of his hand in bestowing them, can be grateful. The seat of gratitude is in the heart; the proof appears in the words and actions. Now, what are the prevailing subjects of conversation amongst us? Are the great things that God has done for us, the high obligations we are under to him, the comforts of our holy religion, and the nature of that blessed hope set before us by the Gospel, in the number? On the contrary, is not the least hint of these things in company, for the most part, received with reserve, if not with contempt and disgust? "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh." God, and the things of God, have little place there; but levity, detraction, ill temper, and, not seldom, profaneness and obscenity, in our discourses, too plainly discover the nature of the fountain from whence they flow. And if we look upon the actions of men in general, they are but of a piece with their words: engrossed by business, or enslaved to pleasure, for a season, all upon the stretch in amassing treasures; and then, perhaps, as restless and eager to dissipate them. Whatever passion rules them for the time, or whatever changes they may admit in their schemes, it is too plain, that a principle of gratitude to God, and a conscious desire to please him, has little influence either in forming or executing their plans. If these things are so, we have another instance of the deceitfulness and desperate wickedness of the heart: it is full of the blackest ingratitude.

Need anything be added to these two charges? Have we not said enough to confirm the prophet's assertion? If not, we can name a

third particular, if possible, more absurd and inexcusable than either of the former. Man is not only insensible of the greatest part of those things which most concern him, and ungrateful and disobedient to his Maker and Preserver, his best and only friend, but he is proud too. Though he has nothing but what he has received, has received nothing but what he has perverted and mismanaged, and must render a strict account of his mismanagement, yet he is proud. We have already seen his blindness and baseness; there wanted only pride to make him a monster indeed. And need we spend time to prove this? No. This, at least, is an universal evil. Any man may easily perceive it in every man but himself; and every thinking man may perceive it working within himself incessantly. Whether we are alone or in company, whether with friends or enemies, with those above us or those below us, pride will insinuate. Nay, in the immediate presence of God, when we come together to implore his mercy, while the most humbling confessions are upon our lips, and we are charging ourselves as most miserable, helpless sinners, even here pride will find us out. Those must be great strangers to themselves, who are not sensible of this. Now, "why is dust and ashes proud?" proud of our failings! proud of our infirmities! Is it not from hence, because the heart is deplorably diseased, desperately wicked, and deeply deceitful?

I shall pursue this point no farther. I shall not attempt to enumerate, at present, those "evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, and blasphemies," Mark 7:21, which our Lord assures us do perpetually "proceed from the heart." I chose to insist on insensibility, ingratitude, and pride; because these are the vices which, in common life, we most condemn, are willing to think ourselves most free from, and can the least bear to be charged with. And it must be allowed, that, between man and man, there is often the appearance of much generosity, gratitude, and condescension. But what will it avail us, that we stand upon some tolerable terms towards each other in these respects, if we are guilty before God? "The Lord seeth not as man seeth," 1 Sam. 16: he cannot be deceived

or put off with a fair appearance; for he "searcheth the heart, and trieth the reins." This is the next point to be considered.

II. That the heart, with all its workings and all its faults, is incessantly under the Divine inspection and examination: "I, the Lord, search the heart, and try the reins." The heart and reins, as distinguished in Scripture phrase, signify those different powers of the mind, the affections, and the thoughts. The words search and try have an emphasis in the original, which cannot be reached without a paraphrase, if at all.

The Lord searches [חַקֵּךְ] the heart: he traces, investigates, the inmost principles of our souls to their first rise, with (if I may so speak) a mathematical accuracy. He tries [בַּחֵן] the reins: he watches every rising thought; he brings it to the test of his most pure law: he examines it with the utmost exactness; as a refiner essays his metals, with a purpose to reject whatever is inferior to the prescribed standard. To form a more just idea of this scrutiny, let us ask ourselves, how we could bear to be obliged to declare aloud, in full company, every thought which passes through our minds every wish and desire of which we are conscious, without the least reserve or exception? I am persuaded there are few people so lost to shame, but, if they were brought to this trial, they would rather choose to die than comply with it. Some things they would perceive, especially upon such a provocation, which they could hardly, upon any terms, prevail with themselves to express. The Lord has mercifully kept us from the knowledge of each other's hearts, any farther than we are willing to disclose ourselves: for was every man compelled to speak all he thinks, there would be an end of society; and man would no more venture to dwell with man, than with tygers and bears. We know what mischief one ungoverned tongue may sometimes occasion: now, the tongue can do no evil, any farther than as it is an instrument of disclosing the hidden things of the heart; yet it is but a small part of these the worst tongue is capable of disclosing. What then would be the case, if all our hearts were open, all our desires known to one another? What a mixture of confusion, and defiance,

shame, rage, fear, and contempt, would overspread every countenance! and yet thus we are exposed to the searching eye of a pure and holy God. The Lord knows the thoughts of man's heart, that they are vain. He long ago declared the result of his observation. "God saw the wickedness of man was great in the earth; and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually;" Gen. 6. And, though the world was drowned for this, matters were not mended afterwards: for, upon a second survey, the judgment amounts to the same. "The Lord looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, and seek God. They are all gone aside; they are altogether become filthy; there is none that doeth good, no, not one. Their throat is an open sepulchre: with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips," Ps. 14, Isa. 59. Compare Rom. 3. How it was in our blessed Saviour's time we have already observed; and neither Scripture nor experience give us reason to hope it has been better since, or is now. The Apostle Paul has assured us, "That, in the last days (a character which it is likely coincides with our days), perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, truce-breakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, high-minded, lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God: having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof." 2 Tim. 3. Surely, I say, if these are marks of the last days, they must be already commenced. However, we see, upon the whole, how vile and hateful our hearts must appear in the sight of a heart-searching God.

III. One thing more we have to consider: That the Lord does not observe the heart of man with the indifference of a mere spectator, but as an impartial and inflexible Judge; "that he may give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings." This was the third particular to be spoken to.



But, alas! what can be said to this? Is it not sufficient to fill our souls with astonishment, and to cause all faces to gather blackness; to hear, that the Lord has purposed to render to every man according to his works; and that he sits Judge, not only upon outward actions, but examines the very thoughts and intents of the heart? Dare any of us abide the issue of such a trial? Which of us will presume to say, I am clean? To what purpose can any of us plead, I have not committed adultery, if God charges us with every inordinate desire, with every offence of the eye? What will it avail, that we have never assaulted the life of our neighbour, if every angry word, every degree of ill-will or revenge, is considered as murder in God's sight? It will not suffice to say, I am no thief or extortioner, unless we can clear ourselves of the most distant wish of possessing what was the property of another. If we are sure that we have not forsworn ourselves, but have performed to the Lord our oaths, it is only thus far well, that we shall not be condemned for open and actual perjury. But if we have at any time mentioned, or even thought of, the name of God, without the highest habitual reverence, we have taken his name in vain; and he has declared he will not hold us guiltless. That this is no gloss of my inventing, but the very words of truth, the declaration of Him by whom we must be one day judged, the fifth chapter of Matthew will inform you. There a wanton glance is styled adultery; an angry expression censured as murder; and to speak unadvisedly, even of the hairs of our head, is deemed a branch of profane swearing. And why? Because all these spring from the heart, which is "naked and open," without either covering or concealment, "in the sight of him with whom we have to do;" Heb. 4. This is thought uncomfortable doctrine, and not without reason, could we go no farther. For there is nothing in heaven or in earth, in time or eternity, that affords the least glimpse of comfort to fallen man, if either God is strict to mark what is amiss, or if he, trusting in himself, presumes to plead with his Maker. The Divine law requires perfect, unremitted, unsinning obedience: it denounces a curse upon the least failure. "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them;" Gal. 3:10; every one, without exception of person or circumstance, that continueth not, from the beginning

to the end of life, in all things, great and small, to do them, τοῦ ποιῆσαι αὐτὰ, to finish them, to do them completely, without any defect either in matter or manner. Most uncomfortable doctrine indeed, were there no remedy provided! For the law of God is as eternal and unchangeable as his nature: it must not, it cannot be attempered or brought down to our capacities; neither can the penalty be evaded: for the God of truth has said, has sworn, that "the soul that sinneth shall die," Ezek. 18:4. Here then we must receive "a sentence of death in ourselves," 2 Cor. 1:9. Here, "every mouth must be stopped, and all the world become guilty before God," Rom. 3:19. Here we must say with the Apostle, "Therefore, by the deeds of the law, there shall be no flesh justified in his sight," Gal. 2:16; "for by the law is the knowledge of sin," Rom. 3:20. O that we could all sincerely say so; that we were brought to this, to feel and confess our lost, undone estate, and our utter inability to save ourselves! then, with joy, should I proceed to what I have had in my eye all along. For with what view have I said so much upon so disagreeable a subject? Why have I attempted to lay open some of the depths of the heart? but that I might more fully illustrate the wonderful grace and goodness of God, vouchsafed to us in the Gospel; and, at the same time, shew the utter impossibility, not of being saved at all, but of finding salvation in any other way than that which God has appointed. For, behold! "God has so loved the world," John 3, that he sent his Son to accomplish that for us, "which the law could not do through the weakness of our flesh," Rom. 8. Jesus Christ performed perfect obedience to the law of God in our behalf: He died, and satisfied the penalty due to our sins: He arose from the grave as our representative: He is entered into heaven as our fore-runner. "He has received gifts for men, even for the rebellious," Psalm 68. He is "exalted" on high, to "bestow repentance and remission of sins," Acts 5, on all that seek to him. He has established his ordinances for this purpose: He has commanded his people, not to "neglect assembling themselves together." He has charged his ministers, at such seasons, to declare first the guilty, deplorable condition of mankind, and then to proclaim the glad tidings of salvation, "by faith which is in him." He has promised to be with them in this work to the end of the

world. He has promised, that where his word is faithfully preached, he will accompany it "with a spirit and power," that shall bear down all opposition. He has promised, that while we are speaking to the ear, he will, by his secret influence, apply it to the heart, and open it to receive and embrace the truth spoken, as in the case of Lydia. Who would venture to preach a doctrine so unpalatable to the carnal mind, as Jesus Christ, and him crucified? Who would undertake so ungrateful a task, as to depreciate that noble creature man, and arraign him publicly of insensibility, ingratitude, pride, and deceit; were it not that we have, first, a command, and that at our peril, to speak plain; and, secondly, a promise that we shall not speak in vain? Not that we can expect to be universally received: the time is come, when many "will not endure sound doctrine," 2 Tim. 4:3; but some there will be, whom God is pleased to save by the foolishness of preaching, so called. Some such I would hope are in this assembly. To such I say, Think not to satisfy the Divine justice by any poor performances of your own; think not to cleanse or expiate the evil of your hearts by any of your own inventions; but, "behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world," John 1:29. He died, that you may live: He lives, that you may live for ever. Put, therefore, your trust in the Lord; for with him is plenteous redemption. His sufferings and death are a complete final propitiation for sin. "He is able to save to the uttermost;" and he is as willing as he is able. It was this brought him down from heaven; for this he emptied himself of all glory, and submitted to all indignity. His humiliation expiates our pride; his perfect love atones for our ingratitude; his exquisite tenderness pleads for our insensibility. Only believe; commit your cause to him by faith and prayer. As a Priest, he shall make atonement for your sins, and present your persons and your services acceptable before God. As a Prophet, he shall instruct you in the true wisdom, which maketh wise to salvation: he shall not only cause you to know his commandments, but to love them too: he shall write them in your hearts. As a King, he shall evermore mightily defend you against all your enemies. He shall enable you to withstand temptations, to support difficulties, to break through all opposition. He shall supply you with every thing you need, for this life or a

better, out of the unsearchable riches of his grace. He shall strengthen you to overcome all things; to endure to the end: and then he shall give you a place in his kingdom; a seat near his throne; a crown of life; a crown of glory; incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away.

## **SERMON II**

### **ON THE SAVIOUR, AND HIS SALVATION**

This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief. - 1 TIM. 1:15.

THOUGH the Apostle Paul has written largely and happily upon every branch of Christian doctrine and practice; and, with respect to his writings, as well as his preaching, could justly assert, "that he had not shunned to declare the whole counsel of God;" yet there are two points which seem to have been (if I may so speak) his favourite topics, which he most frequently repeats, most copiously insists on, and takes every occasion of introducing. The one is, to display the honours, power, and faithfulness of the Lord Jesus Christ; the other, to make known the great things God had done for his own soul. How his heart was filled and fired with the first of these, is evident from almost every chapter of his Epistles. When he speaks of that mystery of godliness, "God manifested in the flesh," and the exceeding grace and love declared to a lost world, through him, the utmost powers of language fall short of his purpose. With a noble freedom he soars beyond the little bounds of criticism; and, finding the most expressive words too weak and faint for his ideas, he forms and compounds new ones, heaps one hyperbole upon another; yet, after his most laboured essays to do justice to his subject, he often breaks off in a manner that shews he was far from being satisfied with all he could say. This reflection is most obvious to those who can read him

in the original: but no disadvantages of a translation can wholly confine that inimitable ardour with which he seems to pour his whole soul into his words, when he is speaking of his Lord and Saviour. And he who can read the first chapters of his Epistles to the Ephesians, Colossians, and Hebrews, the second to the Philippians, or many similar passages, with indifference, must be, I say, not merely a person of small devotion, but of little taste and sensibility.

And how deeply his mind was impressed with the mercies he had received in his conversion and call, is equally conspicuous. He takes every occasion to aggrandize the goodness of God to himself; to exaggerate and deplore the guilt and misery of his former life, in which he once trusted; and to lament the small returns he was able to make for such blessings; even when he could say, without boasting, that he had "laboured more abundantly" than the most diligent and zealous of his fellow-servants.

A powerful abiding sense of these two points upon the Apostle's mind, have given rise to many sudden, lively, and beautiful digressions in the course of his writings. The context to the passage I have read is of this kind. Having incidentally spoken of the Gospel in the 11th verse, he is suddenly struck with the reflection of his own misery while ignorant of it, and the wonderful goodness of God, in affording him the knowledge of salvation, and honouring him, who was before a blasphemer, with a commission to publish the same glad tidings to others. This thought suspends his argument, and fills his heart and mouth with praise. And having acknowledged, that "the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant" towards himself, he subjoins the words of the text, for an encouragement to others; assuring us, that his case was not so peculiar, but that multitudes might be partakers with him in the same hope of mercy.

The words easily resolve into two parts:

First, A short, but comprehensive proposition, including the purport of the whole Gospel, "that Jesus Christ came into the world to save

sinner."

