

Messiah

by

John Newton

Abridged and Made Easy to Read

Introduction

By the time he had passed from this life into the immediate presence of Christ, John Newton (1725-1807) was regarded by many as a leading spokesman for Anglican evangelicalism, the author of several Bible-based poems or hymns, and a remarkable trophy of God's grace.

In 1685 London was commemorating the centenary of the composer Handel's birth. His most popular work, the oratorio *Messiah*, was being performed to large audiences in Westminster Abbey. Newton grasped the opportunity to set forth the Saviour's person and work in a series of fifty sermons based on the oratorio's text. The series was preached at St. May Woolnoth, in the city.

Newton follows faithfully the plan of the oratorio, which consists of three parts: prophecies of the Saviour's coming; the account of his death, resurrection, ascension and session in glory; the ultimate fruits of his work in the deliverance of his people from sin, sorrow and death, and their final victory over all their enemies.

Throughout the series, Newton repeatedly seeks to wean his hearers off the exclusive enjoyment of Handel's music, and to direct them to the Redeemer whose praises they should sing with spiritual melody and harmony in their hearts. The theme that pervades the whole – Jesus Christ and him crucified – is pressed on his hearers with winsome yet solemn earnestness.

May readers of the following summary find Newton's aim fulfilled in themselves, to the praise of God's glorious grace.

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PART ONE

Sermon 1 The Comfort

‘Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received at the Lord’s hand double for all her sins.’ Isaiah 40.1-2

The grand theme of Paul’s gospel ministry was “God manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.” (1 Timothy 3.16) It is my wish and purpose to know nothing among you but this subject, to preach nothing to you but Jesus Christ and him crucified.

The plan I have adopted to show the Saviour’s character and mediation is that of the text of Handel’s oratorio *Messiah*, which is being performed in Westminster Abbey to commemorate the centenary of his birth. I hope indeed that performers and hearers alike are tuned in to the Redeemer’s praise; yet those who love him may anticipate a far more glorious song and chorus, when they join those who are now performing before the throne of God and the Lamb. In any case, true Christians, without the help of either vocal or instrumental music, will find greater pleasure, even now, in humble contemplation of the *words* of *Messiah*, than from the highest forms of musical genius.

This is the plan I speak of: to lead your thoughts into the language of the oratorio. And if God will smile on the attempt, pleasure and profit will go hand in hand. There is no *harmony* to a heaven-born soul than hearing how all the divine perfections combine in the work of redemption, so that God is glorified and sinners are saved. There is no *melody* compared to the blood of Jesus speaking peace

to a guilty conscience, or the Holy Spirit sweetly applying the promises of God to the heart. These are the joys that the world can neither give nor take away. Nor do they merely satisfy the soul: they sanctify it too. They strengthen faith, hope and love, and enable the believer to run in all the paths of holy obedience.

Handel's *Messiah* consists of three parts: prophecies of his coming; the account of his death, resurrection, ascension and session in glory; the final fruits of his work in the deliverance of his people from sin, sorrow and death, and their ultimate victory over all their enemies. It closes with the triumphant song of the redeemed in praise of the Lamb who bought them with his own precious blood. The Biblical texts are so well arranged, and contain the principal truths of the gospel, that I shall not attempt to change them.

If the prophet Isaiah refers in our text to Israel's return from Babylon, his main object was far greater. His eye is fixed on a Person who would come and bless this miserable world, and comfort mourners in Zion with the assurance that his coming would more than compensate them for all their sorrows.

The spiritual and moral state of Jerusalem was very low in Isaiah's day: sin abounded, judgments had been threatened, yet a sense of security prevailed. Most were against the Lord; only a few feared him, and they could not prevent the abounding evils. So Isaiah comforts them: "Speak to her heart" (as the Hebrew is translated), and tell her that there is a balm for all her wounds, a cordial for all her griefs: MESSIAH is at hand. In his message future things are spoken as if present, and what the Lord promised to do is described as already done.

This comforting message consists of two parts: the removal of evil – "her warfare is accomplished, her iniquity is pardoned." Secondly, a promise of good more than equal to all their afflictions – "she hath received at the Lord's hand double for all her sins."

I. Two ideas are included in the term translated 'warfare': a service of hardship, like that of a military life, and an appointed time for it to end. Both apply to the Old Testament dispensation. Compared with that of the gospel, that was a spirit of bondage, distance from God, and fear. This was the church under the law. But it was only for a set time. The gospel state would come and introduce life, power, freedom and confidence.

There is a parallel to this difference between law and gospel in the experience of the redeemed sinner. At first he is made aware of his guilt and danger as a lawbreaker; then he obtains peace through believing the gospel. And this work, both in convincing of sin and in bringing peace, is the Lord's. He wounds, and he heals. When the wound in his people becomes unbearable, then he heals it, and pours in the oil of joy for mourning.

"Her iniquity is pardoned." The sacrifices of the law could never take away sin, nor cleanse the conscience from guilt. But the blood of Christ covered the sins of all believers under the law, and brought them peace with God and comfort in pardon. In the promised Messiah Abraham believed and found rest, and so did his believing descendants. True believers were pardoned *under* the law, but not *by* the law. Their faith looked through all the sacrifices and types to the One who was to fulfil them all. So Abraham saw his day, and rejoiced. A whole succession of God's servants foresaw and spoke of his sufferings and glory; yet the church of the Old Testament rather longed for gospel light than possessed it. This is the privilege of those who enjoy and believe the gospel.

The most evangelical part of Isaiah's prophecy is thus a comfort concerning Messiah to come; but we *know* that the Son of God has come, that atonement has been made, and that the ransom for sinners has been paid and accepted. God is reconciled, and his ministers now preach comfort to all who mourn over their sins, to tell them that they are all forgiven for the Redeemer's sake, and that their iniquity is freely pardoned.

II. The words: “for she has received at the Lord’s hand double for all her sins” are not in Handel’s oratorio; but I cannot omit them. They cannot mean that Israel had already received more trouble than she deserved. Nor can they mean that Messiah’s sufferings were more than was necessary to save his people. Rather, they mean that Jerusalem would receive far greater blessings than she had afflictions. Where sin and its fruit had abounded, there grace would much more abound.

Before our Lord healed the paralytic man who was brought to him, he said: “Be of good cheer; thy sins are forgiven thee.” (Mark 2.5) The assurance that his sins were forgiven was sufficient to make him cheerful, whether his palsy was removed or not. So, “blessed is the man whose transgression is forgiven.” (Psalm 32.1) Though he is poor, afflicted, diseased, neglected or despised, if the Lord does not impute his sin to him, he is a blessed man. There is no situation in human life so deplorable that a sense of the pardoning love of God cannot bring comfort to.

I shall close with a few words applicable to us here.

1. “Who is a God like thee!” (Micah 7.18) Infinitely happy and glorious in himself, he has provided comfort for rebels and lawbreakers of the worst kind! What are we, that he should remember us, redeem us, in such a way and at such a price?

Salvation is wholly of grace; not only undeserved, but also undesired by us, till he is pleased to awaken us to a sense of need. Then we find ready prepared all that our poor souls can require.

Salvation is wholly of the Lord. *His* wisdom, power and goodness have restored us to his favour and likeness.

Salvation is great, in its source, and means, and end.

Salvation is wholly free, without any conditions or qualifications except those God himself performs in us.

Salvation is full, including every blessing, now and in the world to come.

2. When the God of salvation would speak comfort to us, he proposes one object, and only one, as the necessary and all-sufficient source of consolation. This is MESSIAH, Jesus in his person and offices, known and received by faith.

Whatever the world can do for its followers in the day of prosperity, it leaves them helpless in the day of trouble. When a loved one is taken from them, or a feared evil touches them, or death looks them in the face, they have no God, no throne of grace, no Christ, no hope. But those who know, believe on, and have the Spirit of MESSIAH, can never be comfortless. When they recall what HE suffered for them, they know that every circumstance of life is ordered for their good; and though they now sow in tears, they shall reap in joy; therefore they possess their souls in patience.

3. To enjoy the comfort proposed in the text, we must be in the right spiritual condition. Only the evildoer knows the comfort of a free pardon; but those who have no sense of their sin or lawbreaking are strangers to it. This is one main reason for the neglect, even contempt, which the gospel receives from the world. For lack of self-knowledge and of their real state in the sight of the God with whom they have to do, many who receive pleasure from hearing Handel's *Messiah* neither find, nor expect to find, nor desire to find, the comfort spoken of in the text.

Sermon 2

The Herald

'The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low; and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain: And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.' Isaiah 40.3-5

Like other parts of divine revelation, this passage contains features of Hebrew poetry. One such feature is known as parallelism. In it the same thought is repeated with some variety, usually to enforce or confirm the original thought. The Psalms and Isaiah are full of this parallelism. (See Psalm 2.4-5 and Isaiah 59.1) To be aware of this feature could save us from trying to understand every single word. This is the case in the verses before us.

This prophecy of John the Baptist (Matthew 3.1-3; Mark 1.1-3) contains this feature. 'Prepare ye the way of the Lord in the wilderness' is paralleled by 'Make straight a highway for our God in the desert.' So does Isaiah 35.1 – 'The wilderness shall be glad' and 'the desert shall rejoice.'