Secondly, A commendation of this doctrine in a two-fold respect "as a faithful saying," and as "worthy of all acceptance;" each of these illustrated by the instance of himself; when he adds, "of whom I am chief."

I. The Apostle well knew the different reception the Gospel would meet in the world; that many poor guilty souls, trembling under a sense of sin and unworthiness, would very hardly be persuaded, that such sinners as they could be saved at all. To these he recommends it as "a faithful saying," founded upon the immutable counsel, promise, and oath of God, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners; sinners in general; "the chief of sinners;" such as he represents himself to have been. He knew, likewise, that many others, from a mistaken opinion of their own goodness, or a mistaken dependence on something of their own choosing, would be liable to undervalue this faithful saying. For the sake of these, he adds, "it is worthy of all acceptance." None are so bad but the Gospel affords them a ground of hope: none are so good as to have any just ground of hope without it. There was a time when St. Paul could have made a fair profession of himself likewise: he could say, "circumcised on the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to the righteousness which is by the law, blameless;" Phil. 3. But he has been since taught to "count all things but loss for the excellency "of the knowledge of Christ," and is content to style himself the chief of sinners.

Having thus attempted to shew the design and meaning of the words, I propose, something more at large, to unfold the proposition, and point out some of those important and extensive truths it contains. I say, some of them; for it is not possible that either men or angels can fully sound the depth of this one sentence, "that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners." I shall afterwards infer, and enforce the other part of the text, that it is indeed "a faithful saying, and

worthy of all acceptation." And may He, who came into the world to procure salvation for sinners, and is now exalted on high to bestow it, accompany the whole with his promised blessing.

The tenor of the proposition readily suggests three inquiries. First, Who this person is, here spoken of, Jesus Christ? Second, What is meant by the salvation he is said to have undertaken? Third, By what means he effected it?

Let us, first, speak of this gracious, this wonderful person, Jesus Christ. We already bear his name as professed Christians; and we speak of him as our Master, and our Lord: and so far we say well. But, as he has told us, many will call him Lord at the great day, to whom he will profess, "I never knew you whence you are; depart;" so it is to be feared there are many now, that outwardly acknowledge him, who neither know whence he is nor who he is. Though we have Moses and the prophets, the apostles and evangelists, continually with us; though it is the immediate aim and intent of all their writings, in every history, promise, prophecy, type, ceremony, and law, to set Him before our eyes; and though there is hardly an image in the material creation but is adopted by the Scriptures to shadow forth his excellency; ignorance of Jesus Christ, and what he has done for his people, is the great cause that religion appears so low and contemptible to some, and is found so tedious and burdensome by others. Let us therefore attend to the record God has given of his Son; for I propose in this article to say little of my own, but to lay before you the express, powerful, indubitable testimony of holy Scripture.

And here we are taught, first, That Jesus Christ is God. The first words of St. John's Gospel are full to this point: "In the beginning" (that is, at the commencement of time and things, when as yet nothing else existed,) "was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." To prevent a possibility of mistake, and to confirm the eternity of this Divine Word in the strongest manner, it is immediately added, "the same was in the beginning with God. All

things were made by him." And lest this likewise should be either contested or misunderstood, it is guarded by an universal negative, "without him was not any thing made that was made." Further, to prevent, if possible, the surmise, that, in these glorious words, the Eternal Word acted with a deputed power only, the Apostle subjoins, "In him was life," life essentially; and from him, as the fountain, life and light proceeded to his creatures: "In him was life, and that life was the light of men." To this agrees the declaration of St. Paul: "For by him were all things created that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him and for him;" (by his power and wisdom, for his glory and pleasure). "And he is before all things, and by him all things consist," Col. 1. Elsewhere he speaks of him expressly, as "over all God, blessed for ever; who upholdeth all things by the word of his power; the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever." It were easy to enlarge this way; but I shall content myself with observing this general proof of the Divinity of Christ, that the Scriptures, which were given to make us wise to salvation, do ascribe to him the names of God, particularly Jehovah; the essential attributes of God, such as Eternity, Omnipresence, Omnipotence; the peculiar works of God, as Creation, Providence, Redemption, and Forgiveness of Sin; and, finally, command us to pay him those Divine honours, and to rely on him with that absolute dependence, which would be idolatry if referred any where below the Supreme Majesty of heaven and earth.

Again, we learn from Scripture, that Christ is truly and properly Man. This is indeed wonderful! therefore styled "the great mystery of godliness;" 1 Tim. 3. But that He, of whom we have begun to speak, is the very person who came into the world to save sinners, we have abundant proof. The Apostle John, whose testimony we have already cited, says, a few verses lower, John 1:14, "And the Word" (that glorious Word, which was God with God) "was made flesh, and dwelt amongst us, and we beheld his glory," (that is, we, his disciples, whose eyes were spiritually enlightened, for the world in general saw nothing of it,) "as the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of



grace and truth." In other places it is said, "Himself took our infirmities and bore our sicknesses; Matth. 8:17; and was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin;" Heb. 4:15. "As the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also, himself, likewise took part of the same;" Heb. 2:14. "In the fulness of time, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman;" Gal. 4. Many are the mistakes of mortals, and wide the extremes into which mistaken mortals run! Some have rashly ventured to deny our Lord's Divinity; some have wildly and fancifully explained away his Humanity; but may we, through grace, abide by the Scriptural truth, and be directed in the midst of the path of judgment.

From this mystical union of the divine and human nature in one person, the Scripture speaks of him, thirdly, under the character of a Mediator, the "one Mediator between God and man." To this idea the names Jesus Christ, which are as ointment poured forth, direct us in their original import. The former, which signifies the Saviour, pointing out the success and efficacy of his undertaking; the latter, which is the same with Messiah, or the Anointed, expressing both his Divine appointment thereto, and the complete supply of all grace and power, wherewith he was filled for the discharge of it. Thus much for the person spoken of.

We proceed, in the next place, to consider the design of his appearance in the world: "to save sinners." And as the idea of deliverance presupposes a state of distress, it will be necessary previously to inquire into the condition of those whom he came to save; which is indeed emphatically implied in the appellation given them, sinners. Man having broken that law under which he was created, and with which his happiness was closely connected, fell under accumulated ruin. The image of God, in which he was formed, was defaced, and a far different image set up in his heart, even of him who had seduced him from his allegiance; darkness in the understanding, rebellion in the will, sensuality in the affections; the justice of God threatening a penalty he could neither satisfy nor sustain; the commandments of God still challenging an obedience he

had no longer any power to yield. The very gifts and bounties of God, with which he was encompassed, designed not only for his comfort, but his instruction, to lead him, as by so many steps, to their gracious Author, became eventually the occasions of withdrawing him farther from his duty, and increasing, as well as aggravating, his ingratitude. Thus stood man towards his Maker. With regard to his fellow-creatures, self-love and inordinate desires having raised a variety of interfering interests in the breasts of all, peace withdrew from the earth. Every man's heart and hand was set against his neighbour; and violence, rage, envy, and confusion, overspread the world. Nor could he be easier in himself; hurried by restless desires towards things either unsatisfying or unattainable, haunted with cares, tortured with pains, tired with opposition, shocked with disappointment; conscience, like the hand that appeared in Belshazzar's feast, Daniel 5, writing bitter things against him, when outward circumstances allowed a short repose: and vanity, like a worm, destroying the root of every flower that promised the fairest bloom of success. Behold a few outlines of the picture of fallen man! Miserable in his life, more miserable in the continual dread of losing such a life; miserable, most of all, that neither his fancy can feign, nor his fear conceive, the consequences of the death he dreads,—which will introduce him to the immediate presence, to the tribunal, of an incensed, almighty, ever-living God!

Such was the state from which Jesus Christ came to save us. He came to restore us to the favour of God; to reconcile us to ourselves, and to each other; to give us peace and joy in life, hope and triumph in death, and after death glory, honour, and immortality. For he came, not merely to repair, and to restore, but to exalt; not only, "that we might have life," the life we had forfeited, but "that we might have it more abundantly," John 10; that our happiness might be more exalted, our title more firm, and our possession more secure, than the state of Adam in paradise could boast, or than his posterity could have attained unto, if he had continued unsinning upon the tenor of the first covenant.

Now, could we suppose it possible, that a set of innocent beings, without any default of their own, had sunk into a state of misery, we must confess it would have been great grace and favour in the Lord Jesus to save them. But let us not forget the stress laid in the text upon the word sinners. He came to save, not the unfortunate, but the ungodly; Rom. 5. How then should every heart glow with love to him, who hath thus loved us! If any of us can hear or speak of this subject with indifference or disgust, it is to be feared we are quite strangers to the nature, or the necessity, of that salvation with which God has graciously visited his people. Let us no more usurp the sacred words of generosity, sensibility, or gratitude, if this astonishing instance of Divine goodness leaves us cold and unimpressed; especially if to this we join the consideration of the third point I proposed to speak of, By what means Jesus Christ effected this salvation for sinners.

In the passage before us, it is only said, that he came into the world on this account; which teaches us, this was the sole design of his advent; and that, coming on set purpose for this, he would leave nothing undone that was necessary to accomplish it. He emptied himself of that divine glory and honour he possessed with the Father from eternity. "He bowed the heavens, and came down" to our earth; and that not with an external glory, as a celestial messenger, to constrain the attention and homage of mankind, "but was made of a woman," Gal. 4; not of high and noble extraction in the judgment of men, "but in the form of a servant;" born in a stable, laid in a manger, brought up in an obscure and contemptible place, and reputed no higher than the Son of a carpenter. "He was despised and rejected of men: there was no form or comeliness in him," Isa. 53, to attract a general regard: on the contrary, "he came to his own, and his own received him not," John 1. Farther, as he was made of a woman, "he was made under the law;" the one in order to the other; for this was the way Divine Wisdom had appointed, and which Divine Justice required, to make salvation possible to sinners. Eternal Truth had pronounced tribulation, wrath, and anguish, upon every soul of man that doth evil. All men, in every age and place, "had corrupted their ways before God;" yet his mercy had designed,

"that where sin had abounded, grace should much more abound," Rom. 8. Jesus Christ was the grand expedient, in whom "mercy and truth met together," Psalm 85, and the inflexible righteousness of God was brought to correspond and harmonize with the peace of sinful man. That justice might be satisfied, truth vindicated, and sinners saved, "God so loved a lost world," that, when no inferior means could avail, when none in heaven or earth were willing, or worthy, or able, to interpose, "he gave his only-begotten Son," John 3. Jesus Christ, the brightness of the Father's glory, and express image of his person, "so loved the world," that he assumed our nature, undertook our cause, bore our sins, sustained our deserved punishment; and, having done and suffered all that the case required, he is now gone before, "to prepare a place," John 14, for all that believe in him and obey him. Man lay under a double incapacity for happiness; he could neither keep the law of God in future, nor satisfy for his past breach and contempt of it. To obviate the former, Jesus Christ performed a perfect unsinning obedience in our stead. To remove the latter, he became "the propitiation of our sins;" yielded up his life as a prey into the hands of murderers, and poured forth his precious blood, in drops of sweat in the garden, in streams from his side upon the cross. For this he endured the fiercest temptations of the devil, the scorn, rage, and malice of men, and drank the bitter cup of the wrath of God, when it pleased the Father to bruise him, and make his soul an offering for sin. His love carried him through all; and when he had finally overcome the sharpness of death, he opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers. In few words, he lived and died for us when upon earth: nor is he unmindful of us in heaven, but lives and intercedes on our behalf. He continually executes the offices of Prophet, Priest, and King, to his people; instructing them by his word and Spirit; presenting their persons and prayers, acceptable to God through his merits; defending them, by his power, from all their enemies, ghostly and bodily; and ordering, by his providence, all things to work together for their good, till at length they are brought home, to be with him where he is, and to behold his glory.

II. From what has been said, we may justly infer, in the first place, that "this is," as the Apostle styles it, "a faithful saying." When man first fell, God, "in the midst of judgment remembering mercy," declared, unsought and undesired, "that the Seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head;" Gen. 3. In every succeeding age, he confirmed his purpose by types, promises, prophecies, and oaths. At length, in the fulness of time, Christ, "the Desire of all nations," came into the world, fulfilled all that had been foretold, and encouraged every humble penitent sinner to come unto him, that they might have life, pardon, and peace. To doubt, or to deny, his readiness to save, is, so far as in us lies, to "make the word of God of none effect;" it is "to charge God foolishly," as though, like the heedless unskilful builder in the Gospel, he had begun to build that which was not to be finished. If, after all that is set before us, it is possible for any soul to miss salvation that sincerely desires it, and seeks it in God's appointed way, it must be because the Lord Jesus Christ either cannot or will not save them. That he cannot, is flatly false; for "all power is his in heaven and in earth;" Matth. 28; and it is particularly said, that "he is able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him;" Heb. 7: and that he will not, is as false; for he himself hath said, "Whosoever cometh unto me, I will in nowise cast out." John 6.

We may infer, secondly, that this doctrine is not only faithful, but "worthy of all acceptation." And here, methinks, I could begin anew. A point so much mistaken by some, and neglected by most, rather requires a whole, or many discourses, than to be passed over in few words. The most high and wise God has esteemed the redemption of mankind so precious, "that he spared not his only Son;" Rom. 8.—And are there any amongst us, in a land of Gospel light and liberty, where the words of wisdom are sounding in our ears every day, that dare make light of this message, just give it a hearing, and return to their farms, their merchandise, and their diversions, as though this unspeakable grace of God called for no return? Alas! "How shall we escape, if we neglect this salvation?" Heb. 2. "He that despised Moses' law died without mercy." It was dangerous, it was destructive,

to refuse him that spoke upon earth; take heed how you trifle with Him "that speaketh from heaven!" To such as neglect this, "there remains no other sacrifice for sin, but a certain fearful looking for of fiery indignation that shall devour the adversaries;" Heb. 10. Let none of us think it is well with us, merely because we were born and educated in a Christian country, have means of instruction in our hands, and enjoy frequent opportunities of presenting ourselves before God in public worship. To thousands these, so far from being advantages, will greatly aggravate their condemnation, and point the sting of the never-dying worm. Better were it for us to have been inhabitants of Tyre and Sidon, Luke 10; yea of Sodom and Gomorrah, than to appear in judgment with no better plea than this. Neither let us speak peace to ourselves, because we are not so bad as others, but perhaps live decently and comfortably, are useful in society, and perform many things that are commonly called good works. If these works spring from a true love of God, if they are framed according to the rule of his word, if they are performed by faith in Christ Jesus our Lord, they are undoubtedly good, and shall be rewarded before men and angels: if otherwise, you have already your reward, in the complacency of your own minds, and the approbation of friends and acquaintance. The Christianity of the New Testament imports more than all this. It is, to believe in Jesus Christ; so to believe in him, as to obey him in all his commands, to trust him in all his dispensations, to walk in his steps, copying out the bright example of his love, meekness, patience, self-denial, and active zeal for the glory of God, and the good of mankind. It is, from a consciousness of our utter inability to perform these great things, to depend continually upon the promised aid and direction of his Holy Spirit, to seek this assistance by frequent fervent prayer, to offer up ourselves daily as living sacrifices unto God;—and, finally, when we have done all, to be deeply sensible of our unworthiness of the least of his mercies, to confess ourselves unprofitable servants, and to place all our hopes upon this faithful saying, "That Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners."

Thus, from the consideration of the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, the greatness of our misery by nature, and the wonderful things he has done and suffered for our redemption, we may learn the complete security of that salvation he has provided, the extreme danger of neglecting it, and the folly and presumption of attempting to establish a righteousness of our own, independent of Him "who is appointed of God unto us, wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption;" 1 Cor. 1. In setting these things before you plainly and faithfully, I trust I have delivered my own soul. Time is short, life is precarious, and perhaps, to some, this may be the last opportunity of the kind that may be afforded them: God grant we may be wise in time, that, "to-day, while it is called to-day," we may hear his voice. Then we shall understand more of the text than words can teach us; then we shall experience "a peace which passeth all understanding," Phil. 4; "a joy" which "a stranger intermeddleth not with," Prov. 14; and a hope "full of glory," which shall be completed in the endless possession of those "pleasures which are at the right hand of God," Psalm 16; where sin, and its inseparable attendant sorrow, shall cease for ever; where "there shall be no more grief, or pain, or fear," Rev. 21; but every tear shall be wiped from every eye.

## **SERMON III**

### **ON THE CHRISTIAN NAME**

—And the disciples were called Christians first at Antioch. -  
ACTS 11:26, latter part.

THE evangelist Luke, having contributed his appointed part to the history of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, proceeds, in the book we style the Acts of the Apostles, to inform us of the state and behaviour of those faithful followers he left behind him on earth, when he ascended, in the name and behalf of his people, to that heaven from whence his love had brought him down. We are

informed, that the gracious promises he had made while he was yet with them, began soon to take place; for, "when the day of Pentecost was fully come," Acts 2, the Holy Spirit descended powerfully upon them, qualified them for preaching the Gospel to the whole world, and gave them an earnest of success, in making their first essay the happy means of converting about "three thousand souls."

The first believers, who "were of one heart and one soul, who continued stedfastly in the Apostle's doctrine, and had all things in common," would probably have been well content to have lived together in Jerusalem, till death had successively transplanted them to the Jerusalem which is above. But this was not to be their rest; and their Lord, who had appointed them to be "the salt of the earth," and "the light of the world," Matth. 5, made use of the rage of their enemies to effect that separation which those who are united by the grace of God are often so loth to yield to. Little did Herod and the Jews consider what would be the consequence of the persecution they raised against the church of Christ: but persecutors are always blind, and counteract their own designs. So here; for we are told, that those whom they scattered abroad, "went every where preaching the word." Thus, the word of the Lord "ran and was glorified;" their bitterest enemies contributing to push it forward, till, in a few years, it was published "from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth." Psalm 72.

For a while these faithful followers of the Lamb were known only by particular names, according to the different humours of different places; Nazarenes, Galileans, the people of that way, pestilent fellows, and the like: but at length, when they grew more numerous, when their societies were regularly formed, and their enemies universally alarmed, they began to bear a more general and emphatical name. St. Luke has informed us, that this was the case in fact, and has likewise told us where it first obtained; and as I suppose he did not this without some design, I shall endeavour to draw some observations for our use and direction, from this remark in the text, that "the disciples were called Christians first at Antioch:" which I



shall divide into two; thus—That the first general name by which the disciples were distinguished from the world, and united among themselves, was that of Christians; and, secondly, That this took place at Antioch. Thus the propositions lie in the text; but, in treating of each, it may be more convenient to invert this order, and consider the latter as previous to the other.

Now, if we consider the state of the city of Antioch, before, at the time, and since the event which is here recorded; from each of these views we may gather some lesson of instruction for ourselves; which ought to be our view in all we read, but especially when we read those books "which are able to make us wise unto salvation," and where no one sentence is insignificant. But let us not forget, with all we read and hear concerning religion, to mingle our frequent prayers to the great Author and Fountain of all grace, for that aid and assistance of his Holy Spirit, without which we can do nothing to advantage.

Antioch, the capital of Syria, built about three hundred years before Christ, had been long the most flourishing city of the East: the most remarkable circumstance of its ancient state, as suiting our present purpose, was its having been the seat and residence of Antiochus, the most cruel and inveterate enemy of the church and people of God; the most direct and eminent type of that Antichrist who was afterwards to appear in the world; spoken of expressly by prophecy in Daniel, chap. 11; the completion of which you may see at large in the First Book of Maccabees, in Josephus, and more briefly in the 79th and 80th Psalms. But behold the wisdom, the power, and the providence of God! When his people were brought low, he helped them: he set those bounds to the rage of the adversary which could not be broken through; and, at length, in his appointed time, he erected this first general standard of the Gospel, upon the very spot where his grand enemy had so long encamped, and from whence his pernicious counsels and enterprises had so far proceeded. The application of this is very suitable to the times in which we now live. We see a powerful combination against the Protestant interest. Our

enemies are many and mighty: their designs, we have reason to believe, are deep laid, and their efforts unwearied. Once and again our hopes have been almost swallowed up: and though we, through the singular goodness of God, have hitherto escaped, the storm has fallen heavy upon our brethren abroad. What may be the immediate issue of the present threatening appearances, we know not: but we may encourage ourselves from the experience of past ages, as well as from the sure promises of Scripture, that however "the kings of the earth may assemble, and the rulers take counsel together," Psalm 2, God "has a hook in their nose, and a bridle in their jaws," Isa. 37; and all their force and policy shall at last bring about what they least desire and intend—the welfare and glory of God's church. He that caused the Christian name to go forth first at Antioch, where the truth of God had been most eminently and successfully opposed, can likewise introduce a temper and worship truly Christian, in those places which at present seem destitute of either. And for this it is our duty continually to pray.

Again; if we consider the state of Antioch at the time the disciples were first called Christians there, we may learn how to form a judgment of our profession. This city was then luxurious and dissolute to a proverb, even in Asia, where luxury and effeminacy were universally prevalent. Whether this name was assumed by the disciples, or imposed by their enemies, we cannot doubt but that, in common repute, it was a term of the most extreme reproach and ignominy. Nor can I suppose the worst appellations any sect in succeeding ages has been doomed to bear, have implied half of that contempt which an inhabitant of Antioch or Daphne expressed when he called a man a Christian. If we imagine a set of people, who, at this time, in France, should style themselves the disciples of the late Damien, and be called after his name, we may perhaps form some idea of what the people of Antioch understood by the word Christian. The Apostle assures us, that he and his brethren were "accounted the filth and offscourings of all things," 1 Cor. 4 ὡς περικαθαρματα τοῦ κοσμου—παντων περιψημα. He has chosen two words of the most vile and despicable signification; which, I believe, no two words in

our language will fully express. The outward state of things is since changed, and the external profession of Christianity is now no reproach; but let us not imagine the nature of things is changed too. It was then received as a maxim, that "all who will live godly in Christ Jesus, must suffer persecution," 2 Tim. 3; and it is a truth still, founded upon Scripture, and confirmed by experience. If we know nothing of it in our own cases, it is because our tempers and manners have hitherto been too conformable to that wicked world which in our baptisms we were engaged to renounce. I shall have occasion to speak farther upon this point before I close: in the mean time, here is a test to examine ourselves by. If we could not glory in the Christian name, under the same circumstances as the disciples bore it at Antioch, we are as yet unworthy of it. Let conscience judge.

Once more: Antioch, the city where the Gospel once so flourished that from thence the whole Christian church received that name by which it is still called, is now no more. It has been a heap of ruins more than five hundred years. The light of the Gospel has been long withdrawn: gaiety and festivity are likewise forgot. Slavery, imposture, and barbarism, have blotted out the resemblance, and even the remembrance, of what it once was. O that our yet happy land could from hence take a timely warning! Our privileges are great; perhaps greater, all things considered, than any nation has possessed since the days of Solomon. Our preservation hitherto has been wonderful: often have we been in extreme danger, but have always found deliverance at hand. Yet let us not be high-minded; our sins and aggravations (it is to be feared) have been, and still are, very great likewise; and God, we see, is no more a respecter of places than of persons. Antioch is ruined, Rev. 3; Philadelphia, which received so honourable a testimony from the mouth of the Lord himself, has been long since destroyed. Let us beware of boasting; let us not presume too much on what we are; nor say, "The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord is here," Jer. 7; we are the bulwark of the Protestant interest, and none can hurt us. If the Lord is with us, it is true; if we "walk worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called," we are safe; but, if otherwise, we know not how soon God may visit us

with his heavy judgments, war, famine, discord, or pestilence, till we become a warning to others, as others are now proposed warnings to us. Our liberties, our properties, our religion, are in God's hands: may he incline our hearts to true repentance, lest at length these blessings should be taken from us, and given to a people that will bring forth more fruit.

There is an ambiguity in the original word χρηματισαι, which our translation renders called: for, though that is the more general sense it bears in heathen writers, wherever it occurs in the New Testament, except in this passage, and in Rom. 7:3, it signifies to be taught or warned by a revelation from Heaven. Thus it is spoken of Joseph and the Wise Men, Matth. 2; Simeon, Luke 2; Cornelius, Acts 10; Noah, Heb. 11; and elsewhere. It does not therefore appear quit certain from the text, whether the disciples chose this name for themselves, or the wits of the time fixed it upon them as a mark of infamy; or, lastly, whether it was by the special direction of the Spirit of God that they assumed it. But I incline to the latter supposition; partly, because, in those happy days, it was the practice and the privilege of the disciples to ask, and to receive, direction from on High, in almost every occurrence; but, chiefly, on account of the excellent instructions couched under this emphatical name, sufficient to direct and to animate those who were to be known by it, in their duty to each other, to God, and to the world. Some of these I propose to infer from the other proposition contained in the text, that the first name by which the followers of the Gospel were generally known, was that of Christians.

Hitherto, as they were separated from the world, so they had been divided among themselves; and so strong were the prejudices subsisting between the members of the same body, that we find, in the beginning of this chapter, some of one party contended with the Apostle Peter only for eating with those of another. Hence we read the phrases, we of the Jews, they of the Gentiles. But henceforward they are taught to blend and lose the greater distinction of Jew and Gentile, and the lesser divisions of Paul, Apollos, and Cephas, in a

denomination derived from Him who alone was worthy to be their Head, and who was equally "rich in mercy to all that call upon him" in every place. And as they thus were taught union and affection among themselves, so their relation to God, the way of their access to him, and their continual dependence upon him, were strongly implied in this name. A Christian is the child of God by faith in Christ: he draws near to God in the name of Christ: he is led and supported by the Spirit of Christ: Christ is the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, of the faith, hope, and love of every believer. From him alone every good desire proceeds: by him alone every good purpose is established: in him alone any of our best performances are acceptable. Let us beware (it is a necessary caution in these days) of a Christianity without Christ. I testify to you in plain words, that this is no better than a house without a foundation, a tree without a root, a body without a head, a hope without hope; a delusion, which, if persisted in, will end in irremediable destruction: "for other foundation can no man lay, than that which is laid, Christ Jesus;" he is the cornerstone, "chosen of God and precious." Alas! for those who are offended with him in whom God is well pleased! but those who trust in him shall never be ashamed. This is another important lesson comprised in the word Christian.

Nor is this all; but in the name of Christian they might, and we may, read the terms upon which we are to stand with the world. If I was asked what the words Platonist or Pythagorean signified, I should say they expressed certain persons, who embraced the sentiments, submitted to the institutions, and imitated the conduct of Pythagoras and Plato; and, in order to describe them farther, I need do no more than give an account of the lives and writings of their respective masters. Could I thus, in some distant, unknown country, where the name of Christianity had been only heard of, have an opportunity of declaring the history, the doctrines, and the laws, of Jesus Christ; how he lived, how he taught, how he died, and upon what account; what usage he himself received from the world, and what he taught his followers to expect after he should leave them: if I should then describe the lives and the treatment of his most eminent servants,

who lived immediately after him, and shew, "that as he was, so were they in the world," 1 John 4; that, pursuing his pattern, they found exactly the same opposition;—would not the inhabitants of such a country conclude, even as the Scripture has assured us, that the temper of Christianity, and the temper of the world, must be exactly opposite; and that, as it is said, "Whoever will be a friend of the world is an enemy of God," James 4; so whoever had boldness to profess himself a friend of God, must necessarily be an enemy to the world, and would be sure to find the world, and all in it, at sworn enmity with him? But if I should farther tell them, that though the same laws, the same warnings, and the same examples, still subsist; yet that fierce opposition I have spoken of is at length nearly over, so that none are better pleased with the world, or more agreeable to it, than many of those who speak most honourably of the Christian name: would not these people immediately infer, that one of these contending powers must have yielded to the triumphant genius of the other? that either the whole world were become such Christians as those who were first styled so at Antioch, or that modern Christians must be, for the most part, so only by profession, and have neither right nor pretence to their ancient spirit? And could we suppose farther, that, after this information, some of these remote people were to land at Dover, and make the tour of this kingdom, can you think they would be long in determining which of these is indeed the case?