Now, to see by the eye of faith the coming Redeemer's glory and divine power preparing the way before him, and to enter into the wonderful and gracious design of the Redeemer's salvation, adore him as Lord and humbly claim him as *our* God, affords a pleasure far greater than the most excellent music. When eastern kings used to travel, heralds went before them to give notice that the king was coming, and to order people to remove all the obstacles on the road that might hinder his progress. So it is here: John the Baptist was the herald to announce his coming. Only there is this difference: MESSIAH is visiting this wilderness of a world on a mission of mercy to sinners. Despite all the obstacles in his way, his glory shall be revealed, and the whole world shall see it.

The division suggested by this vivid picture is:

I. The state of the world at his coming – a wilderness.

II. The preparation of his way – ‘every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low.’

III. The manner and effects of his coming – ‘and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it.’

I. The word *wilderness* suggests a barren, uncultivated and dangerous place. (See Jeremiah 2.6) The world we live in may not at first seem like this, but that is because our depraved natures find it congenial. But when the Holy Spirit opens our eyes, the enchanted vision disappears, and we begin to judge the world as it really is.

At the time of Isaiah’s prophecy, Israel was like a broken down vineyard that yielded only wild grapes. (Isaiah 5.4) Though the people were not idolaters like the heathen, they drew near God with their lips, but their hearts were far from him. (Mark 7.6) Their religious leaders, the scribes, Pharisees and Sadducees, wore a cloak of godliness, but they trusted in their own righteousness, and taught the people to do the same. Meanwhile, the heathen nations were full of idolatry, ignorance, sensuality and cruelty. Their pretended wise men spoke of wisdom and morals, but their notions were mere swelling words, with no power to change people’s hearts. They had philosophers, poets, orators, musicians, sculptors and artists, but their civilisation was overwhelmed with moral corruption and wickedness. The prophet’s description of this world as a wilderness is therefore very appropriate.

II. Before he came, MESSIAH’s way was to be prepared before him.

The providence of God did this, by a series of changes. Though political leaders did not know this, God was using them to prepare people’s hearts to receive his Son.

By conquering a wide territory in that region of the world, Alexander the Great gave the nations the Greek language, in which

the New Testament was to be written and the Old Testament was already translated.

By dividing Alexander's empire after his death, God replaced it with the Roman empire, in which former kingdoms became no more than Roman provinces, each having its own governor. The road system between these provinces made travel easy, and so prepared the way for the spread of the gospel.

Among the Jews, God prepared the people for MESSIAH's coming by sending them John the Baptist. Like the morning star, he showed that the Sun was about to appear. And as MESSIAH's day dawned, so John disappeared.

III. The manner and effects of MESSIAH's appearance are described by the words: 'the valleys shall be exalted.' A valley is a low-lying area: God's people were in a low spiritual state. But His Son came to preach the gospel to the poor, fill the hungry with good things, save the chief of sinners, and open the door of salvation to the vilest characters. (e.g. Luke 7.37-38; 23.42) The Pharisees thought such people beneath their notice, but Jesus had compassion on them, and forgave their sins. He was born in Bethlehem, hardly noticed among the thousands of villages in Judah; he visited Galilee, whose inhabitants were despised by the people in Jerusalem. To this day he raises such sinners from their low state, and gives them a dignity that wealthy worldly folk know nothing about.

By contrast, he brings low 'every mountain and hill.' MESSIAH came to pour contempt on all human glory. He exposed the wickedness of the scribes, Pharisees and rulers, and showed that all their boasted excellence was abominable in the sight of God. (Luke 16.15) By living in poverty, he showed up the vanity of all their affluence. So does the gospel when he comes with it. When faithfully preached it is mighty through God to pull down strongholds, proud thoughts and every kind of self-exaltation. It brings men even lower when it gives them a sense of forgiveness

and acceptance with God through his Beloved Son. At the same time it makes them see their former gain as not worth having, compared with what they have gained through trusting in MESSIAH and his cross.

Besides this, 'the crooked are made straight, and the rough places smooth.' MESSIAH came to put right people's perverse hearts, to subdue their obstinate spirits, and to form them into a willing people in the day of his power. (Psalm 110.3) The Jewish teachers had twisted the straight and perfect law of God by their traditions, and had deformed the beauties of holiness by binding heavy burdens on the people that were too heavy to bear. But MESSIAH cleansed the law of their corrupt glosses, and made the path of holy obedience plain, practical and pleasant.

In these ways the 'glory of the Lord was revealed,' not to every eye, for many were prejudiced against his outward appearance and by mistaken views of his kingdom. But his disciples could say: "we beheld his glory." (John 1.14) He spoke with authority. His word was with power. He controlled nature, and even raised the dead. He exposed men's thoughts, forgave their sins, and displayed his divine sovereignty at every turn.

Yet the prophecy looks forward to future times. After ascending into heaven he filled his apostles and disciples with knowledge and power, and sent them forth in all directions to proclaim his love and grace to a sinful world. Then his glory was revealed, and spread from one nation to another. We still await the full accomplishment of this promise, when the whole earth shall be filled with his glory. May those of you who have heard Handel's *Messiah* ask whether you were more affected by the music than by these words.

Sermon 3

Heaven and Earth Shaken

‘Thus saith the Lord of hosts, Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land. And I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come; and I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord of hosts.’ Haggai 2.6-7.

God shook the earth when he proclaimed his law to Israel from Sinai. The mountain shook, thunder and lightning filled the air. The hearts of the people trembled. Even Moses said: “I exceedingly fear and quake.” Then the voice of the Lord shook the earth. (Exodus 19.16-19; Hebrews 12.26)

But the prophet speaks of another, greater, more important and widespread shaking. If we really believe the Scriptures are true, and that they shall certainly be fulfilled, we should be very careful to study aright the events they describe, till our hearts are rightly affected, because they all concern us.

When they had returned from their captivity in Babylon, the Jews met many discouragements as they rebuilt the temple at Jerusalem. Even when its foundation had been laid, the old men wept because it was so inferior to the first temple. (Haggai 2.3; Ezra 3.12) In these circumstances the prophets Haggai and Zechariah were sent to encourage them with the promise that, however inferior this second temple might be to Solomon’s, it would be filled with a glory far greater than that of the original temple. This glory would not depend on silver and gold. It would be a glory of a far different kind: MESSIAH would grace it with his presence. His coming would usher in his kingdom, which would then shake the heavens and the earth.

From the words of our text we may consider:

I. MESSIAH's Character: 'the desire of all nations.'

II. The effects of his appearance: 'shaking the heavens and the earth.'

III. His filling the house with glory. Though this last clause is not in Handel's *Messiah*, it is too important to omit here.

I. MESSIAH is called 'the Desire of all nations.'

1. Before he came into the world, many nations expected to see a deliverer. This was owing to traditions founded on God's promises concerning the Seed of the woman. (Genesis 3.15) One of the poet Virgil's *Eclogues* speaks of one who would restore peace to mankind in a golden age. Socrates too felt the need of a divine teacher to show mankind how to live and worship aright.

2. Even when they lived in spiritual darkness, these nations *desired* light, to satisfy their needs and end their calamities. They thirsted for happiness, but did not know where to find it. They had fears and forebodings of conscience, but they did not know a cure for these. They were so aware of their guilt and weakness that, even though they did not know God and his grace, they offered countless sacrifices to try to obtain peace. (Micah 6.6-7)

He who eventually came to meet these needs is therefore justly described as the Desire of all nations.

II. 'I will shake the heavens and the earth.'

This part of the prophecy has been partly fulfilled. At MESSIAH's birth a star appeared. At his death the sun was hidden, the earth shook, rocks were split, and the dead were raised. During his life on earth he over-ruled nature and controlled even invisible demons. When his disciples carried his gospel throughout the empire, idols were toppled and heathen temples closed. At length the Roman Empire itself renounced heathenism and embraced the Christian name.

The prophet's language, however, is highly figurative. Heavens, earth, sea and nations sometimes refer to peoples and

governments. Here Religious and Political establishments, Church and State, are intended. MESSIAH's coming would dissolve the Jewish state, end the old system of sacrifices, destroy the temple, and scatter its people all over the earth. Nothing like this had happened before. It is striking proof of the truth of Holy Scripture. What Moses and the prophets foretold came to pass. At the end of time he will shake the heavens and the earth again, by dissolving the whole frame of nature, and punish all who do not obey his gospel.

III. 'He shall fill this house with glory.'

He did so when he entered the temple, healed the blind and the lame there (Matthew 21.15-16), made even children feel his power and sing his praise, and rebuked the Pharisees and the buyers and sellers who profaned his Father's house. When he finally left it, he delivered the sentence that was soon to be executed by the Roman army (Matthew 23.37). Even as an infant he was spoken of by Simeon and Anna as the consolation of Israel. (Luke 2.25-38) But he especially filled the house with his glory when he proclaimed himself the fountain of life, and invited poor thirsty sinners to come to him and drink. (John 7.37)

The temple at Jerusalem has long since been destroyed. But now he has a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. There the spirits of just men are made perfect. (Hebrews 12.22) He also has a house on earth: his church. And wherever two or three are met in his name, he is present with them, filling them with his glory: making his voice heard, his power felt, his goodness tasted, and his name like precious ointment. The glory of the New Testament Church is far greater than that of even Solomon's temple. But this can only be seen by an enlightened and spiritual mind. It is not the glory of costly garments, vaulted roofs, solemn procession, choristers and 'dignitaries,' but of the gracious influences of his Spirit, heart-felt prayers, the good word of his grace, filling his people with joy and peace in believing. Where they have these blessings they need no more.