Numbers are deceived by restricting many passages in the New Testament to the times in which they were delivered, though it seems to have been the great care of the Apostles to prevent, if possible, our making this mistake. St. John, having expressly said, "If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him," immediately explains what he means by the world; namely, "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life," 1 John 2. If high distinction, vain shew, and sensual pleasure make no part of the world at this day, I must allow that we have no part in the Apostle's decision, nor any cause to observe his caution: but if these things are as highly prized, as eagerly, and almost as universally pursued, now in Britain,

as they were sixteen hundred years since at Rome and Antioch, surely we bear the name of Christians in vain; if our hopes and fears, our joys and sorrows, our comforts and our cares, are not very different from those of the generality among whom we live. "If any man," says St. Paul, "have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of his," Rom. 8. Now, whatever more is meant by the phrase of "having the spirit of Christ," it must certainly mean thus much at least; a disposition and turn of mind in some degree conformable to the mind that was in Christ Jesus, to be evidenced by a life and conversation suitable to his precepts and example. "He was holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners: he went about doing good," Heb. 7. He was gentle and compassionate, meek and patient under the greatest provocations: so active for the glory of God, that his zeal, by a strong and lively figure, is said to have "eaten him up," John 2; so affected with the worth of souls, that he wept over his bitterest enemies; so intent on his charitable designs towards men, that an opportunity of helping or instructing them, was as meat and drink when he was hungry, John 4, and made him forget weariness and pain; so full of devotion towards God, that when the day had been wholly consumed in his labours of love, he would frequently redeem whole nights for prayer! Luke 6. But I must stop. No pen can describe, no heart conceive, the life of the Son of God in the flesh! Yet, in all these things he was our great Exemplar; and no profession or appellation can benefit us, unless we are of those who copy closely and carefully after him. For thus saith the beloved Apostle, "He that saith he abideth in him, ought himself so to walk even as he walked. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him," 1 John 2.

I shall conclude with a short address to three sorts of persons. And, first, If there are any such here (would to God this part of my labour may prove needless), I would recommend this subject to the consideration of those who have almost, if not altogether, cast off the honourable name into which they were baptized; who, trusting to what they call the light of nature, and the powers of human reason, venture to determine the fitness of things by their own standard, and

declare in their words, as well as by their actions, "they will not have this man to rule over them," Luke 19. Is not this an unaccountable event upon your plan, that the name which first went out from Antioch, under the greatest disadvantages, should so soon overspread the world, without arts or arms, without any force, or any motive of an external kind? Is it possible, that any kind or degree of enthusiasm could influence, not a few, at one time, or in one place, but multitudes, of all ages, sexes, tempers, and circumstances, to embrace a profession which, in proportion to the strictness wherewith it was followed, was always attended with reproach and suffering? Those places which were most noted for opposition to this way, have been long since buried in the dust: but a succession of those whom the world counted "not worthy to live," and "of whom the world was not worthy," Acts 25, Heb. 11, has always subsisted, and still subsists. Had you lived in those days when Jesus Christ assured a company of poor disregarded fishermen, that neither the power nor the policy of the world, nor "the gates of hell should ever prevail against them," Matth. 16, you might have been less inexcusable in refusing to believe him. But now—when you have the accomplishment of this promise before your eyes, and well know (for you are book-read) what various attempts have been made, with what steadiness and formidable appearances they have been for a while carried on, to render these words vain, but how at length all such attempts have totally failed, and ended in the confusion and ruin of those who engaged in them—what tolerable reason can you assign for the part you act? Does the tendency of the Gospel displease you? Is it an enemy to that virtue you are so fond—to talk of? On the contrary, we are ready to put it to the proof, that here are not only the sublimest maxims of true virtue, but that the practice, or even the real love of virtue, are quite unattainable upon any other scheme; and that the most specious pretences, independent of this, are no more than great "swelling words of vanity," 2 Pet. 2.—I speak the more freely upon this point, because I speak from experience. I was once as you are. I verily thought that I "ought to do" (or at least that I might do) "many things against Jesus of Nazareth," Acts 26. None ever went farther than I, according to the limits of my years



and capacity, in opposing the truths of the Gospel. But the mercy of God spared me; and his providence having led me through various changes and circumstances of life, in each of which I had a still deeper conviction of my former errors, has at length given me this opportunity to tell you (O that I could speak it to your hearts!) "that at the name of Jesus every knee," sooner or later, "must bow," Phil. 2; before him every heart must either bend or break: that he is full of mercy, love, and pardon, to all that submit themselves to him; but that ere long, he shall be "revealed from heaven in flaming fire, to execute judgment, and to convince ungodly sinners of all the hard speeches they have spoken against him," Jude.—I would, 2ndly, address those who, while they profess to believe in the Lord Jesus, do, in their works, manifestly deny him, Tit. 1. This is, if possible, a worse case than the other: yet how frequent! You believe that Jesus Christ came into the world, both to be a propitiation for sin, and also to give us an example of a godly life, and yet continue contentedly in the practice of those sins for which he poured forth his soul, in the pursuit of those vices which the Gospel disallows, and in the indulgence of those desires which your own consciences condemn. Think, I entreat you, of these words in the 50th Psalm: "Unto the wicked God saith, What hast thou to do, that thou shouldst take my covenant into thy mouth; seeing thou hatest instruction, and castest my words behind thee?" This question is now proposed to our consciences, that we may be aware in time of the danger of insincerity; and not "perish with a lie in our right hands," Isa. 44. If we cannot answer it now, what shall we say in that awful hour when God shall speak it in ten thousand thunders, to all who, in this life, presumed to mock him with an empty outside worship, "drawing near him with their lips, when their hearts were far from him?" Isa. 29. For the day is at hand, "the day of the Lord," when God shall bring "every hidden thing to light;" when every man's work shall be tried and weighed; tried in the fire of His purity, weighed in the balance of His righteousness; and as the issue proves, so must the consequence abide to all eternity: a trial and a scrutiny which no flesh could abide, were it not for the interposing merits of Jesus Christ, our Saviour and our Judge. But he has already told us, that he

will then own none but those who were faithfully devoted to his service here. To the urgent cries and strongest pleas of others, he will give no other answer, but "I know you not; I never knew you," Matth. 7; "depart from me, ye accursed, into everlasting fire," Matth. 25.—What will it then avail to plead our privileges, when, if this be all, we may read our doom already? "And that servant who knew his master's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes: for unto whomsoever much is given, of him much shall be required; and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more. O consider this, ye that forget God, lest he tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver." Luke 12; Psalm 1.

Finally, Let those who through grace have attained to worship God "in spirit and in truth," be careful to adorn and hold fast their profession. "You see your calling, brethren:" let the name of Christian always remind you of your high obligation to, and continual dependence upon, the Author of your faith. Use it as a means to animate and regulate your whole behaviour; and if, upon some occasions, you find undeserved ill offices, or unkind constructions, wonder not at it: thus it must and will be, more or less, to all who would "exercise themselves in keeping a conscience void of offence," Acts 24. Yet be careful to model your actions by the rule of God's word. Our Lord says, "Blessed are ye when men revile you, and say all manner of evil against you, falsely, for my sake," Matth. 5. Observe, first, the evil spoken of you, must be false and groundless; and, 2ndly, the cause must be "for the sake of Christ," and not for any singularities of your own, either in sentiment or practice, which you cannot clearly maintain from Scripture. It is a great blessing when the innocence and simplicity of the dove is happily blended with true wisdom. It is a mercy to be kept from giving unnecessary offence in these times of division and discord. Endeavour that a principle of love to God, and to mankind for his sake, may have place in all your actions; this will be a secret, seasonable, and infallible guide, in a thousand incidents, where particular rules cannot reach. "Be sober, be vigilant;" "continue

instant in prayer;" and in a little while all your conflicts shall terminate in conquest, faith shall give place to sight, and hope to possession. Yet a little while, and "Christ, who is our life, shall appear," Col. 3, to vindicate his truth, to put a final end to all evil and offence; and then we also, even all who have loved him, and waited for him, "shall appear with him in glory." Isa. 25.

## **SERMON IV**

### **ON ALL THINGS BEING GIVEN US WITH CHRIST**

He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? - ROM. 8:32.

VARIOUS have been the disputes and various the mistakes of men, concerning the things of God. Too often, amidst the heat of fierce contending parties, truth is injured by both sides, befriended by neither. Religion, the pretended cause of our many controversies, is sometimes wholly unconcerned in them: I mean, that "pure religion and undefiled," that "wisdom which, coming from above," abounds with proof of its Divine original, being "pure, peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good works, without partiality, and without hypocrisy," James 3. Religion is a serious and a personal concern. It arises from a right knowledge of God and ourselves; a sense of the great things he has done for fallen man; a persuasion, or at least a well-grounded hope, of our own interest in his favour; and a principle of unbounded love to him who thus first loved us. It consists in an entire surrender of ourselves, and our all, to God; in setting him continually before us, as the object of our desires, the scope and inspector of our actions, and our only refuge and hope in every trouble: finally, in making the goodness of God to us the motive and model of our behaviour to our fellow-creatures; to love,

pity, relieve, instruct, forbear, and forgive them, as occasions offer, because we ourselves both need and experience these things at the hand of our heavenly Father. The two great points to which it tends, and which it urges the soul, where it has taken place, incessantly to press after, are, communion with God, and conformity to him; and as neither of these can be fully attained in this life, it teaches us to pant after a better; to withdraw our thoughts and affections from temporal things, and fix them on that eternal state, where we trust our desires shall be abundantly satisfied; and the work begun by grace shall be crowned with glory.

Such is the religion of the Gospel. This the life and doctrine of our Lord, and the writings of his Apostles, jointly recommend. An excellent abridgment of the whole we have in this eighth chapter to the Romans, describing the state, temper, practice, privileges, and immoveable security, of a true Christian. Every verse is rich in comfort and instruction, and might, without violence, afford a theme for volumes; particularly, that which I have read may be styled *evangelium evangelii*; a complete and comprehensive epitome of whatever is truly worthy our knowledge and our hope. The limits of our time are too narrow to admit any previous remarks on the context, or indeed to consider the subject according to the order of an exact division: therefore I shall not at present use any artificial method; but, taking the words as they lie, I shall offer a few practical observations, which seem naturally and immediately to arise from the perusal of them, making such improvement as may occur as I go along. And may the Father of mercies, who has put this treasure into our hands, favour us with his gracious presence and blessing.

I. From the words, "He spared not his own Son," we may observe, in one view, the wonderful goodness and inflexible severity of God. So great was his goodness, that, when man was by sin rendered incapable of any happiness, and obnoxious to all misery; incapable of restoring himself, or of receiving the least assistance from any power in heaven or in earth; God spared not his only begotten Son, but, in his unexampled love to the world, gave him, who alone was able to

repair the breach. Every gift of God is good: the bounties of his common providence are very valuable; that he should continue life, and supply that life with food, raiment, and a variety of comforts, to those who by rebellion had forfeited all, was wonderful: but what are all inferior blessings, compared to this unspeakable gift of the Son of his love? Abraham had given many proofs of his love and obedience before he was commanded to offer up Isaac upon the altar; but God seems to pass by all that went before, as of small account in comparison of this last instance of duty: "Now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, from me," Gen. 22. Surely we likewise must say, "In this was manifested the love of God to us, because he gave his Son, his only Son, to be the life of the world." But all comparison fails: Abraham was bound in duty, bound by gratitude; neither was it a freewill offering, but by the express command of God; but to us the mercy was undesired, as well as undeserved. "Herein is love; not that we loved God;" on the contrary, we were enemies to him, and in rebellion against him, "but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation of our sins," the sins we had committed against himself. My friends, ought not this love to meet a return? Is it not most desirable to be able to say, with the Apostle, upon good grounds, "We love him, because he first loved us?" Should it not be our continual inquiry, "What shall we render to the Lord for all his benefits?" especially for this, which is both the crown and the spring of all the rest! Are we cold and unaffected at this astonishing proof of Divine love? and are not our hearts grieved and humbled at our own ingratitude? Then are we ungrateful and insensible indeed!

The justice and severity of God is no less conspicuous than his goodness in these words: as he spared not to give his Son for our sakes, so, when Christ appeared in our nature, undertook our cause, and was charged with our sins, though he was the Father's well-beloved Son, "he was not spared." He drank the bitter cup of the wrath of God to the very dregs: he bore all the shame, sorrow, and pain, all the distress of body and mind, that must otherwise have fallen upon our heads. His whole life, from the manger to the cross,

was one series of humiliation and suffering; John 18. Observe him in the world, despised, vilified, persecuted even to death, by unreasonable and wicked men; ridiculed, buffeted, spit upon; and at length nailed to the accursed tree! Consider him in the wilderness, Luke 4, given up to the power and assaulted by the temptations of the devil! Behold him in the garden, Luke 22, and say, "Was ever sorrow like unto his sorrow, wherewith the Lord afflicted him in the day of his fierce anger?" How inconceivable must that agony be, which caused his blood to forsake its wonted channels, and start from every pore of his body! Behold him, lastly, upon the cross, Matth. 27, suffering the most painful and ignominious death; suspended between two thieves; surrounded by cruel enemies, who made sport of his pangs; derided by all that passed by! Attend to his dolorous cry, expressive of an inward distress beyond all we have yet spoken of, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me! St. Paul reminds the Galatians, that, by his preaching among them, Jesus Christ had been "evidently set forth crucified before their eyes," Gal. 3. Would it please God to bless my poor words to the like purpose, you would see a meaning you never yet observed in that awful passage, "Tribulation, and wrath, and anguish upon every soul of man that doth evil," Rom. 2; for the punishment due to the sins of all that shall stand at the last day on the right hand of God met and centred in Christ, the Lamb of expiation; nor was the dreadful weight removed till he, triumphant in death, pronounced "It is finished," John 14. Let us not think of this as a matter of speculation only; our lives, our precious souls, are concerned in it. Let us infer from hence, how "fearful a thing it is to fall into the hands of the living God," Heb. 10. The Apostle Peter, 2 Pet. 2, admonishes those to whom he wrote from the fearful example of the angels who sinned, and of the old world; where the same word is used as in my text, οὐκ ἐφείσατο, "he spared them not;" that is, he punished them to the utmost; he did not afford them the least mitigation. It is a frequent figure of speech, by which much more is understood than is or can be expressed. Much more then may we say, if God "spared not his Son, what shall be the end of those who obey not the Gospel?" 1 Pet. 4. If the holy Jesus was thus dealt with, when he was only accounted a sinner by

imputation, where shall the impenitent and the ungodly appear? "If these things were done in the green tree, what shall be done in the dry?" Luke 23. The punishment of sin in the soul in a future state is twofold: the wrath of God in all its dreadful effects, typified by fire unquenchable, Mark 9; and the stings of conscience, represented by a worm that never dies. Our Lord endured the former; but the other, perhaps, could have no place in him, who was absolutely perfect and sinless. But if the prospect of one made him amazed and sorrowful beyond measure, what consternation must the concurrence of both raise in the wicked, when they shall hear and feel their irrevocable doom! May we have grace so to reflect on these things, that we may flee for safety to the hope set before us, to Jesus Christ, the only and the sure refuge from that approaching storm, which "shall sweep away all the workers of iniquity as a flood," Isa. 23.

II. Here, as in a glass, we may see the evil of sin. The bitter fruits of sin are indeed visible every where. Sin is the cause of all the labour, sickness, pain, and grief under which the whole creation groans. Sin often makes man a terror and a burden, both to himself and those about him. Sin occasions discord and confusion in families, cities, and kingdoms. Sin has always directed the march, and ensured the success, of those instruments of Divine vengeance whom we style mighty conquerors. Those ravagers of mankind, who spread devastation and horror far and wide, and ruin more in a few days than ages can repair, have only afforded so many melancholy proofs of the malignity of sin. For this, a shower of flaming brimstone fell upon a whole country; for this, an overwhelming deluge destroyed a whole world; for this, principalities and powers were cast from heaven, and are reserved under chains of darkness, 2 Pet. 2, to a more dreadful doom. But none of these things, nor all of them together, afford such a conviction of the heinous nature and destructive effects of sin, as we may gather from these words, "He spared not his own Son."

III. Here we may likewise see the value of the human soul. We ordinarily judge of the worth of a thing by the price which a wise

man, who is acquainted with its intrinsic excellency, is willing to give for it. Now, the soul of man was of such estimation in the sight of God, who made it, that, when it was sinking into endless ruin, "he spared not his own Son, but freely delivered him for our ransom." Two things especially render the soul thus important in the view of Infinite Wisdom: first, the capacity he had given it; for "he formed it for himself," Isa. 43, capable of knowing, serving, and enjoying God; and, by consequence, incapable of happiness in any thing beneath him; for nothing can satisfy any being but the attainment of its proper end: and, secondly, the duration he had assigned it, beyond the limits of time, and the existence of the material world. The most excellent and exalted being, if only the creature of a day, would be worthy of little regard\*. On the other hand, immortality itself would be of small value to a creature that could rise no higher than the pursuits of animal life. But in the soul of man the capability of complete happiness or exquisite misery, and that for ever, make it a prize worthy the contention of different worlds. For this an open intercourse was maintained between heaven and earth, till at length the Word of God appeared "in the likeness of sinful flesh," that, in our nature, he might encounter and subdue the sworn enemy of our species. All that has been transacted in the kingdoms of providence and grace, from the beginning of the world, has been in subserviency to this grand point, the redemption of the deathless soul. And is it so—and shall there be found among us numbers utterly insensible of their natural dignity; that dare disparage the plan of Infinite Wisdom, and stake those souls for trifles, which nothing less than the blood of Christ could redeem? There is need to use great plainness of speech; the matter is of the utmost weight; be not therefore offended that I would warn you against "the deceitfulness of sin." Suffer not your hearts to be entangled in the vanities of the world; either they will fail, and disappoint you in life, or at least you must leave them behind you when you die. You must enter an invisible unknown state, where you cannot expect to meet any of those amusements or engagements which you now find so necessary to pass away the tedious load of time that hangs upon your hands. You, to whom a few hours of leisure are so burdensome, have you considered how you



shall be able to support an eternity? You stand upon a brink, and all about you is uncertainty. You see, of your acquaintance, some or other daily called away—some who are as likely to live as yourselves. You know not but you may be the very next. You cannot be certain, but "this very night your soul may be required of you," Luke 12. Perhaps a few hours may introduce you into the presence of that God whom you have been so little desirous to please. And can you, in such a situation, sport and play, with as little concern as the lamb already marked out to bleed to-morrow? Oh! it is strange! How fatally has the god of this world blinded your eyes! and how dreadful must your situation be in death, if death alone can undeceive you!

IV. Lastly, We may gather from these words the certainty of the Gospel salvation. God himself delivered up his Son for us all. He declared himself well pleased with him, Matth. 3, as our Surety, upon his first entrance on his work; and testified his acceptance of his undertaking, in that he raised him from the dead, and received him into heaven as our Advocate. Now, "if God himself be thus for us, who can be against us?" Rom. 8. If he who only has right to judge us is pleased to justify us, "who can lay any thing to our charge? If Christ who died" for our sins, and is risen on our behalf, has engaged to "intercede for us, who shall condemn?" "There is now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus." Nor is this all; but every thing we stand in need of is fully provided; and we may well argue, as the Apostle has taught us elsewhere, "If when we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life," Rom. 5; or, as in the passage before us, "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all," when we were alienated from him, "how shall he not with him freely give us all things," now he has taught us to pray, and given us his own promises to plead for all we ask? This brings me to the second clause of the text; only it may be proper, before I enter upon it, to subjoin two cautions, to prevent mistakes from what has been already said.

1st, Let us remember that all is free gift. He gave his Son; he gives all things with him. The Gospel allows no place for merit of our own in any respect. There was no moving cause in us, unless our misery may be deemed such. Our deliverance, in its rise, progress, and accomplishment, must be ascribed to grace alone; and he that would glory, must "glory in the Lord." 1 Cor. 1.

2nd, Let us observe the Apostle's phrase. He says, not absolutely for all, but for us all; that is, those who are described in the former part of the chapter, "who are led by the Spirit of God, who walk not after the flesh, who are delivered from the bondage of corruption," who have liberty to call God, "Abba, Father," and prove their relation by following him as "dear children." Christ is "the author of eternal salvation to those only who obey him," Heb. 5. It cannot be otherwise, since a branch of that salvation is to deliver us "from our sins," and "the present evil world," Gal. 1; to "purify us from dead works, to serve the living God." "Be not deceived, God will not be mocked; whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he reap. He that soweth to the flesh, shall," notwithstanding all that Christ has done or suffered, yea so much the rather, "of the flesh reap corruption." Gal. 6.

The text, having declared that God spared not his Son for our sakes, proceeds to infer, that "with him he will assuredly give us all things." Here we may take notice, first, that the words all things must be limited to such as are needful and good for us. It may be said of many of our desires, "Ye know not what ye ask," Matth. 20: in such cases, the best answer we can receive is a denial. For those blessings which God has promised absolutely to give, such as pardon, grace, and eternal life, we cannot be too earnest or explicit in our prayers; but in temporal things we should be careful to ask nothing but with submission to the Divine will. The promises, it is true, appertain to "the life that now is, as well as that which is to come," 1 Tim. 4. "Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are ours, if we are Christ's," 1 Cor. 3. But the particular modus of these things God has reserved in his own

hands, to bestow them as best shall suit our various tempers, abilities, and occasions. And well for us that it is so: for we should soon ruin ourselves if left to our own choice: like children who are fond to meddle with what would hurt them, but refuse the most salutary medicines, if unpalatable; so we often pursue, with earnestness and anxiety, those things which, if we could obtain them, would greatly harm, if not destroy, us. Often, too, with a rash and blind impatience, we struggle to avoid or escape those difficulties which God sees fit to appoint for the most gracious and merciful purposes—to correct our pride and vanity, to exercise and strengthen our faith, to wean us from the world, to teach us a closer dependence upon himself, and to awaken our desires after a better inheritance.

Again; as God, by his promise freely to give us all things, has not engaged to comply with the measure of our unreasonable shortsighted wishes; so neither has he confined himself as to the time or manner of bestowing his gifts. The blessing we seek, though perhaps not wholly improper, may be at present unseasonable: in this case, the Lord will suspend it till he sees it will afford us the comfort and satisfaction he intends us by it; and then we shall be sure to have it. Sometimes it is withheld to stir us up to fervency and importunity in our prayers, sometimes to make it doubly welcome and valuable when it comes. So likewise as to the manner. We ask one good thing, and he gives us an equivalent in something else; and when we come to weigh all things, we see cause to say his choice was best. Thus David acknowledges: "In the day that I called, thou didst answer me, and strengthenedst me with strength in my soul," Ps. 138. David asked for deliverance from trouble; the Lord gave him strength to bear it; and he allows his prayer was fully answered. A parallel case the Apostle records: he besought the Lord thrice, 2 Cor. 12, for the removal of that trial which he calls "a thorn in the flesh;" the answer he received was, "My grace is sufficient for thee." Such an assurance was more valuable than the deliverance he sought could be. Sometimes we seek a thing in a way of our own, by means and instruments of our own devising. God crosses our feeble purposes, that he may give us the pleasure of receiving it immediately from

himself. It were easy to enlarge on this head: let it suffice to know, our concerns are in his hands who "does all things well;" and who will, and does, appoint "all to work together for our good."

From the latter clause, thus limited and explained, many useful directions might be drawn. I shall only mention two or three, and conclude.

1st, Since we are told, that God freely gives us all things, let us learn to see and acknowledge his hand in all we have, and in all we meet with. When Jacob was returning to Canaan after a long absence, Gen. 32, the fear of his brother Esau occasioned him to divide his family and substance into separate companies; and, comparing his present situation with the poor condition in which he had been driven from home, twenty years before, he breaks out into this act of praise, "I am not worthy, O Lord, of all thy mercies; for with ray staff I passed over this Jordan, and now I am become two bands!" How pious and how cheering was this reflection! And afterwards, Gen. 33, when his brother Esau asked him concerning his sons, "They are the children (said he) which God has graciously given thy servant." Such a deep and abiding persuasion of the Most High God, ordering, and overruling all our concerns, would, like the light, diffuse a lustre and a beauty upon every thing around us. To consider every comfort of life as an effect and proof of the Divine favour towards us, would, like the feigned alchymist's stone, turn all our possessions to gold, and stamp a value upon things which a common eye might judge indifferent. Nor is this more than the truth: "The hairs of our head are all numbered," Matth. 10. The eye of Divine Providence is upon every "sparrow of the field;" nor can we properly term any circumstance of our lives small, since such as seem most trifling in themselves do often give birth to those which we judge most important. On the other hand, to be able to discover the wisdom and goodness of our heavenly Father, through the darkest cloud of troubles and afflictions; to see all our trials appointed to us, in number, weight, and measure; nothing befalling us by chance, nothing without need, nothing without a support, nothing without a designed advantage:

what a stay must these apprehensions be to the soul? Take away these, and man is the most forlorn, helpless, miserable object in the world; pining for every thing he has not, trembling for every thing he has; equally suffering under the pressure of what does happen, and the fear of what may; liable to thousands of unsuspected dangers, yet unable to guard against those which are most obvious. Were there no future life, it would be our interest to be truly and uniformly religious, in order to make the most of this. How unhappy must they be to whom the thoughts of a God ever present is a burden they strive, in vain, to shake off! But let us learn "to acknowledge him in all our ways," and then "he will direct and bless our paths." Prov. 3.

2nd, Since all we have is the gift of God, let this teach us, "in whatever state we are, therewith to be content." "Our heavenly Father knoweth what we have need of before we ask him," Matth. 6. "The earth is his, and the fulness thereof;" Ps. 24: and his goodness is equal to his power; a proof of which we have in the text. He has already given us more than ten thousand worlds. Are you poor? Be satisfied with the Lord's appointment. It were as easy to him to give you large estates, as to supply you with the bread you eat, or to continue your breath in your nostrils; but he sees poverty best for you: he sees prosperity might prove your ruin; therefore he has appointed you the honour of being in this respect conformable to your Lord, who, when on earth, "had not where to lay his head," Matth. 8. Have any of you lost a dear friend or relative, in whose life you thought your own lives bound up? "Be still, and know that he is God," Ps. 46. It was he gave you that friend; his blessing made your friend a comfort to you; and though the stream is now cut off, the fountain is still full. Be not like a wild bull in a net: the Lord has many ways to turn your mourning into joy. Are any of you sick? Think how the compassionate Jesus healed diseases with a word, in the days of his flesh. Has he not the same power now as then? Has he not the same love? Has he, in his exalted state, forgot his poor languishing members here below? No, verily; he still retains his sympathy: "he is touched with a feeling of our infirmities; he knows our frame; he remembers we are but dust," Ps. 103. It is because

sickness is better for you than health, that he thus visits you. He dealt in the same manner with Lazarus, whom he loved, John 11. Resign yourselves, therefore, to his wisdom, and repose in his love. There is a land where the blessed inhabitant shall no more say, "I am sick," Isa. 33; and there "all that love the Lord Jesus" shall shortly be. Are any of you tempted? "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation; for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to them that love him," James 1. Sure you need no other argument to be content, or, shall I say? to rejoice, and be exceeding glad. "My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him." Heb. 12. Be it in poverty or losses, in body or mind, in your own person or another's, it is all appointed by God, and shall issue in your great benefit, if you are of the number of those that love him.

3rd, Once more: since it is said that all things are freely given us in and together with Christ, let us "give all diligence to make OUR calling and election sure," 2 Pet. 1; to know that we have an interest in him and his mediation; and then (if I may borrow a common expression) we are made for ever. The Lord Jesus Christ, sent from God on a merciful errand to a lost world, did not come empty: no, he is fraught with all blessings, suitable to all persons, extending to all times, enduring to all eternity. O make it your great care to know him and to please him; study his word, call upon his name, frequent his ordinances, observe his sayings, seek to know him as the only way to God, John 14: the way to pardon, peace, and Divine communion here, and to complete happiness hereafter. When once you can say, "My beloved is mine," Sol. Song 2, I account all his interest my own, "and I am his," I have given myself up to him without reserve; you will, you must be happy. You will be interested in all his attributes and communicable perfections. His wisdom will be your high tower, his providence your constant shield, his love your continual solace. "He will give his angels charge over you to keep you in all your ways," Ps. 81. In times of difficulty he will direct your counsels; in times of danger he will fill you with comfort, and "keep" you "in perfect peace," Isa. 26, when others quake for fear. He will bless your basket

and your store, your substance and your families: your days shall happily pass in doing your Father's will, and receiving renewed tokens of his favour; and at night you shall lie down, and your sleep shall be sweet. When afflictions befall you (for these likewise are the fruits of love), you shall see your God near at hand, "a very present help in trouble," Ps. 46; you shall find your strength increased in proportion to your trial; you shall in due time be restored, as gold from the furnace, purified sevenfold, to praise your great Deliverer. Every thing you meet in life shall yield you profit; and death, which puts a fatal period to the hope of the wicked,—death, at whose name thousands turn pale, shall to you be an entrance into a new and endless life. He who tasted death for you, Heb. 2, and sanctified it to you, shall lead and support you through that dark valley; you shall shut your eyes upon the things of time, to open them the next moment in the blissful presence of your reconciled God. You, that a minute before was surrounded by weeping, helpless friends, shall in an instant be transported and inspired to join in that glorious song, "To Him who loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests to God and his Father: to him be glory and strength, for ever and ever. Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing," Rev. 5. Thus, "blessed shall the man be that fears the Lord," Ps. 128. "Thus shall it be done (Esth. 6.) to him whom the King delighteth to honour." Amen.