But before they can enjoy them, their own personal heavens and earth are shaken. Their former views of God and of themselves are shaken. Their religious building is shaken. Their vain hopes are shaken. This shaking makes way for their perception of the glory of the Saviour. In the day of his power they throw open the gates of their hearts, so that the King of glory may enter in.

Dear hearers, is MESSIAH your desire? If so, then your heart's desires are directed to him, you depend on him, devote yourself to him, and place all your happiness in his favour.

On the other hand, if you trust in yourself that you are righteous and better than others, attach yourself to the business or pleasure of this world so as to have no relish for God's record of his dear Son, you are guilty of treating the most glorious display of God's wisdom and goodness with contempt. However respectable you are in character, however amiable in the eyes of others, you are a sinner in the sight of God, and will be treated by him as an enemy, if you persist in rejecting his gospel.

The great point that will determine your state for eternity is this: What do you think of Christ? If you do not love him, you must fall under God's curse and condemnation forever. (1 Corinthians 16.22) Today, therefore (for tomorrow is not yours), may you will hear his voice, and flee for refuge to the hope set before you!

Sermon 4

The Lord Coming to His Temple

‘The Lord whom ye seek shall suddenly come to his temple, even the Messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the Lord of hosts. But who may abide the day of his coming? And who shall stand when he appeareth? For he is like a refiner’s fire, and like fuller’s soap. And he shall purify the sons of Levi, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness.’ Malachi 3.1-3

Holy Scripture concludes all under sin. (Romans 3.9) It charges them with treason and rebellion against their sovereign Lawgiver and Benefactor.

Yet it also informs us that he is longsuffering, and waits to be gracious. He tells us that he has given his only Son to mediate between him and us, and to atone for all who sue for mercy in his name. He also invites us too to come to him for pardon and eternal life.

These are the main points in Handel’s *Messiah*. The composer has been praised after his death in a place professedly devoted to the worship of God. But how few are disposed to praise MESSIAH himself! The very same truths that are heard without music from the pulpit are heard without music with indifference and even contempt! I leave my remarks to your serious reflection, in order to consider the passage before us.

Malachi confirms and unites the prophecies of Isaiah and Haggai that we considered in sermons 2 and 3. He foretells a great and solemn event. May the Holy Spirit, whose office is to glorify the Saviour, enlighten our hearts to understand his words and apply them to ourselves!

Let us note:

- I. The names here ascribed to MESSIAH.
- II. The suddenness of his coming.
- III. His searching power in general.
- IV. His purifying power on the priesthood.

I. MESSIAH's names.

'The Lord.' Our translators usually express Jehovah in capitals; e.g. LORD. But here the word is not Jehovah, but Adonai, a name that implies authority and rule, like our 'Lord' and 'Master.' It is a divine name. The Lord shall come to *his own* temple. MESSIAH, who was known on earth as a man, is now worshipped both in heaven and on earth, as God, the God of Israel. "He came to his own." Jesus Christ is "the true God, and eternal life." (1 John 5.20) And no man can call him so but by the Holy Spirit. (1 Corinthians 12.3)

He is also called 'the Messenger of the covenant.' He is the Mediator, Gift, Promise, Head and Substance of the covenant of grace. And he came to establish the covenant and to bestow its blessings on his people. The law, moral and ceremonial, was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ – grace, to relieve us from condemnation by the moral law; truth, to fulfil the types of the ceremonial law. This was according to God's eternal covenant.

Malachi adds: "the Lord *whom ye seek*" and "the Messenger *in whom ye delight*." Messiah was the hope and desire of the true Israel of God from the beginning; and when he was born, a people were already waiting for him. The prophecies regarding him that were read every Sabbath in the synagogues, marking the time and place of his appearing, the doctrine he would teach and the works he would perform, all told them what he would be like. But through prejudice and misunderstanding they expected him to deliver them from the Roman yoke instead of from sin.

II. His coming was sudden. Though long expected, he came unlooked for, and unknown. When he stood in their midst, they did not recognize him as their MESSIAH. They regarded themselves as the people of God, the children of Abraham, and boasted in his law. Yet when he came they hated and crucified him, though he was the object of Abraham's faith. (John 8.56)

This shows that it is awfully possible for people to abuse the information they have. So it is today. Like them, *we* have the Scriptures; but how many who admit their authority in word remain ignorant of their contents and live in direct contradiction to their precepts! So too the Saviour's power is revealed among us, yet crowds reject it as easily as the Jews rejected his person. At length death surprises them, and they sink into darkness. The Lord comes suddenly to them, for they never think seriously of him till they find themselves at his tribunal!

III. But who may abide the day of his coming? Like a refiner's fire, he scours their metal and reveals their dross; and like fuller's soap he purges away their spots. Whether to the Jews, whose pretended holiness and outward strictness he detected as mere hypocrisy, or to us Gentiles, whose secret thoughts he still uncovers and religiosity he exposes, he acts like a refiner's fire and a fuller's soap.

He also comes by his Spirit to make his gospel effective in his people's hearts and lives. He consumes their dross and removes their defilement; for the kingdom of God is not in word only, but also in power.

We expect him to come again. "Behold he cometh in the clouds, and every eye shall see him." (Revelation 1.7) And who shall abide *this* coming? To the wicked he will burn like an oven, and utterly consume them. (Malachi 4.1) But to all who love his appearing it will be a joyful day. He will wipe away their tears, vindicate their characters, acknowledge them as his, and receive

them into the kingdom prepared for them before the foundation of the world. (Matthew 25.34)

IV. The 'sons of Levi,' or priests, are particularly mentioned in connection with his coming. By Malachi's day they had corrupted the Lord's covenant, and caused many to stumble. (Malachi 2.8-9) They dishonoured their office, and became vile and contemptible. But when he would come he would purge them so that a great number of priests would be saved. (Acts 6.7)

This process has been repeated in many churches. A fall from simple, pure worship, principles and morals after the apostles' days was not put right until the Reformation. Even then the nations who were freed from the chains of popery did not long preserve their purity. In most countries the state became the idol of the church, and the church became the creature of the state.

How it is with us I need not say at length. Facts speak for themselves. Yet it is a mournful fact that the ministry has become contemptible, though the gospel itself has not changed. It still produces its age-old effects: it enlightens darkened minds, softens hard hearts, heals wounded spirits, and makes those who were once burdens to society useful citizens. The believing sinner, being purified by the blood of Jesus, now offers to God a righteous sacrifice: a holy life and praising lips.

And converted ministers are now constrained by the love of Christ and of souls to preach the subject they formerly despised: Jesus Christ and him crucified.

Sermon 5

Immanuel

‘Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name IMMANUEL, GOD WITH US.’ Isaiah 7.14

God’s signature of wisdom and power appears on all his works, the glow-worm as well as the sun, a blade of grass as well as the structure of the universe. Similarly he is inimitable in his Word. He has a style and manner all his own. His thoughts are above our thoughts, and his ways above our ways.

This is eminently so in the restoration of fallen man to his favour. We have slight thoughts of both the evil of sin and of holiness. But to have mercy on sinners required the utmost wisdom in making it correspond to his justice and truth. His gospel reveals this wisdom, for it combines inflexible righteousness with the greatest grace. This is the greatest of all his works, and gloriously sets forth his perfections.

Our text refers exclusively to MESSIAH. My warrant for stating this is the authority of Matthew 1.23 and Luke 1.31-32. These evangelists apply it directly to him, and assure it that it was accomplished in him.

Two things are stated:

- I. A virgin shall conceive, and bear a son.
- II. His name shall be called IMMANUEL, GOD WITH US.

I. A virgin shall conceive, and bear a son.

The Mediator between God and man must himself be a man. The Redeemer must have the same nature as those he came to redeem. Adam’s first act of disobedience to God degraded man, detached him from his God, and made him incapable of fulfilling the law of his creation: to love the Lord his God and his neighbour as

himself. But MESSIAH fulfilled it exactly, as a man, and it is renewed by the power of grace in all who believe on him. *His* obedience to it is accepted on their behalf, and he will at length perfectly restore them to its standards.

Therefore, when God sent forth his Son, made under the law to redeem us from the curse of the law, he was made of a woman. (Galatians 4.4-5) Thus he became our *Goel*, or kinsman Redeemer, in whom the right to redeem us lay.

Had he derived his human nature from sinful parents, he would have been defiled and depraved like the rest of Adam's descendants. But that holy thing that was conceived and born of a virgin was the immediate creation of God. And so he came into this sinful world holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners. (Hebrews 7. 26) Being perfectly pure, he did not need to offer sacrifices for himself, like the Old Testament priests. (Hebrews 7.27) Thus his spotless purity perfectly qualified him to be a great High Priest to us.

All this was brought about by his being conceived without sin in the womb of a virgin. His nature was unblemished, his obedience was flawless, and his sacrifice of himself was according to the strictest demands of God's law.

Let us pause and admire the wonderful wisdom and power of God that brought this to pass.

II. Our admiration and gratitude is raised even higher when we realise that he who was born of a virgin is IMMANUEL, GOD WITH US. Had he been no more than a man, he would not have been able to save sinners. Because sin is exceedingly sinful (Romans 7.13), must bring divine value, as well as divine power, to the work of our redemption.

Indeed, had he been no more than a sinless man, he could have redeemed only himself. But an obedience that was to avail for

millions of others must be divine in merit. Besides, no mere creature could have borne and exhausted the curse due to us for our sin. Such an undertaking required the power of God. If anyone imagines that the righteous God could have forgiven us sinners without such an atonement, let him consider: the question is not what God *can* do, but what it *becomes* him to do, consistent with all his perfections and his character as Judge. His wisdom and justice decided that nothing less was required to redeem his people from their sins. Atoning blood is the blood of IMMANUEL, of him who is GOD with us. The sinner who makes this plea at the throne of grace builds his hope on a rock that cannot be moved.

Even though forgiveness is essential to our salvation, it is only a part. We cannot be blessed unless the power of sin is destroyed. A well-grounded hope of mercy is always linked to a thirst for holiness and conformity to God's image. Our case requires an almighty arm, of power that can remove a heart of stone and create in us a heart of flesh.

Furthermore, our passage through life needs a Saviour who is always present with us, always watching over us, always upholding us, and who never changes. Such a one is IMMANUEL, GOD WITH US. How can our prayers be answered, our needs supplied, our distresses relieved, unless our Redeemer is GOD? How can he give rest to the weary, preserve us from perishing, and give us eternal life, unless he is GOD? It was because the LORD was his Shepherd that David had no reason to fear, even when passing through the valley of the shadow of death. (Psalm 23.1, 4) Jesus is our Shepherd. How can we trust in him unless we are sure that he is *our* Shepherd?

This doctrine does not need to be proved to 'men of reason.' It is a truth of revelation, and demands our assent on the authority of God who has revealed it. He who was born in a stable, and suffered on Golgotha, is the true God and eternal life. This is the doctrine of Scripture, the only foundation of our hope. We do not say, however, that God suffered, bled and died, or that MESSIAH's

human nature is the object of worship. But we do say: “God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself.” (2 Corinthians 5.19) We believe that the human nature of MESSIAH was so intimately united to the divine that the actions of each nature are properly ascribed to his one person, the God-Man, IMMANUEL, God with us. And so we read that the final judgment of the world is committed to him as man (Acts 17.31) and that the one who bought the church with his own blood was God (Acts 20.28) Behold then the character of MESSIAH: a divine person in human nature, God manifest in the flesh, God with us!

And he is still with us. He suffered as man, and as man he now reigns in glory. He exercises all power and authority, and receives our spiritual worship to present to God. In him man is both exalted and ennobled. Believers are brought into the closest relationship to one who is God over all, blessed for ever. Angels adore him, but only redeemed sinners can say: “He loved us and gave himself for us; he has washed us from our sins in his own blood.” (Galatians 2.20; Revelation 1.5) He is our Saviour, our Shepherd, our Friend, our Immanuel!

I will conclude with a few practical remarks.

1. What a cold assent is given to the doctrine of the Godhead of Christ by many who claim to receive it as a truth! From education, books or ministers they have adopted an orthodox scheme of religion, and with this they are satisfied. They never doubted it, and therefore assume they believe it. But no one can say from the heart “Jesus is Lord” unless he is taught by God. A cordial belief of this truth will always produce great and lasting effects. Those who know the Saviour as IMMANUEL will so trust in him as to renounce all confidence in anyone and anything else. They will love him above all others, and forsake everything that competes with his favour. They will glory in his cross, espouse his cause, and enlist in his service. They will draw from his fullness, obey his commands and live in his Spirit. Happy are those who, in saying the Creed, are so minded. But thousands whose lips frame its words do not know what they say. Their assent to his character is

no better than that of the demons who said: “We know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God.” (Mark 1.24)

2. What a strong foundation this doctrine affords to those who really know and trust in MESSIAH. This truth is the rock on which the Church of God is built, and against which the gates of hell shall never prevail. (Matthew 16.18) The difficulties of our warfare are great, the enemies of our peace are many, the world frowns, Satan rages, but Jesus has overcome all. He will guide his people with unerring wisdom, support them with an almighty arm, supply them from the riches of his grace, revive them when they faint, heal them when they are wounded, plead for them at the right hand of God, lead them along the path of life, and finally give them a crown.

3. On the contrary, how dreadful is the state of those who reject him, and say in their hearts: “We will not have this man to reign over us.” He is now proposed as Saviour; he invites sinners to come to him, and assures them that whoever comes to him shall in no wise be cast out. (John 6.37) Happy are those who hear his voice and obey it today, while it is called today. Tomorrow is uncertain. Death may be at the door. Our state at death shall be our state in eternity. Those who refuse him now as Saviour must stand before him as Judge. They must answer for all their transgressions of the law, and for all their contempt of the gospel of the grace of God!

Sermon 6

Salvation Published from the Mountains

‘O Zion, that bringest good tidings, get thee up into the high mountains: O Jerusalem, that bringest good tidings, lift up thy voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid: say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God! Isaiah 40.9.

While I bear testimony to the great value of our English Version (A.V.) as a translation of the *whole* Scripture, there are particular passages where a small change, answerable to the original Hebrew and Greek, might render the meaning clearer. As the text stands in Handel’s *Messiah*, Zion and Jerusalem are considered as *bringing* the good tidings: “O thou that *tellest*.” But the prophet represents them as *receiving* the tidings.

In view of MESSIAH’S appearing, great joy is expected, for the gospel is good news, glad tidings indeed! In keeping with the rejoicing at their deliverance from Egypt (Exodus 15.20-21) and David’s return from the slaughter of the Philistines (1 Samuel 18.6-7) and the Song of Deborah (Judges 5.28-29), therefore, the womenfolk are called on to proclaim the glad tidings throughout the country. Zion is a besieged city, but her deliverance is at hand. Therefore say to her: “Behold your God!” The promise of IMMANUEL, GOD WITH US, is now to be spread from the mountaintops. Dawn is breaking, and this passage prepares the way for the following one: “Arise, shine, for thy light is come.” The welcome news is to go out from Jerusalem through Samaria to the ends of the earth.

The cause of this joy is the character and work of MESSIAH, answerable to the state in which he finds mankind. This state has three principal features: guilt, an alienated heart, and misery.

1. Guilt

We are God's creatures. He made us, and he preserves us. He is therefore our Lord and Lawgiver. But we have broken the law of our creation. We have violated the order of his government. We have renounced our allegiance to him, disowned his right over us, and set up ourselves.

His justice and truth, however, are engaged to punish us. This liability to punishment is termed *guilt*. And there is no way of escape, unless he is pleased to appoint one. This he has done; and to declare this is the good news of the text. Proclaim it from the mountaintops that there is forgiveness with him. Say to Jerusalem: "Behold MESSIAH, behold your God! He comes to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. (Hebrews 9.26) He *can* do it, for he is God; and he *will* do it, for he has taken our nature for this very purpose. "Behold the lamb of God, who taketh away the sin of the world."

2. An alienated heart

Not only have we sinned against the Lord, we are deeply averse to him in our hearts. We are 'haters of God.' (Romans 1.30) Many think this a hard saying. They admit they are not without blame, and fall short of their duty, and even break God's commandments. But it is only a weakness! They are sorry, and hope to do better next time! Yet they still think their hearts are basically good. In short, they persuade themselves that God is not as strict to mark iniquity as his Word says he is. All this proves our inbred dislike to his moral character, his rule of government, and his method of grace. We will not make his glory our chief end, or his favour our chief good. We do not like to retain God in our thoughts. (Romans 1.28) This enmity against God is so strong that we cannot bear that others think more highly of him than we do, or are more strongly attached to him than we are. This is why Cain slew Abel. (1 John 3.12) Can we show a stronger dislike to a person than by hating all who love him?

But MESSIAH comes to take this enmity away. Therefore say to poor sinners: “Behold your God!” The cross of Christ subdues our enmity when all else fails. It did with Saul of Tarsus. (Acts 9.1-20; Philippians 3.8) Now, the doctrine that Paul preached has enlightened the minds of many here, and has brought you new hopes. You were once far from God, but now you are brought near to him by the blood of Christ. You once lived to yourselves, but now you live for him who loved you and gave himself for you.

3. Misery

If we are guilty in the sight of God and alienated from him, we are bound to be miserable. Guilt binds a heavy burden on our conscience, and we are afraid of future punishment. Moreover, sin has filled the world with misery and sorrow. The whole creation groans under its weight. At first, everything God made was very good (Genesis 1.31), but now it is spoiled, and at the end of our lives comes death.

Then publish the glad tidings from the mountains; let the joyful sound drift over the plains. Your MESSIAH is coming to establish a new, spiritual kingdom, free from all misery. Soon his people shall enter a state of eternal, uninterrupted, inconceivable joy!

For these purposes the Son of God was revealed. The prophets saw his day afar off, and proclaimed his approach: “Thy God cometh!”

Does the promise make joy spring up in *your* hearts? Or is it nothing to you? You may have been moved by the music of *Messiah*, but you are to be pitied if the words have not moved you! Yet hear once more: “Thy God cometh!” He came in the fullness of time according to the prophecy, and the same word of prophecy assures us that he will come again. Then every eye shall see him. O, prepare to meet thy God! (Amos 4.12)

Sermon 7

The Morning Light

‘Arise, shine, for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee. For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people: but the Lord shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee: and the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising.’ (Isaiah 60.1-3)

One strong proof that the Bible is from God is that it teaches us to think highly and honourably of him. There is no right knowledge of God where the Bible is not known. The most admired ancient writings are inferior to it.