## **SERMON V**

### **ON SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES**

Search the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me. - JOHN 5:39.

THE phrase in the Greek is ambiguous; and may be either rendered, according to our reading, as a command, search the Scriptures; or else as simply affirming, ye do search the Scriptures. And as the words were spoken to the Scribes and Pharisees, who were exceedingly studious in the letter of the Scriptures, this may perhaps have been their first design. The difference is not material; and either sense will afford us instruction. If we receive it as a command, we should consider it as given us by the Lord himself, whose disciples we profess to be; as bound on us by our own acknowledgment, since in them we think, and say, we have eternal life; and as absolutely necessary to be complied with, since it is these, and these only, testify of Christ, in the knowledge of whom our eternal life consists. If we should understand it in the latter sense, as spoken to the Scribes and Pharisees, it may give us a useful caution not to lay too much stress either on what we think or on what we do. For these persons we find had, in some respects, a right sentiment of the holy Scriptures: they believed that in them there was eternal life: and, in a sense likewise, they made this an inducement to read, yea, to search them. But though they thus thought and thus acted; and though the Scriptures, from the first page to the last, do testify of Christ; yet they could not understand or receive this testimony, but rejected the Messiah whom they professed to hope for, and took all their pains in searching the Scriptures to no purpose.

In what I am about to lay before you, I propose the following order: 1st, To mention a few requisites, without which it is impossible rightly to understand the Scriptures: 2nd, To shew how the Scriptures testify of Christ: 3rd, To consider what the import of their testimony is: 4th, To press the practice of searching the Scriptures from the argument used in the text, which is equally applicable to us as to the Jews of old, "that in them we think we have eternal life."

I. The first requisite I shall mention is Sincerity; I mean a real desire to be instructed by the Scripture, and to submit both our sentiments and our practices to be controlled and directed by what we read there. Without this, our reading and searching will only issue in our



greater condemnation, and bring us under the heavy doom of the servant that knew his master's will and did it not. A remarkable instance of this we have in the 42nd and two following chapters of Jeremiah. After the destruction of Jerusalem, and the death of Gedaliah, the people that were left entreated the prophet to inquire of the Lord for them, concerning their intended removal into Egypt. Their request was fair: "That the Lord thy God may shew us the way wherein we may walk, and the thing that we may do." Their engagement was very solemn: "The Lord be a true and faithful witness between us, if we do not even according to all things for the which the Lord thy God shall send to us. Whether it be good, or whether it be evil, we will obey the voice of the Lord our God, to whom we send thee." But their hypocrisy was most detestable. The Lord, who seeth the inmost purposes of the soul, could not be put off with their fair pretences. He sent them in answer an express prohibition to go into Egypt; assuring them that his curse should follow them, and that there they should certainly perish. Yet they went, and verified what the prophet had told them: "For ye dissembled in your hearts, when ye sent me to the Lord your God, saying, Pray for us unto the Lord our God, and according to all that the Lord our God shall say, so declare unto us, and we will do it." Then they spoke out, and, like themselves, when they told him, "As for the word which thou hast spoken unto us in the name of the Lord, we will not hearken unto thee, but we will certainly do whatever thing goeth forth out of our own mouth." None of us dare speak thus in express terms: but if we bring our preconceived opinions or purposes, not in order to examine them strictly by the test of Scripture, but to find or wrest some passages in the word of God to countenance or justify ourselves; if our desire is not simply to be led in the very way of God's commandments; if we are not really willing to discover every error and evil that may be in us, in order to forsake them; we closely imitate these deceitful, obstinate, insolent Jews, be our pretences ever so fair, and are liable to the like dreadful judgment for our hypocrisy,—the curse of God upon our devices here, and the portion of his enemies hereafter.

Where this sincerity is wanting, every thing is wrong; neither praying, nor hearing, nor reading, can profit. The Scripture abounds with the severest threatenings against those who presume to mock the all-seeing God. I shall only produce one passage from Ezekiel, 14:5: "Son of man, these men have set up their idols in their hearts, and put the stumbling-block of iniquity before their faces: should I be inquired of at all by them? Every man of the house of Israel that setteth up his idols in his heart, and putteth the stumbling-block of iniquity before his face, and cometh to the prophet, I, the Lord, will answer him that cometh, according to the multitude of his idols." I say not this that I would have any one throw aside the ordinances of God, especially his public worship. These are the means which God has appointed, in which he has commanded us to wait, and where he is often pleased to be found, even by those who seek him not. But I would entreat such persons seriously to consider the dreadful condition they would be in, if death should surprise them in such a state of insincerity as renders their very prayers and sacrifices "an abomination to the Lord," and perverts those things which are designed for their advantage, into an occasion of their falling.

A second thing necessary is Diligence. This, with the former, is finally described in the Book of Proverbs:—"My son, if thou wilt receive my words, and hide my commandment within thee; so that thou incline thine ear to wisdom, and apply thine heart to understanding: yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; if thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as hid treasures: then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God;" Prov. 2. The wisdom of God, in which we are concerned, is contained in his word. The best understanding is to keep his commandments; Psal. 111; but as we cannot keep them unless we know them, neither can we know them without a diligent inquiry. The word which is rendered search, *ερευναω*, is borrowed from the practice of miners: it implies two things, to dig and to examine. First, with much labour they pierce the earth to a considerable depth; and when they have thus found a vein of precious ore, they break and sift it, and suffer no part to escape their

notice. Thus must we join frequent assiduous reading, with close and awakened meditation; comparing spiritual things with spiritual, carefully taking notice of the circumstances, occasion, and application of what we read; being assured, that there is a treasure of truth and happiness under our hands, if we have but skill to discover and improve it. Only let us be mindful that we have the same views in reading the Scripture, that God has in revealing it to us; which the Apostle thus enumerates: "All Scripture," or the whole Scripture, *πασα γραφη*, "is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished to every good work;" 2 Tim. 3. And elsewhere it is said to be able to make us "wise unto salvation." How absurd would it be for a man to read a treatise of husbandry with a design of learning navigation, or to seek the principles of trade and commerce in an essay on music? No less absurd is it to read or study the Scriptures with any other view than to receive its doctrines, submit to its reproofs, and obey its precepts, that we may be made "wise unto salvation." All disquisitions and criticisms that stop short of this, that do not amend the heart as well as furnish the head, are empty and dangerous, at least to ourselves, whatever use they may be of to others. An experience of this caused a learned critic and eminent commentator (Grotius), to confess, towards the close of his life, *Vitam prorsus perdidi, laboriose nihil agendo!* Alas! I have wasted my life in much labour to no purpose! But, on the contrary, when we are diligent and studious, that we may be better acquainted with the Divine precepts and promises, and better inclined to observe and trust them, then we may hope for happy success; for, "blessed is the man whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and who meditates therein day and night: for he shall be like a tree planted by rivers of waters, which bringeth forth its fruit in due season; his leaf also shall not wither, and whatsoever he doth," under this influence, "shall prosper;" Ps. 1. Thus God has promised, and thus many have found it, and been enabled to adopt the words of David, "Thou through thy commandments hast made me wiser than my enemies, for they are ever with me: I have more understanding than all my teachers, for thy testimonies are my meditation." Ps. 119.

Humility is a third thing very necessary to a profitable perusal of the Scriptures. "God giveth his grace to the humble," James 4: "He will guide the meek in judgment, he will enlighten the simple in his way," Ps. 25. The proud he resisteth, ἀντιτασσεται, he draws up against him, he prepares himself, as it were, with his whole force, to oppose his progress. A most formidable expression! If God only leaves us to ourselves, we are all ignorance and darkness; but what must be the dreadful case of those against whom he appears in arms? This has been a principal source of those various and opposite heresies and mistakes, which are the reproach of our holy profession, that vain man, though born a mere "wild ass's colt," Job 11, has undertaken, by his own strength and wisdom, to decide authoritatively on the meaning of Scripture; without being aware of the ignorance, prejudice, and weakness, which influence his judgment in religious matters; without knowing the utter inability of the natural man to discern the things of God, and without attending to those means the Scripture itself has appointed for the redress of these evils. But would we not lose our time and pains would we wish not to be misled ourselves, or not to mislead others? Let us aim at a humble spirit: let us reflect much on the majesty and grandeur of the God we serve: let us adore his condescension in favouring us with a revelation of his will: let us learn to consider the word of God, and the wisdom of God, as terms of the same import: in a word, let us study to know ourselves, our sinfulness and ignorance; then we shall no longer read the Scriptures with indifference or prepossession, but with the greatest reverence and attention, and with the most enlarged expectation.

I shall mention but one thing more upon this head, which is as necessary in itself as any of the preceding, and likewise necessary in order to obtain them, and that is Prayer. Sincerity, diligence, and humility, are the gifts of God; the blessing we seek in the exercise of them is in his hands; and he has promised to bestow all good things, even "his Holy Spirit, upon those who ask him." Prayer is indeed the best half of our business while upon earth, and that which gives spirit and efficacy to all the rest. Prayer is not only our immediate duty, but

the highest dignity, the richest privilege we are capable of receiving on this side eternity; and the neglect of it implies the deepest guilt, and includes the heaviest punishment. A stranger to prayer, is equally a stranger to God and to happiness, "like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed," James 1. Are any of you, my friends, unacquainted with prayer? Then are you without God in the world, without a guide in prosperity, without resource in distress, without true comfort in life, and, while you continue so, without hope in death. But especially, you are utterly unqualified to "search the Scripture." There is a veil upon the mind and heart of every man (as the Apostle assures us, 2 Cor. 3), so that he can neither see nor embrace heavenly truths, till this impediment is removed: the means of this is prayer. Therefore David says, "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law," Ps. 119. He knew there were wonderful things contained in the law, but confesses himself incapable of discerning them till the Lord should interpose. This he has promised to do in behalf of all who call upon him. But those who seek not assistance from God can find it no where else: for "every good and perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights," James 1, who hath said, "If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God." A critical knowledge of the original languages, a skill in the customs and manners of the ancients, an acquaintance with the Greek and Roman classics, a perusal of councils, fathers, scholiasts, and commentators, a readiness in the subtilties of logical disputation; these, in their proper place and subserviency, may be of considerable use to clear, illustrate, or enforce the doctrines of Scripture: but unless they are governed by a temper of humility and prayer; unless the man that possesses them accounts them altogether as nothing, without that assistance of the Spirit of God which is promised to guide believers into all truth; unless he seeks and prays for this guidance no less earnestly than those who understand nothing but their mother-tongue; I make no scruple to affirm, that all his apparatus of knowledge only tends to lead him so much the farther astray; and that a plain honest ploughman, who reads no book but his Bible, and has no teacher but the God to whom he prays in secret, stands abundantly fairer for the attainment of true skill in

divinity. But happy he, who, by faith and prayer, can realize the Divine presence always with him! who is sincere in his intentions, diligent in the use of means, diffident of himself, yet full of trust and hope, that God, whom he desires to serve, will lead and guide him in the paths of peace and righteousness for his mercy's sake, Psal. 31. Those things which are necessary for him to know, shall be made so plain, that he shall not mistake them; and those things, with which he is not so immediately concerned, shall at least teach him humility; teach him to adore the depths of Divine wisdom, and to long for that hour, when "all that is imperfect shall be done away; when we shall no more see in part, but shall know even as we are known," 1 Cor. 13.

II. I proceed to the second thing proposed, To shew how the Scriptures testify of Christ. In general, it may be said, that he is the main design and subject, both of the whole Scripture and of each particular book. This will be easily allowed of the New Testament, but is not so obvious with regard to several parts of the Old: I hope therefore it will not be unacceptable to those who love the word of God, if I consider this point something at large, and help them to discover the Lord Jesus Christ in almost every page of the Bible. This will be a new inducement to them to search the Scriptures, when they shall perceive that many passages which they were accustomed to read with indifference, as hardly able to discern any wisdom or meaning in them, do directly testify of Christ.

What is expressed in the Old Testament (for of this I am now to speak) concerning Christ, may be reduced to three heads; prophecies, types, and ceremonies. To open and trace these in their proper extent, would require volumes; but it is only a hint of each that the bounds of our present meeting will permit me to offer.

The first glimmering of light which dawned upon a lost world was that promise (for I consider the promises as a branch of prophecy) which God (who, in the midst of "judgment, remembers mercy") made to the woman, that "her Seed should bruise the serpent's head," Gen. 3. This was absolute and general, giving hopes of a

recovery, but no information of person, time, or place; but the path of "this Just One was as the light which shineth more and more to the perfect day," Prov. 4. In the time of Noah, the Hope and Desire of all nations was restrained to the line of Shem, Gen. 9, and afterwards more expressly to the family of Abraham: when this divided into two branches, God, to shew that his purpose is of himself, and that he will do as pleaseth him with his own, set aside the elder, and confirmed to Jacob the younger, "that in his Seed all the families of the earth should be blessed," Gen. 28. Jacob had twelve sons, which made a still more explicit restriction necessary: accordingly, the patriarch, before his death, declared this high privilege of perpetuating the line of the Messiah was fixed in the tribe of Judah, Gen 49; and the time of his advent was obscurely marked out, by the promise, "that the sceptre should not depart from Judah till the Shiloh come." The last personal limitation was to David, 1 Chron. 17; that of his family God would raise up the King, who should reign for ever, and overall. Succeeding prophets gradually foretold the time, place, and circumstances of his birth, the actions of his life, the tenor of his doctrine, the success he met with, and the cause, design, and manner of his sufferings and death: in short, to almost every thing that we read in the Gospel, we may annex the observation that the evangelists have made upon a few instances (in order, as it may be presumed, to direct us in searching out the rest), "Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by the prophets." From them we learn, that the Messiah should be born of a virgin, in Bethlehem of Judah, four hundred and ninety years after the commandment given to rebuild Jerusalem; that he should begin his ministry in Galilee; that he should be despised and rejected of men, betrayed by one of his disciples, sold for thirty pieces of silver, with which money the Potter's field should be afterwards purchased; "that he should be cut off, but not for himself;" and that his death should be followed by the sudden and total ruin of the Jewish government. To compare these promises and prophecies among themselves, and with their exact accomplishment recorded in the New Testament, this alone would engage us in a close and profitable search into the Scriptures, and

would afford us the most convincing proofs of their Divine original and excellence.