The sublime style of the prophets flows from the grandeur of their subject. They wrote under the influence of him who alone can speak worthily of himself. Their main theme is the revelation of his perfections in the person of his Son. The prophecies we have already considered grow clearer and more precise as the time of MESSIAH’s coming draws nearer. Recently we heard of the command to proclaim his coming from the mountaintops. Here the prophet begins to show us the effects of his appearance. The earth lies in darkness; but the Sun of Righteousness is about to arise, and fill it with life, light and glory. These effects will not extend to all, for many will love darkness rather than light. Darkness shall cover those who reject him; but his glory shall be seen on all who believe. This is the scope of the passage before us.

I. As the sun brings light to the natural world, so MESSIAH brings it to the spiritual and moral world. In Scripture, darkness implies a state of ignorance, sin and misery. (John 12.35; 1 John 1.6; Matthew 25.30) Light signifies true knowledge, holiness and happiness. (Ephesians 5.8; Micah 7.8; Psalm 97.11) The Old Testament church was halfway between: it lived in a kind of dawn

or twilight. MESSIAH was the source of their knowledge, hope and joy, but they were covered with many shadows; so they longed for the glorious light of the gospel in its fullness.

When MESSIAH arrived, he brought with him grace and truth. At Pentecost, he gave the gifts that would qualify his servants to preach the gospel everywhere, and settle his kingdom in the world. The partition wall between Jew and Gentile was taken away, and his righteousness was openly showed to the heathen. Many began to sit down in the kingdom with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

By the power of his Holy Spirit the Lord is present now with his ministers and people. (Matthew 6.6; 18.20) His Spirit will stay with the Church forever. Thus the gospel state is a state of light. The Sun rises, and all who have the eyes of their understanding opened enjoy a bright and marvellous day.

II. Those on whom MESSIAH shines, the living members of his Church, are so lit up by him that they too shine, just as the moon shines by the light of the sun. Gazing on his glory in the Word, they are changed into the same image, from glory to glory. (2 Corinthians 3.18)

Two points may be considered here: the fact, and the cause.

(1) The fact

They shine. They were once darkness, but now are they light in the Lord. (Ephesians 5.8) A dark, ignorant, wicked, selfish Christian is a contradiction in terms. Those who merely *profess* the name of Christ are so, but those who truly know him walk in the light, as he is in the light. They know him with a good understanding. (Psalm 111.10) They know the Lord, they know themselves, they know the evil of sin, and they know the way of salvation. They know how to endure affliction, to forgive injuries, and to overcome evil with good. They know the vanity of this world and the importance of eternity. They have learned to be content, to do their duty and to face death with comfort. True believers are conformed more and more to the spirit of their Saviour, and are therefore different to

others in the world. At least they have the beginnings of true peace and solid joy.

(2) The cause

They shine wholly by MESSIAH's light. They themselves are happy to confess that they are wise only by his wisdom, and strong by his power. They can neither think a good thought without him, nor stand unless he upholds them, nor watch unless he watches with them, nor be safe or happy unless he daily supplies them.

There is a real spiritual union between Christ and his people. He is the vine; they are the branches. He is the head; they are the members. They dwell in him by faith; he dwells in them by his Spirit. All their wellsprings are in him. "I live," says the apostle, "yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." (Galatians 2.20) "I can do all things through Christ strengthening me." (Philippians 4.13) For his part, Christ says: "My grace is sufficient for thee" (2 Corinthians 12.9), and "Without me ye can do nothing." (John 15.5) These things are written that no flesh should glory in his presence, but that he who glories should glory in the Lord. (1 Corinthians 1.29-31)

III. Those who wilfully turn from the light involve themselves in double darkness, and become more wicked than those who never saw the light. So says our Lord, MESSIAH: "If I had not come and spoken to them, they had not had sin; but now they have no cloak for their sin." (John 15.22) And again: "For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see, and that they which see might be made blind." (John 9.39) He came to make the ignorant wise to salvation; but those who disdained his teaching through the pride of their own imagined wisdom were left to themselves. Thus they gave proof that their boasted light was mere darkness. The worst errors, the hardest heart, the most profane spirit, and the most abominable wickedness will certainly be found where the gospel is despised.

It is evident that much so-called Christian morality, opposed to the gospel, is leaner than the morality of many heathen. Infidels, who think it is their wisdom to despise the gospel, are not found where the Bible is unknown. Avowed atheists, who deny the Being or Providence of God, live in evangelized lands. But their hearts are hardened against conviction before they descend to such depths. Nevertheless, while the blind stumble at noonday, MESSIAH's people walk in confidence and peace, and shine like lights in this poor dark world.

IV. The third verse of the chapter foretells, and so secures, the conversion of the Gentiles. The times and seasons are at God's disposal, and the Scripture must be fulfilled. Much was done in the first age of Christianity. The apostle Paul took the gospel even to Rome, the capital of the empire. We have reason to believe that it came to our islands not long after our Lord's ascension. And though later the gospel left many as ignorant as when it found them, even among them some experienced a real saving change. And we are warranted to hope for still greater things, for the Redeemer's kingdom shall one day fill the whole earth. (Daniel 2.35)

V. The call in our text comes to all of us. "Arise, shine, for thy light is come." "Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light." (Ephesians 5.14) Just as natural light requires eyes to see it, so spiritual light requires eyes to see it. The glory of the gospel is that it gives eyes as well as light. It is God's chosen instrument for this purpose. However suited to man's fallen state, the gospel must be accompanied by divine power before it lets in the light.

This truth encourages ministers to persevere in publishing the glad tidings, for the preaching of the gospel is a dispensation of grace and holiness. And when the Lord works with it, who shall hinder it? (Isaiah 43.13) Therefore, having his command and promise, we are not moved by the carelessness and obstinacy of those who do not realize what they are doing when they reject its good news.

Our business is to deliver his message, and to water it with our prayers and tears. Only God can give the increase. We must not suppress or disguise what he commands us to declare. Nor must we add anything of our own to accommodate it to the tastes or prejudices of our hearers. (2 Corinthians 4.2)

Let those preach smooth things who dare answer at God's tribunal for the souls they have murdered. *We dare not!* Let those be ashamed of the gospel who do not feel indebted to him for his love in dying for sinners. *We cannot*, and by the grace of God *we will not!* We will glory in it. "God forbid that we should glory" in anything else! (Galatians 6.14) Like Ezekiel, we are commanded to preach to dry bones, and he who sends us can make dry bones live. (Ezekiel 37.4) "O ye dry bones, hear the word of the Lord!" This word of his salvation is sent to you. "The Lord is risen indeed!" "Arise, shine, for your light is come." In his name we proclaim pardon and peace to all who will seek him. But seek him today, while it is called today. Tomorrow is not yours. Seek him now, while he may be found. Harden not your hearts. Tremble, "lest a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should finally come short of it." (Hebrews 4.1)

Sermon 8

The Rising Sun

‘The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined.’ Isaiah 9.2

Contrasts illustrate and strengthen each other. The happiness of those who believe in MESSIAH is sharpened by the recollection of their former misery. They were darkness, but now they are children of light. They were far off from God, but now they are brought near him. They were found of him when they did not seek him. (Isaiah 65.1) The gratitude they feel for this undeserved deliverance gives them a more lively sense of the blessings they enjoy. Indeed, the thoughts of what they have been redeemed from will add to their joys in heaven. (Revelation 5.9-12)

These contrasts are found in our text. MESSIAH’s light shone on them when they were in darkness, and he gave them life when they dwelt in death. Matthew (4.15) confirms that this passage refers directly to him. I shall first consider the literal fulfilment of this prophecy, and then apply it to the state of mankind at large.

I. Hebrew words often mean more than one thing. This is why interpreters and translators differ. Sometimes the context helps to decide the meaning. The words rendered ‘lightly afflicted’ and ‘grievously afflicted’ (in verse 1) signify: the one ‘to think lightly of,’ the other ‘to honour.’ Both are used in the verse: “Them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed.” (1 Samuel 2.30) Had these words been so translated in the passage before us, their meaning would have been plainer: “Nevertheless there shall not be dimness (or darkness) as in the time of her vexation or distress). He formerly debased (made light of) the land of Zebulon and Naphtali, but in the latter time he has made it glorious, even (the land) by the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles. (For) the people that walked in

darkness, etc.” Such was the low state of Galilee before the coming of MESSIAH; such was the honour it received from his appearing.

1. The land allotted to Issachar, Zebulon and Naophtali became known as Galilee. As the people there were mixed with foreigners, and as it was far from Jerusalem, Galilee was lightly esteemed by the Jews. Even Nathanael was prejudiced against it, as if MESSIAH could never come out of it. (John 1.46) Its inhabitants were reckoned rude, unpolished, provincial people. When Peter denied knowing his Lord, he was recognized by his Galilean dialect. (Mark 14.70)

2. This despised part of Israel was the scene of much of MESSIAH’s ministry. Though he was born in Bethlehem of Judah (Micah 5.2) he was brought up at Nazareth, and lived for a time in Capernaum, both towns of Galilee.

3. By living there, he honoured the region. Its towns were ‘lifted up to heaven.’ (Matthew 11.21-23) They were highly privileged to be visited by him.

4. But though Galilee was favoured in this way, when MESSIAH appeared it was a land of darkness. Though its people were not idolaters, they were very ignorant. The law and the prophets were read in their synagogues, but to little purpose. Their keeping swine proves how little they regarded the law of Moses. They were also under the spiritual guidance of the scribes and Pharisees, blind leaders of the blind. Messiah himself was called a Galilean and Nazarene, terms of contempt. Furthermore, most of his followers were men of Galilee, little thought of by the outside world.

So much for the literal meaning.

II. But this prophecy is not to be limited to the locality of Galilee. Isaiah (49.6) extends it to take in the Gentile world at large. God’s Servant, MESSIAH, was to be a light to the Gentiles and God’s salvation to the ends of the earth. So he is still “the light of the

world.” (John 8.12) He sends his word of grace and truth wherever he pleases, and by the power of his Spirit he is present wherever his gospel is known. Though courts and palaces are rarely favoured with it, he is known in villages and cottages. Alas, how few believe its report!

Mankind at large is still in a state of darkness, until enlightened by the Word and Spirit of grace. Even when a person is awakened to a sense of his sin, he remains like a shipwrecked sailor on an inhospitable coast, and ready to perish unless someone comes to him to ferry him to an island where he would be safe, have plenty and be free from anxiety. He may easily snatch at a pardon without realizing that a holy God must be satisfied before he can give peace to such a soul.

But Jesus dispels this darkness by bringing life and immortality to light by the gospel. For,

The Holy Spirit must show us that there is forgiveness with God, on the basis of MESSIAH’S sacrifice, and must fulfil in us the promise: “I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean” (Ezekiel 36.25-26) before we can receive God’s mercy.

When MESSIAH’S obedience unto death is revealed to the enlightened conscience by the Spirit, he shows us how God is reconciled to us sinners. God’s holy law has been vindicated, the demands of his justice have been satisfied, and a door of hope is opened for us to draw near with confidence.

Thus the doctrine of the cross sheds light on everything concerning our salvation. In Jesus Christ and him crucified all the treasure of wisdom and knowledge are revealed, and we see the manifold wisdom of God. (Ephesians 3.10) We look to him, and are enlightened. Our thoughts of God and of ourselves are changed and corrected, and we gain a solid hope, a humble spirit, new views of our duty and fresh motives for obedience.

In this way God, as revealed in Christ, is chosen as ‘the pearl of great price.’ No longer burdened with anxiety, nor deadened by disappointments, nor held in slavery to sin, we begin to enjoy peace with God and hope of glory. We who once walked in darkness have seen a great light. We who were dead in sins have been given life.

How we should pity those who reject the light of the gospel! True, they cannot see it; but equally true, they will not. But may I not hope that today some of you shall be made a willing people in a day of his power? (Psalm 110.3)

Do not reason about the matter, but repent and believe the gospel. The light shines round about you, whether you see it or not; and it has power to open the eyes of the blind. If you call on him, he will hear, and you shall receive your sight. If the Saviour’s grace and glory make no impression on you, it is because you are blind. If only you were conscious of your blindness, the remedy is at hand. If now you are willing to seek him, he is willing to be found of you.

But if you deliberately choose darkness, your ruin is unavoidable. God is gracious and longsuffering, but he will not be mocked. (Galatians 6.7) Humble yourself at once and beg for his mercy, or else prepare to meet him in judgment. But be assured he will not meet you like a man. You must either bend or break. The Lord forbid that he would say to you on the great day of his second appearing: “Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire!”

Sermon 9

Messiah's Names

'For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder; and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.' Isaiah 9.6

Such was the triumphant joy of the Old Testament Church! Their noblest hopes were founded on the promise of MESSIAH. By faith, which is the substance of things hoped for (Hebrews 11.1), they considered the promises of the unchangeable God as already accomplished. Isaiah therefore prepares this joyful song for the servants of God who lived in his day.

It is still new. It has been and shall be taken up by the New Testament Church, so that present day Christians can sing: "Unto us a child is born." And when a sinner is taught by the Holy Spirit to understand MESSIAH's ability and willingness to save those who are ready to perish, and begins to feel the joyful effects of trusting in his name, then this song becomes his own, even though many may despise and pity him as a weak enthusiast. May you too make it your own!

Every clause in this passage might furnish us with a long sermon, but my plan is to touch briefly on certain particulars of MESSIAH's states and names.

I. We have his Incarnation. "Unto us a child is born." He is born in our nature, born of a woman. "A son is given." He is not merely a son, but the Son of God. This mystery of godliness, God manifest in the flesh (1 Timothy 3.16) is the central truth of revelation. Like the sun, it diffuses its light on the whole system of truth.

II. We have his exaltation. “The government shall be upon his shoulder.” In our nature he suffered, in our nature he reigns. When he had overcome the sting of death he took possession of the kingdom of glory. Now we can say: he who rules heaven and earth is the child who was born, the son who was given for us. This exaltation of his guarantees the security and exaltation of all who are joined to him by faith. Their best Friend is seated on the throne of glory. And since he is for them who can be against them?

III. The names he is given.

“His name shall be called Wonderful.” In Judges 13.18 the word is rendered ‘secret.’ Both are true. He is *wonderful* in his person, obedience and sufferings; in his grace, government and glory. Let us believe, admire and adore him! His name is also *secret*. Who can by searching find him out? No one can grasp his greatness, trace his wisdom, exhaust his fullness, or limit his power. No one knows the Son, but the Father. But those in whose view he is wonderful can say with Paul: “I count all things but loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord!”

Another of his names is Counsellor. The council of redemption, in which the glory of God and the salvation of his people was decided, was established in and with him before the foundation of the world.

And he is our Counsellor, to plead our cause and manage our case with infallible success. In all our difficulties, dangers and cares we must look to him for guidance: his secret is with those who consult him. He will teach them many things that are hidden from those who are wise and prudent in their own eyes.

He is also the Mighty God. Though as Mediator he is a Servant, yet his attributes are truly divine. Only the Mighty God could satisfy the demands of his own holy law. Only the Mighty God could lead his people through the wilderness of this world to glory. If he is not the Mighty God, then Christians are guilty of idolatry.

Furthermore, he is the Everlasting Father. While he is not ashamed to call his people brethren (Hebrews 2.11), they are also his children. They are born into his family, and derive their spiritual life from him.

Lastly, he is called the Prince of Peace. It is his sovereign right to speak peace to his people (Psalm 85.8), and there is no true peace but what he bestows. (Isaiah 57.21) Thoughtless security and ignorant insensibility are not peace. They are the effect of blindness of mind and hardness of heart. Can they possess peace who are under the power of restless desires that can never be satisfied?

But MESSIAH's kingdom is a kingdom of peace. He has made peace with God by the blood of his cross, and faith brings this peace to his people. (Colossians 1.20; Romans 5.1)

Moreover, he teaches his people how to seek and keep peace among men. His love subdues the power of self, and makes them kind to others. Thus their peace flows like a river. And when they come to die, their end is peace. (Psalm 37.37)

Such is the character of MESSIAH! This is the God we adore, our almighty, unchangeable Friend! Once known, his grace, glory, greatness and goodness fix the heart, fill it with admiration, and keep it from roving from him. They bring with them cheerful, unreserved obedience to his commands, and a deliberate, voluntary submission to his holy will.

May we all be so minded. I dare not hope it is so with all present. But this is the day of his grace. He came into the world to draw hearts to himself, and for this purpose he favours us with his gospel, in which he still says: "Look unto me, and be ye saved" (Isaiah 45.22); "Come unto me, and I will give you rest." (Matthew 11.28) To be found among his disciples at the last great day is the one thing needful.

Then hear his voice today. As long as you are unfit to die, you cannot fully enjoy this life. Putting off his call is highly dangerous. You cannot presume on the future in which to seek him. How do you know that you shall not be suddenly cut off, which would make your repentance impossible? If you grieve his Spirit *now*, how can you be sure he will *ever* return? O tremble, lest by trifling with God a sudden death is your end!

Sermon 10

The Angel's Message and Song

'There were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flocks by night. And lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them, and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them: Fear not, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you: ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God, and saying: Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace, good will toward men.' Luke 2.8-14

The recent entertainment in Westminster Abbey was chiefly to gratify the great, the wealthy and the gay. Yet despite the expense involved and the splendid appearance of the audience the shepherds who were honoured with the first news of MESSIAH's birth, free, enjoyed a far more sublime entertainment. The performers of *their* oratorio were the heavenly host; their chorus was a song still sung by the redeemed around the throne of God. We are told the very words of this song. May our hearts be suitably affected by them!

I will confine myself at present to a few thoughts on the circumstances this heavenly vision, the angel's message, and the concluding chorus.

I. The Circumstances

Suddenly, without warning, a glory shone round about the shepherds, and an angel appeared to them. No wonder they were afraid! Though few believe it, we live near an invisible world. And those who believe the Word of God cannot doubt the existence of

angels. We would be naturally afraid of them if they appeared to us, even with a message of mercy and peace from God. Yet soon we must join them in the world of spirits, when we leave the world of our senses. Happy are they who, like Stephen, can commend their departing spirits into the hands of Jesus! He is Lord of all worlds, and has the key of the invisible state.