The types of Christ in the Old Testament may be considered as twofold,—personal and relative: the former describing, under the veil of history, his character and offices as considered in himself; the latter teaching, under a variety of metaphors, the advantages those who believe in him should receive from him. Thus Adam, Enoch, Melchizedec, Isaac, Joseph, Moses, Aaron, Joshua, Samson, David, Solomon, and others, were, in different respects, types or figures of Christ. Some more immediately represented his person; others prefigured his humiliation; others referred to his exaltation, dominion, and glory. So, in the latter sense, the ark of Noah, the rainbow, the manna, the brazen serpent, the cities of refuge, were so many emblems pointing out the nature, necessity, means, and security of that salvation which the Messiah was to establish for his people. Nor are these fanciful allusions of our own making, but warranted and taught in Scripture, and easily proved from thence, would time permit; for indeed there is not one of these persons or things which I have named, but would furnish matter for a long discourse, if closely considered in this view, as typical of the promised Redeemer.

The like may be said of the Levitical ceremonies. The law of Moses is, in this sense, a happy school master to lead us unto Christ, Gal. 3: and it may be proved beyond contradiction, that in these the Gospel was preached of old to all those Israelites indeed, whose hearts were right with God, and whose understandings were enlightened by his Spirit. The ark of the covenant, the mercy-seat, the tabernacle, the incense, the altar, the offerings, the high priest with his ornaments and garments, the laws relating to the leprosy, the Nazarite, and the redemption of lands;—all these, and many more which I have not time to mention, had a deep and important meaning beyond their outward appearance: each, in their place, pointed to "the Lamb of God who was to take away the sins of the world," John 1, derived



their efficacy from him, and received their full accomplishment in him.

Thus the Old and New Testament do mutually illustrate each other; nor can either be well understood singly. The Old Testament, in histories, types, prophecies, and ceremonies, strongly delineate Him who, in the fulness of time, was to come into the world to effect a reconciliation between God and man. The New Testament shews, that all these characters and circumstances were actually fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth; that it was he of whom "Moses in the law and the prophets did write;" and that we are not to look for another.

We read in Genesis, chap. 21, that Abraham had two sons: Isaac, the child of the promise, the son of his old age, by his wife Sarah; and Ishmael, born some years before, of Hagar, the handmaid, and servant of Sarah; that the latter, with his mother, were cast out of the family: the occasion some would think trivial, the anger and jealousy of Sarah, because Ishmael had mocked her son. But when it was grievous to Abraham to put them away upon so slight a ground, God himself interposed, and commanded him to comply with her desire. Had we heard no more of this, it is likely we should have considered it as a piece of family history, of no very great importance but to those who were immediately concerned in it. We should, perhaps, have wondered to find so much said upon such a subject, in a book which we profess to believe was written by Divine inspiration; we should probably have presumed to arraign the Divine Wisdom, in descending to particulars, in which, according to our views of the fitness of things, we could discern nothing either interesting or instructive. To guard us from these rash mistakes, to explain the true meaning of this particular transaction, and at the same time to furnish us with a key for understanding many passages of the like nature, in which human wisdom can discover neither beauty nor benefit; it has pleased God to favour us with an infallible exposition of the whole matter. Not for the sake of Abraham, or Isaac, or Ishmael, or Hagar, was this recorded; much less merely to gratify our curiosity. No: "These things," saith the Apostle Paul, "are an allegory;

for these are the two covenants; the one from Mount Sinai, which gendereth to bondage, which is Agar. For this Agar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children. But Jerusalem, which is above, is free, which is the mother of us all.—Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise. But as then he that was born after the flesh, persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now. Nevertheless, what saith the Scripture? Cast out the bond-woman and her son: for the son of the bond-woman shall not be heir with the son of the free-woman. So then, brethren, we are not children of the bond-woman, but of the free;" Gal. 4. I must not detain you by shewing at large how the Apostle teaches us to discover the spirit and privileges of the Gospel, together with what all who truly receive it must expect to encounter, in a passage which we might otherwise have thought superfluous, if not impertinent. Keep this in your mind when you read the Scripture. Assure yourselves, that there is nothing vain or useless in the word of God. Compare one place with another; the Law with the Gospel, the Prophets with the Evangelists: pray unto God that he would open your understandings to understand the Scriptures, as he did for the disciples, Luke 24; and in a little time you will find, that Christ is not only spoken of in a few verses, here and there, but that, as I said before, he is the main scope and subject of every book, and almost of every chapter.

I would add an instance or two of the meaning of the ceremonies, to what I have observed of Hagar in reference to the types. In the law of the passover, it was especially enjoined, Exod. 12, that not a bone of the paschal lamb should be broken. Now, who would have thought that this referred to Christ? yet we see the Evangelist expressly applies it to him, and is filled with wonder at the accomplishment. The legs of those who were crucified at the same time were purposely broken, John 19; but our Lord was passed by; and that it should be so, was intimated near fifteen hundred years before, in this charge concerning the lamb. Again, we find that in several places, where a bullock was commanded to be slain for a sin-offering, it is enjoined, that the flesh and the skin should be burnt without the camp; and

from the Epistle to the Hebrews, chap. 13, we learn, that this was not a slight or arbitrary circumstance. We have there this explication: "For the bodies of those beasts whose blood is brought into the sanctuary, by the High Priest, for sin, were burnt without the camp: wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate. Let us go forth, therefore, without the camp, bearing his reproach." I must not enlarge any farther, or it were easy, by the clue the Apostles in their writings have given us, to trace the important meaning of many of those institutions, which scoffers, who are wise in their own conceits, though neither acquainted with themselves nor the subject, presume to censure as frivolous. The sense of the sacred writings lies too deep for a captious, superficial, volatile survey; it must be a search, a scrutiny; a humble, diligent, sincere, and persevering inquiry, or no satisfaction can be expected.

The import of the Scripture testimony concerning Christ, which was the third thing I proposed to speak of, must be deferred to another opportunity. I hope what has been already said, may, through the Divine blessing, engage you to "search the Scriptures." Remember it is the command of our Lord Jesus Christ: it is the only appointed way to the knowledge of Him, whom to know, so as to love, serve, and obey him, is both the foundation and the sum of our happiness here and hereafter. We, as well as the Jews, think we have eternal life in the Scripture, and shall, like them, be inexcusable and self-condemned if we neglect it. Let us not be like fools, with a prize, an inestimable prize, in our hands, but without heart or skill to use it. Better it would have been for us to have lived and died in the wilds of America, without either means of grace or hopes of glory, than to slight this record which God has been pleased to give us of his Son. But happy the man whose delight is in the law of his God! He has sure direction in every difficulty, certain comfort in every distress. The beauty of the precepts are preferable in his eye to "thousands of gold and silver," Ps. 119. The comforts of the promises are sweeter to his taste, "than honey or the honey-comb," Ps. 19. He is happy in life; for the word of God is to him as a "fountain of living water." He shall

be happy in death; the promises of his God shall support him through that dark valley: and he shall be happy for ever in the presence and love of Him for whose sake he now searches the Scripture; "whom having not seen," 1 Pet. 1, yet, from the testimony there given of him, "he loves; in whom, though now he sees him not, yet, believing, he rejoices with joy unspeakable and full of glory."

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Pleraque autem (si detur liberè loquendi venia) quæ etiam in Theologicis scholis tractantur, et magno cum apparatu et strepitu docentur et disputantur, spinosum fortè acumen habent, sed simul certè spinosam sterilitatem: lacerare et pungere possunt, animos pascere non possunt: "Nemo enim ex spinis uvas colligit unquam, aut ex tribulis ficus." "Quorsum alta (inquit quidam) de Trinitate disputare, si careas humilitate, et sic Trinitati displiceas?" Et aptè St. Augustinus ad illud Esiaæ, "Ego Deus tuus docens te utilia;" "utilia (inquit) docens, non subtilia." Et hoc est quod opto et oro; ut nobis pro modulo nostro subdocentibus, ille efficaciter vos perdoceat, qui cathedram in cœlo habens, corda docet in terris.—Archiep. Leighton. Prælect. Theol. pag. 4. edit. Lond. 1693. 4to.

## **SERMON VI**

### **THE SAME SUBJECT CONTINUED**

Search the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me. - JOHN 5:39.

IN a former discourse on these words, I mentioned four things as highly requisite, if we would acquire a useful knowledge of the Scripture; sincerity with respect to the end, diligence in the use of means, a humble sense of our own weakness, and earnest prayer to God for the assistance of his grace and Spirit. To engage us to this practice, and perseverance therein, I next considered how the

Scriptures, when properly searched into and compared, do clearly and in every part testify of Christ, that he is the end of the Law, the sum of the Prophets, the completion of the promises, the scope of the types and ceremonies, and the great object of the whole Old-Testament dispensation. I am now to say something to the third point I proposed;

### III. Concerning the import of the testimony the Scriptures bear to Christ.

The principal difficulties on this head are, where to begin on a subject absolutely boundless; and what to select that may be most suitable and useful to this assembly, from the immense variety of topics that offer. For this being the great end and design of the Scripture, to proclaim the excellency of Christ Jesus our Lord, "that we through him may have strong consolation," Heb. 12, it is inculcated in so many places, set in such a diversity of views, and couched under such deep and comprehensive expressions, that not only our present opportunity, but my whole future life, would be too short, if I would collect, state, and explain, all that properly belongs to this single article. For order's sake, I shall reduce the little I must say at this time to three or four distinct particulars, what the Scripture testifies of Christ, as to his person, his offices, his power, and his love.

When we hear of some great undertaking to be performed, we inquire of course about the person who is chiefly concerned in it; so, when we are told of the mighty works Jesus Christ engaged to perform, to redeem a lost world, to satisfy Divine justice, to make an end of sin, to abolish death, and to bring life and immortality to light; the first question that occurs is, Who is he? "Search the Scriptures," and you will have a clear and decisive answer. The Prophet Isaiah, rapt into future times, describes him thus. "Unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder; and he shall be called, Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace," Isa. 9:6. The union

of the Divine and Human natures in the Messiah is so strongly asserted, the names and attributes of God are so clearly ascribed in this passage, to one who should be born into the world, that "he who runs may read; the wayfaring man, though a fool," must understand it; and it requires a considerable share of unhappy ingenuity to wrest the words to any their than their obvious meaning. This text, if it stood alone in the Bible (supposing the Scriptures to be a revelation from God), would be a full warrant, and a firm foundation, for that great point of Christian faith and doctrine, That Jesus Christ is very God and very man; or, as the Apostle better expresses it, "God manifest in the flesh." But it is not alone: on the contrary, the Messiah is seldom mentioned, but something is either said of him, or referred to him, which teaches us the same important truth. "Behold the days come," (saith the Lord by Jeremiah, chap, 23) "that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch; and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth. In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely; and this is his name whereby he shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS." Isaiah in general styles him, "A Child to be born;" Jeremiah more particularly, "A Branch of David." Isaiah ascribes to him the name of "The Mighty God;" Jeremiah says, he shall be called "The Lord our Righteousness." You have the word LORD in capital letters here, as in other places where it is in the original JEHOVAH. Some of the names of God are occasionally applied to inferior subjects; to angels, to magistrates, and sometimes to idols. But Jehovah is allowed by all to signify the essential and incommunicable name of the Most High God. Yet this is not the only place where it is expressly and directly applied to the Messiah. David himself speaks to the same purpose: "The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand," Psal. 110. That the Messiah was to be David's Son, was known and acknowledged by the Jews in our Saviour's time; but how he could be the Son of David, and yet his Lord, was a difficulty that utterly posed and silenced the most learned Rabbies and Scribes among them; because, being destitute of that sincerity and humility we have before spoken of, they could not

understand the Scriptures, which were read in their synagogues every day.

Now, although this important doctrine was not to be discovered by the light of nature, or the powers of human reason, yet, since it has pleased God to make it known to us, our reason, humbly tracing the steps of Divine revelation, can easily prove the expedience, and even the necessity, that it should be so. When we are informed from Scripture, that all mankind being sunk into a state of sin and misery, God had in great mercy appointed a person to atone for the one, and deliver them from the other; we may safely, from these principles, infer, by our own reason, 1st, That this person cannot be mere man: for as the whole human race, and consequently every individual, is supposed to be previously involved in the same circumstances of guilt and condemnation, it is impossible that any one of these should be able either to answer or satisfy for himself, much less be qualified to interpose in behalf of another. From hence reason may ascend a step higher, and conclude, 2nd, That no mere creature, however great and excellent, can undertake this part: for the two great points necessary in order to our redemption—to satisfy the justice of God, and to restore the divine image in man—are either of them beyond the sphere of finite power. We read in the Scripture of angels, archangels, thrones, principalities, and powers; and from several texts we may collect, that their number and excellencies are beyond any conceptions we can form. Could we suppose that the virtues and endowments of all these various and exalted beings were united and centred in one of them; however glorious this being would be in other respects, when we consider him as a creature of the Divine power, he will be found to be as unfit, and as unable, to interfere in the behalf of sinful man as the meanest worm that crawls upon the earth. It is the duty of every being, great and small, to be entirely devoted, according to the extent of its capacity, to the service and glory of its great Creator: therefore an angel is no more capable than a man of performing the smallest work of supererogation. The highest archangel could not magnify the law of God, and make it honourable on the behalf of man, being already bound thereto for

himself: much less can we suppose such a being capable of expiating the sins of mankind by suffering. If Divine justice insisted on a propitiation, it must follow, that nothing less than an equivalent could be accepted. But what would be the temporary sufferings of a creature, or of all creatures, in this view? A finite satisfaction, however heightened and exaggerated, would at last be infinitely short of the demand. As to the other branch of redemption, the restoration of the image of God in the soul, I need only mention it; for it appears, at first glance, that this must be the prerogative of Divine power alone to effect. It remains, therefore, that the deliverance of mankind could be attempted only by Him who, we are assured by the Apostle, agreeable to the passages already cited, is over all, God blessed for ever.

That the Son of God should take upon him the nature and circumstances of our humanity, sin excepted, in order to atone for our transgressions, is indeed such an instance of condescension and love, as must for ever dazzle and astonish the brightest understandings. It is true, some persons in these refined times, affect to speak of this point with admirable coolness and precision. But in the beginning it was not so. Either the Apostle Paul was less master of his temper, or more unequal to sublime speculations, than these gentlemen, or else we must allow he had a very different view of the subject; for he cannot mention it without appearing to be transported, and (if I may use the expression) swallowed up by the thought: his ideas seem too great for words; and it is well if his best attempts to explain himself have not exposed him, in the judgment of some of his readers, to the charge of solecism. However, though this doctrine, above any other, is a proof that God "is able to do for us exceeding abundantly, beyond all we could ask or think," it is not, upon the premises I before mentioned, in the least repugnant to right reason; rather it is exactly calculated to remove all those surmises which would arise in the mind of a reasonable sinner, upon the first intimation of possible forgiveness. In our nature Christ fulfilled the law which we had broken; he sustained the penalty we had incurred; he vanquished the enemies we had to encounter; he trod the path



which he has marked out for us; he is entered in our name into that heaven he has promised us; and retains a sympathy with us in all our sufferings and temptations, "in as much as he himself has suffered, being tempted," Heb. 2.

I am next to consider the testimony of Scripture concerning the offices of Christ. These are, in general, included in the character of Mediator. "There is one God, and one Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus," 1 Tim. 2. In this word is summed up all that Christ has done, now does, or will do hereafter, either on the part of God or man. But, for our better apprehension, it is proposed to us under three distinct and principal views, answerable to the three particulars in which the misery of fallen man does principally consist.

And first, Man having departed from God, "became vain in his imaginations, and his foolish heart was darkened," Rom. 1; so that he totally lost the knowledge of his Creator, and how entirely his happiness depended thereon. He forgot God and himself, and sunk so low as to worship the work of his own hands. His life became vain and miserable; in prosperity, without security or satisfaction; in adversity, without support or resource; his death dark and hopeless; no pleasing reflection on the past, no ray of light on the future. Such was the unhappy case when Christ undertook the office of a Prophet; in which character, under various dispensations, first by his servants inspired of old, and afterwards more clearly in his own person, and by his Apostles, he has instructed us in the things pertaining to our peace; not only renewing in us the knowledge of the true God, which, where revelation prevailed not, was universally lost out of the world, but disclosing to us the counsels of Divine love and wisdom in our favour, those great things "which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard," and which never could have entered "into the heart of man to conceive," had not he who dwelt in the bosom of the Father declared them to us. We can now give a sufficient answer to that question, which must have for ever overwhelmed every serious awakened mind, "Wherewithal shall I appear before the Most High God," Mic.

6. We have now learnt how God can declare and illustrate his righteousness and truth, by that very act which, without respect to satisfaction given, would seem the highest impeachment of both; I mean, his justifying the ungodly. We have now a glass by which we can discover the presence of the Creator in every part of his creation, and a clue to lead us through the mysterious mazes of Divine providence. But who can enumerate the various, the important, the interesting lessons we receive from this Heavenly Teacher, when, by the influence of his Holy Spirit, he powerfully applies his written word to the hearts of his real disciples, who search the Scriptures with a sincere desire to be made wise unto salvation! Whatever is necessary to make life useful and comfortable, and to gild the gloom of death with the bright prospect of a glorious immortality, is there contained: so that, instructed by these writings alone, a poor illiterate mechanic has been often enabled to converse upon a dying bed with more dignity, certainty, and influence, than any, or all the philosophers, ancient or modern, could attain.

But, besides the natural ignorance of fallen man, he was chargeable with aggravated guilt. Guilt and ignorance are reciprocally causes and consequences of each other. Every additional guilt tends to increase the stupidity of the human soul; and every increase of this increases, in the same proportion, the natural indisposition for the practice or the love of virtue; makes the soul more blind to consequences, more base in its pursuits, and thus become a more willing and assiduous servant of iniquity. No wonder, therefore, that when the understanding was totally darkened as to the knowledge of God, the will and affections became wholly disobedient to his law. But when a Divine light has, in some measure, discovered the heart to itself, and at the same time set an offended God in view, every such sensible sinner would undoubtedly imitate our first parents, and fly (were it possible) from the presence of his Maker and his Judge. "I heard thy voice," says Adam, "and I hid myself, for I was afraid," Gen. 3. Vain attempt; and, if it was practicable, a dreadful alternative, since absence from God imports the utmost misery to a creature who can be happy only in his favour. But here the Scriptures

bring us unspeakable comfort, testifying of Christ as our great High Priest. To point out and illustrate this part of his character, is the chief end and design of the whole Levitical law; the main points of which are explained, and applied to our blessed Lord throughout the Epistle to the Hebrews. The principal parts of the priest's office were, to sacrifice in behalf of the people, to make atonement, to pray for them, and to bless them in the name of the Lord. No sacrifices could be offered or accepted; no blessings expected, but through the hands of the priests whom God had appointed. Thus Christ, the High Priest of our profession, offered himself a sacrifice without either spot or blemish; he entered with his own blood within the vail, to the immediate presence of our offended God; and through him peace and good-will is proclaimed to sinful men. He continues still to exercise the other part of his appointment; he makes continual intercession for his people; he presents their prayers and imperfect services acceptable before the Throne; he gives them confidence and access to draw nigh to God; and he bestows upon them those gifts and blessings which are the fruits of his sufferings and obedience. The Levitical priests were, like their people, sinners; and were therefore constrained first to make atonement for themselves; they were mortal, therefore their service passed from hand to hand; their sacrifices were imperfect, therefore needed continual repetition, and had at last only a typical and ceremonial efficacy; "for it was not possible that the blood of bulls and goats," Heb. 9 and 10, could remove either the guilt or pollution of sin. "The law made nothing perfect." But Jesus, the "Mediator of the New Covenant," is "such a High Priest as became us; holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners; who needeth not (as those of old) to offer sacrifice first for his own sins, and then for the people; for this he did once, when he offered up himself," Heb. 8. The great inference from this doctrine, several times repeated by the Apostle in a variety of phrase, is, That we may now have boldness to appear before God, that our prayers and services are pleasing in his sight, and all the blessings of grace and glory ready to be bestowed on us, if we faithfully apply for them, through the merits of his Son.

Once more: Man is not only ignorant of God and himself, and too full of guilt to plead in his own name, but he is likewise weak and defenceless; unable to make his way through the opposition that withstands his progress to eternal life, or to secure him from the many enemies "that rise up against him," Psal. 3. We read, that when the Gibeonites made a league with Joshua, Jos. 9, which was the only step could save them from utter ruin, the neighbouring states and cities all united to destroy them; so the soul that is desirous to submit to Jesus Christ, immediately finds itself in the midst of war: the world, the flesh, and the devil, unite their forces, either to recal such a one to the practice and service of sin, or to distress him to the uttermost for forsaking it. And none could support this conflict, if not themselves supported by a higher hand. But Jesus, the antitype of Joshua, the true Captain of the Lord's hosts, reveals himself in his word as the King of his Church. He can inspire the fainting soul with unseen supplies: he, "when the enemy comes in like a flood," Isa. 59, can by his Spirit lift up a standard against him; he can take the prey even out of the hand of the mighty. He has said it of his church in general, and he will make it good to every individual that trusts in him, that the gates of hell shall never prevail against them. What though a sense of the guilt and remaining power of sin often fills the humble soul with inexpressible distress! He that stills the raging of the sea, and the violence of the winds, with a word, can, with equal ease, calm all the unruly motions of the mind. What though the world opposes in every quarter, and presents snares or terrors all around! what though rage or contempt, threats or allurements, are by turns, or all together, employed to ruin us! Behold, "greater is he that is in us, than he that is in the world," 1 John 4; Christ has "overcome the world for us," John 16, and has promised to make us conquerors, yea more than conquerors, in our turn. What though "the devil goes about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour!" 1 Pet. 5:8. It is an argument of the strongest kind for watchfulness and prayer; but we need not fear him: the "beloved of the Lord shall dwell in safety," Deut. 33; "the Lord shall cover him all the day long; he shall deliver him from the snare of the fowler," Ps. 91. "His truth shall be a shield and buckler," to all who enlist under

his banner; and at length, yea shortly, "the God of peace shall bruise Satan under our feet." Rom. 16.

It is thus the Scriptures, to help the weakness of our apprehensions, testify of Christ, under the threefold view of Prophet, Priest, and King of his people. These are his principal and leading characters, which include and imply the rest; for the time would fail to speak of him, as he is declared to be their Head, Husband, Root, Foundation, Sun, Shield, Shepherd, Lawgiver, Exemplar, and Fore-runner. In brief, there is hardly any comfortable relation, or useful office, amongst men; hardly any object in the visible creation, which either displays beauty, or produces benefit, but what is applied in the word of God, to illustrate the excellence and sufficiency of the Lord Jesus Christ. The intent of all is, that we may learn to trust him, and delight to serve him; for these must go together. Whoever would be benefited by his mediation as a Priest, must submit to his instructions as a Prophet, and yield him universal obedience as a King. Fatal are the mistakes in this matter now in the world. Some talk highly of the death and sufferings of Christ, who are little solicitous to keep his commandments: others labour in the very fire to observe his law; but "being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own," Rom. 10, they labour to no purpose. Dependence on the merits of Christ, and obedience to his commands, are inseparably united; and only the man who aims at both, can attain to either.

I should now lay before you some Scripture testimonies of the power and love of Christ; but I have anticipated this part of my subject in what I have already said. His Divine nature proclaims his power, his offices display his love. We have seen, that he emptied himself of his eternal glories; that "he bowed the heavens, and came down in the form of a servant;" that he submitted to all imaginable sufferings; all that the malice of men, all that the avenging justice of God, could inflict: and, having by this means opened the kingdom of heaven, and taken possession there, in behalf of all believers, he has caused the glad tidings of salvation to be published through the world,

declaring, that "whosoever cometh to him (without one exception), he will in no wise cast out;" John 6. Are not these proofs of unspeakable, unexampled love? We have seen, that he fully performed the work he undertook; "that he has made an end of sin," Dan. 9; "brought in an everlasting righteousness, spoiled principalities and powers," Eph. 2; "triumphed over all our enemies, broke down the partition-wall, and brought life and immortality to light by his Gospel," 1 Tim. 1. We read, that he is exalted highly; that God has given him a name that is above every name," Phil. 2: that he is "far above all principality, and might, and dominion:" and what more can be said of his power? Read his own declaration, "All power is given to me in heaven and in earth," Matth. 28. Were these two points, the power and the love of Christ, rightly understood, and fully believed, earth would be full of heaven. But, alas! we are fools, and slow of heart, to receive all that Moses and the Prophets, Luke 24, the Evangelists and Apostles, have written for our instruction. From hence proceeds our indifference, and that we need so much to be pressed to search the Scriptures, though we readily acknowledge that in them we have the words of eternal life.

IV. It remains therefore, in the fourth and last place, that I add a few words to recommend and enforce the command in the text, "search the Scriptures," from the argument there subjoined, "for in them ye think ye have eternal life:" and we think right; for it "is eternal life to know the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom he hath sent," John 17: and every article of this knowledge is contained in the Old and New Testament; nor can any part of it be met with any where else. Yet let conscience judge this day, as in the presence of "the living God, the Searcher of hearts," before whom our private judgments must shortly come under a review: has any book a smaller share of the time, the memory, or the affections of many of us than this book of God? Do not the successive returns of business and amusement so far engross our time, and our thoughts, that we have either no leisure or no disposition to attend to the things which pertain to our peace? Consider, "in them we think we have eternal life." We know we are posting to eternity as fast as the wings of time can carry us; we know,

that the consequences of our behaviour in this span of life will attend us into an invisible unalterable state; and we confess, that the necessary directions for our conduct in these most important and precarious circumstances, are to be found only in the Bible: what words then can describe our fatal insensibility, if, all this acknowledged, we have no heart to consult, or to value, this inestimable treasure put into our hands?

Many inquiries, more curious than useful, have been started concerning the Divine procedure with the heathen nations, and those who never heard of the Gospel of peace. "The Judge of all the earth will (undoubtedly) do right," Gen. 18, and will be justified at the great day, when every man shall receive according to his works. Till then we must wait for the knowledge of what he has not seen fit to reveal. But thus much he has already told us, that, however it may go with those who know not the Gospel, dreadful will be the doom of those who, having it published among them, refuse to obey it. "The servant who knew not his master's will shall be beaten with few stripes," Luke 12. But this will not be our case; at least our ignorance will be rather an aggravation than an excuse; a wilful, obstinate, infatuated ignorance. We have the words of eternal life in our hands, "line upon line, precept upon precept;" but how do we imitate those (whom perhaps we have been ready to blame) spoken of in the parable, who, when they received a kind and gracious invitation to a royal feast, made light of it, and "all with one consent began to make excuse!" Luke 14. It is easy to apply this to the Jews of old: so David could clearly judge in the case of the rich man who killed his poor neighbour's lamb, 2 Sam. 12; but had not the Prophet helped him, he would not have collected that he himself was the person intended. But to bring the general truths of Scripture home to the heart is the work of God; and perhaps, while I am speaking at random, he may rouse the consciences of some to say in particular, Thou art the man. Then they will soon see how much it behoves them to search the Scriptures, when they understand the weighty meaning of the words, eternal life.

Some of us, I hope, do already make conscience of frequent reading the Scriptures; but let us remember the force of the word search. It is not a careless superficial reading, or dispatching such a number of chapters in a day, as a task, that will answer the end. I have already reminded you, that it is a business will need your best application; a serious, impartial, humble, persevering inquiry, accompanied with earnest prayer for the light and assistance of God's Holy Spirit. When we set about it in this method, we shall soon find happy effects; pleasure and instruction will go hand in hand, and our knowledge advance as the growing light. The precepts shall inspire us with true wisdom; teach us how to order all our affairs respecting both worlds, to fill up our several stations in life with propriety, usefulness, and comfort; and to avoid the numerous evils and distresses which those who live by no rule, or by any other rule than God's word, are perpetually running into. The promises shall be a support in every trouble, a medicine in every sickness, a supply in every need. Above all, the Scriptures will repay our trouble, as they testify of Christ. The more we read of his person, offices, power, love, doctrine, life, and death, the more our hearts will cleave to him: we shall, by insensible degrees, be transformed into his spirit. We shall, with the Apostle, say, "I know in whom I have believed," 2 Tim. 1. Every thing we see shall be at once a memorial to remind us of our Redeemer, and a motive to animate us in his service. And at length we shall be removed to see him as he is, without a cloud, and without a vail; to be for ever with him; to behold, and to share the glories of that heavenly kingdom "which (Matth. 25) he has prepared (for his followers) from before the foundation of the world." Amen.

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