The glorious gospel of the blessed God may seem a fitter theme for an angel rather than a man. But angels never sinned. They may proclaim its excellence, but they cannot know its power. God has put this treasure in earthen vessels. Yet here an angel was sent with the best news that mankind could ever hear; not to Caesar, or Herod, or the high priest, but to lowly shepherds. The Lord does not regard the petty distinctions known among men. He is equally near all who fear him, whatever their situation in life. These shepherds, no doubt, were waiting for the consolation of Israel. Thus it has been from age to age: God has hidden his gospel from the wise and great, and has revealed it to babes.

II. The Angel's Message

Though brief, this message was full. It contained the fact: "Unto you is born this day" – the place: "in the city of David" i.e. Bethlehem, because David was born there – MESSIAH's office: "a Saviour" – his name, honour and character: "Christ, or Anointed, the Lord." These things are mentioned because it was so unlikely that MESSIAH would be a babe lying in a manger. Yet so it was. Though he was rich in himself, he became poor for our sakes. (2 Corinthians 8.9) It was because of this that he was despised and rejected of men. (Isaiah 53.3) Though he came to his own, as Lord and Master of his house, yet coming in this manner, he was slighted and opposed. His people preferred a murderer to him, and so put him to death as an impostor and blasphemer. But the shepherds did not so reason through unbelief. They saw, they believed, they obeyed.

The great difference between the greatness of MESSIAH's claims and his lowly appearance is still the great stumbling block today.

Because he stooped so low, many do not believe that he is God. Yet those who are willing to be taught by his Word and Spirit see a beauty in his willingness to be born in a stable, and to live as a poor man, without house or property. By doing this he poured contempt on all worldly pomp, and sanctified the state of poverty to his followers. However, those who live in the world of light do not reject him. Rather, they express their joy at his taking on such a low state.

III. The Angels' Chorus

“Glory to God in the highest.” That is, in the highest heaven, to the highest degree, at the highest instance of his mercy. At the creation these ‘morning stars’ sang for joy. (Job 38.7) But redemption was a greater work than creation. The glory of God shone more brightly in it.

The glory of his *goodness* shines in the mercy he has shown to mankind. We are sinners, rebels, enemies; yet he has purposed to restore to us a life we have forfeited, and that more abundantly.

The glory of his *wisdom* appears in his adjusting the demands of his holiness, justice and truth with his purpose of mercy. By pardoning sin and humbling the sinner’s pride, he enables him to receive grace and glory as he sees the excellence of the gospel and embraces it.

The glory of his *power* is seen in his making every one, even his enemies, agents of his grace, despite all the seeming difficulties standing in the way.

These are things that the angels desire to look into. (1 Peter 1.12)
The greatest intelligences in the universe admire them.

“On earth peace.” This is the great design and effect of MESSIAH’s appearance. Fallen man is in a state of war with God. He has renounced his allegiance and dependence. He is disobedient to his laws and averse to his government. His

conscience, if not deadened by repeated refusal to be convicted, tells him that God is against him. He therefore feels unhappy here, and fears he shall be miserable hereafter. Without an express assurance from God, he would sink into despair.

But here God assures him that there is forgiveness with him (Psalm 130.4), for God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself. When he knows this mercy the sinner's enmity is slain, and he surrenders himself to God, begins to trust and love him, for he enjoys peace with him.

The expression "goodwill toward men" follows naturally. Sinners who believe on the Son of God are not only forgiven and no longer condemned; they are also united to their Saviour, as a token of God's good will towards them. We believe, admire, and adore. "The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will rejoice over thee with singing." (Zephaniah 3.17)

The language of the heavenly host is not that of our hearts by nature. We once sought our joy from another source. We were indifferent to the glory of God, and strangers to his peace. And some of us are still blind to the beauty of the gospel, and deaf to its gracious invitations. If so, we must not expect to sing with the redeemed before the throne. Those who reach the inheritance of the saints in light are first made fit for it in this present world. They believe God's witness that they are guilty, unworthy and helpless. They receive God's record of his Son. They renounce all confidence in the flesh, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and worship God in spirit. (Philippians 3.3) Their sense of debt to him disposes them to praise him now as they *can*, in hope of praising him as they *ought*. For heaven itself could not be a place of joy to them unless they account all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus their Lord.

Sermon 11

Messiah's Entry into Jerusalem

'Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy king cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass. And he shall speak to the heathen.'
Zechariah 9.9-10

The smallness of man's fallen mind is evident from the idea it forms of grandeur. The pageantry of a Roman triumph shows us what he imagines his best state. Seated in an imperial coach, dressed in splendid robes and crowned with jewels, protected by guards and hailed by crowds, he sees himself at the peak of happiness.

How different was MESSIAH's entry into Jerusalem! This King of kings and Lord of lords rode on an ass's colt. And though the crowds seemed to greet him, he appeared unmoved by their applause. He took no notice of the zeal of his apparent friends because his heart was filled with compassion for his enemies. For he had just wept over the city when he considered its future destruction. As his kingdom is not of this world, he allowed no marks of human grandeur in his procession. He drew near Jerusalem on an ass, and weeping for his enemies there.

The passage of Handel's *Messiah* that follows the chorus of the heavenly choir is taken from these verses. It does not include them all, and instead of "he is just, having salvation" are the words "he is a righteous Saviour."

Let us notice:

I. The Prophet's Address.

It is to the daughter of Zion and Jerusalem. These titles are emblems of the church or professing people of God. They boasted

that they alone were the Lord's people. They had the promises of MESSIAH in their hands, and professed to be waiting for his arrival. They are therefore called on to rejoice in it. But when he came, even to his own, they did not receive him. (John 1.11) Only a few waited for him, though all were bound to welcome him.

The parallel between the Jewish people and Gentiles who profess to have received the gospel is striking. While they assume the name 'Christian' and call the Saviour 'Lord,' they reject the gospel and treat his ministers with neglect or contempt. And so they share the guilt of those who pretended to expect MESSIAH, yet crucified him when he appeared. In person he could be crucified only once, but the Scripture speaks of those who "crucify the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame."

II. The Call to Rejoice.

This call is heard and obeyed only by those who feel their need of the Saviour, and who believe in his authority and ability to save. To them the prophet brings a joyful message. And when they hear it they rejoice with joy unspeakable, and full of glory. (1 Peter 1.8) Jesus still has a people, and will have to the end of time, who rejoice in him. They know his name, put their trust in him, and can say with another prophet: "I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation." (Habakkuk 3.18)

III. The Cause of Their Joy.

"Thy king cometh." MESSIAH is a king. This title he professed before Pilate (Mark 15.2), who ordered it to be fixed to his cross. Here he is spoken of as king of Zion. The kingdom he came to establish is not of this world. His subjects are members of a spiritual kingdom. Their true citizenship is in heaven. (Philippians 3.20) And though they share life on earth with others, it does not appear what they shall be. (1 John 3.2) He rules them from a throne of grace, with full consent from their hearts.

IV. His Character.

He is a *righteous* Saviour, just and having salvation. His kingdom is founded in righteousness. In managing all their concerns he is their righteous advocate. And because his intercession for them is founded on a righteous condition, he does not say: "I ask", but "Father, I will that those whom thou hast given me be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory." (John 17.24)

He is a *Saviour*. Indeed, he is their salvation. (Isaiah 12.2) His wisdom, power, compassion and purpose are all engaged to save them, fully, freely and for ever; from guilt, from Satan, and from sin, through all the dangers and trials of this life; to save them to the uttermost, till he places them out of the reach of all evil, and puts them in a state of happiness in uninterrupted communion with God.

V. His Great Design.

His design was not confined to the nation Israel. His kingdom includes people gathered from all nations. (Luke 13.28-29) Though the heathen were long alienated from God, by coming to know him, they found their prison doors opened, their chains broken, their condemnation reversed, and themselves accepted in the Beloved as true children of Abraham. Out of Jew and Gentile MESSIAH makes one people. (Ephesians 2.13-16) Where faith in him is found, there is neither Jew nor Gentile, circumcision nor uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bond or free; but Christ is all, and in all. (Colossians 3.11)

Much has already been done by the gospel. Crowds have been turned from darkness to light, and from the worship of dumb idols to serve the living and true God. And we expect a time when this promise shall be even more extensively fulfilled, when the fullness of the Gentiles shall have come in, and all Israel shall be saved.

From the character of the Saviour we may infer the character of his people. By beholding his glory they are changed into his likeness. They are *righteous* as he is righteous. They learn of him to love

righteousness and to hate iniquity. (Psalm 45.7) Their principles are righteous, being drawn from the pure Word of God. Their spirits, desires and hopes are righteous. They are indeed a *saved* people. The kingdom to which they belong is not made up of outward forms, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. (Romans 14.17) They rise above names, parties and divisions. They are free from narrow views and self-interest. Like their great Example, they put on mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering, forbearance and forgiveness. (Colossians 3.12)

Such is the fruit of the gospel. Let us test ourselves by it. If MESSIAH is really your king, your conscience will bear witness that you revere, imitate and obey him.

And if any of you are convinced that you have been a Christian only in name, lacking the life and power of godliness, remember that he is a righteous and a gracious Saviour. Seek him as such, and he will speak peace to you also. It is not too late. His sure promise is recorded for your encouragement: "Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out." (John 6.37)

Sermon 12

Effects of Messiah's Appearance

'Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped: then shall the lame man leap as a hart, and the tongue of the dumb shall sing.' Isaiah 35.5-6

How beautiful is the imagery with which the prophet describes the effects of MESSIAH's appearance! A barren desert gives way to a fruitful garden, adorned with tall cedars, colourful flowers, rich pasture and flowing streams! Those people with literary taste may admire the elegance of such pastoral poetry, but those who have a Scriptural and spiritual taste see it not as a pleasant change in nature, but as a moral change in their own spiritual state. By shining into their hearts, the Lord has created for them a new heaven and a new earth. The works of God around them take on a new appearance. Before, they lived without him in the world, but now they see his hand everywhere; for now his grace is planted in their souls, and they are no longer barren and unfruitful, but are filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ to his praise. (Philippians 1.11)

The verses I have read describe the effects of MESSIAH's power and goodness in relation to the inhabitants of the desert. He finds them in distress, which only he can relieve. But when he works, the blind receive their sight, the deaf hear, the lame walk, and the dumb begin to sing his praise. These mighty works confirmed his claims when he was on earth, and he appealed to them as proofs that he was the promised Saviour. (Matthew 11.3-6)

But the words have a spiritual sense too. The physical infirmities he cured are emblems of more dreadful evils that afflict mankind. He came to open the eyes of the mind, to give life to our dead wills, so as to make them active, cheerful and obedient in his service. These effects are produced by one simple, powerful

operation: the voice of the Son of God. While Lazarus was in the grave, all his powers were inactive. But as soon as the Saviour said: "Lazarus, come forth" (John 11.43) he was restored to life, and was immediately able to see, hear, move and speak. So it is with us. While we were spiritually dead, we were blind, deaf, dumb and motionless. But when the Son of God spoke into our souls, we were made alive, and all our spiritual senses began to operate. Now we can see, hear, speak and move.

These are the four leading effects of a work of grace on our hearts. And they are all to be ascribed to MESSIAH. For they are all wrought by his Holy Spirit. Every gift and grace needed to spread the gospel in every age, and to make it powerful, are given to sinners by MESSIAH's mediation. When he ascended on high, he gave gifts to men, so that the Lord God might dwell among them. (Psalm 68.18) And it was for his sake that any grace was given to fallen man. To this day sinners hear the voice of the Son of God, and hearing they live.

I. They were once blind, but now they see.

The religion of true believers is not the effect of imagination and blind impulse. It springs from an enlightened understanding. They see God as great and glorious; they see sin as both hateful and harmful; they see holiness as beautiful and desirable; they see themselves as vile and full of sin; they see the folly of trying to recommend themselves to God; they see their need of the Saviour. They see and approve of God's way of salvation by him as worthy of his wisdom and goodness, and as perfectly suited to their need. They see the all-sufficiency of him on whom their help is laid. They see the emptiness of this present world and the vast importance of eternity.

They also hear. They were once deaf to the voice of God, whether he spoke in his Word or his Providence, whether in mercy or in judgment. But now their deaf ears are unstopped. They are attentive, submissive, and willing to obey his commands. With them "Thus saith the Lord" is worth more than a thousand

arguments. They desire no further proof of a doctrine, no other warrant for their practice, no other reason for their circumstances than his Word, his requirement and his disposal of them.

Further, along with their sight and hearing they receive power to run in the way of his commandments. Before, they were numb with palsy, chained in by their sins, unable to move. But now their chains are broken, their souls receive strength, and they both will and do God's good pleasure. (Philippians 2.13) It is not more wonderful to see a cripple recover the use of his limbs than to see someone long chained in sinful habits leap in the service of God. Now they are inspired with a holy vigour to run with patience and perseverance the race set before them.

Fourthly, their once dumb voices break out in singing their grateful praises to their Deliverer. When grace teaches the heart, then the heart teaches the mouth. (Proverbs 16.23) When we believe, then we speak; yes, we sing and rejoice. (Isaiah 12.1; Psalm 118.15; Psalm 107.1-2)

It is necessary to examine ourselves by this test, and not to remain satisfied with a bare knowledge of the gospel. It is very possible, even easy, with the help of books, sermons and conversation, to know divine truths and arrange them in an orderly way. They may be learnt like any branch of human science. But although those who have no more than this make a great boast of seeing, yet none are more fatally blind. They speak in disdain of others of a righteousness built on their so-called knowledge, prayers and alms deeds, just like the Pharisees. Yet they misunderstand and abuse the knowledge of doctrine they have, but dislike close and faithful preaching. Though they may be pleased with such doctrines as total inability, final perseverance and the gospel invitation, yet these very doctrines produce no fruit in them but wild brambles! God grant that such delusion may not be found among us! May we come to the light in order to know more of ourselves, and more of our Saviour, in a humble, spiritual, watchful frame of mind.

But let us conclude.

True Christianity is friendly to the best interests of mankind. It is the source of peace, tenderness, kindness and every humane spirit. It is calculated to soothe the savage temper, to shrink the selfish spirit, and to change the lion into the lamb. What then shall we think of those who slander the gospel as unfriendly to the best interests of man? Why should they try to take away our hope when they have nothing with which to replace it? Let us have compassion on them, and pray for them, if perhaps God will give them repentance to acknowledge the truth. (2 Timothy 2.25)

The changes wrought in human nature by the gospel are truly miraculous. They are more than education, example, persuasion or resolution can achieve. They are the work of God. This fact should exclude all boasting. The subjects of this change are no better than others. They have nothing but what they have received. The glory is due to God alone.

It should also soften the censures of those who are still strangers to God. Their danger should incite our pity, and stimulate our efforts to recover them from their errors. Especially, let us try to win them by our example, without the word. (1 Peter 3.1) If the Lord is pleased to do for them what he has done for us, their opposition to us will quickly end, and they may make quicker progress in the Christian life than we have done. This was the case with Saul of Tarsus. He drew near Damascus as a persecutor, but left it as a preacher and a pattern to other disciples.

That this change is the work of God should also encourage those who through a sense of the greatness of their sins are ready to sink into despair. Whatever may be difficult to you, all things are possible with God. (Mark 10.27) And all things are possible to him who believes. (Mark 9.23) The promises invite you to apply to him who is the Author and Finisher of faith, and who has said for your encouragement: "Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out." (John 6.37)

Sermon 13

The Great Shepherd

‘He shall feed his flock like a shepherd; he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom: and shall gently lead those that are with young.’ Isaiah 40.11

It is not easy for those living in modern times to form a correct idea of pastoral life in eastern countries centuries ago. In those days wealth consisted mainly in flocks and herds, and people like Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were shepherds. This calling MESSIAH condescends to bear; happy are those who can say: “We are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.” (Psalm 100.3) The passage before us will lead me to speak of the Shepherd, the flock, and his tender care over them.

I. The Shepherd

Our Lord here styles himself the Shepherd, the good Shepherd of the sheep. (John 10. 11,14) The apostle Peter styles him the chief Shepherd. (1 Peter 5.4) His faithful ministers have the honour to be his under shepherds, yet even they must be watched over by him before they can oversee the flocks committed to their charge. As all eyes are on him, so his eye is on all the flock. Unless therefore the Shepherd and Bishop [Overseer] of our souls is Jehovah, we are less privileged than ancient Israel. And as David’s Shepherd (Psalm 23.1) was Jehovah, so he who is our Shepherd is Jehovah too.

The sinner who knows his weakness, needs, enemies and dangers will acknowledge this, for who but Jehovah could supply, protect and lead him through the desert of this world? He who has promised his presence is our great Shepherd. He is also the good Shepherd, for he laid down his life for his sheep, and has redeemed them to God by his blood.

II. The Flock

The good Shepherd has a flock whom he has loved from everlasting, and whom he will love to the end. (John 13.1) He humbled himself for their sakes; and died for them, the just for the unjust (1 Peter 3.18), to redeem them from the curse of the law, from the guilt and dominion of sin, and from the power of Satan, to bring them to God. By nature they have all gone astray, every one to his own way (Isaiah 53.6), but having bought them, he seeks, finds and restores them, for they are his sheep. By the power of his Word and Spirit he makes himself known to them, causes them to hear his voice, and guides them back into his fold.

Considered as individuals they are aptly described as sheep. They are weak, defenceless, prone to wander, and not known for returning on their own. They have no strength to fight against wolves, and unlike the ant cannot provide for themselves. Such are we, but if we can say with David: "The Lord is my Shepherd" we may conclude with him: "therefore I shall not want."

Collectively they are a flock. Though scattered abroad in different places, and largely unknown to each other, they are all equally known to him. In his view they are one flock; their views, hopes and aims are the same. Soon they shall be gathered together into one fold, where they shall worship their Shepherd for ever.

III. His Tender Care Over His Flock

"He shall feed his flock like a shepherd." The word is not confined to feeding: it refers to every branch of the shepherd's work. Psalm 23 and Ezekiel 34 beautifully describe what he is engaged to do for them. From age to age his flock have rejoiced in his care, and still do so today.

He feeds them. He leads them into the green pastures of his Word and ordinances. They feed on him in their hearts by faith with thanksgiving.

He guides them. He does so first by his example. He has trodden their path before them, and they follow him. He both teaches them the way in which they should go, and inclines and enables them to walk in it. (Isaiah 30.21)

He also guides them by his providence. He appoints the places where they live and the callings in which they are to serve him. He orders all the circumstances of their lives by his infinite wisdom, till all his gracious designs in their favour are accomplished.

He guards them. They are a flock among wolves, but he restrains their enemies from devouring them. He keeps them night and day. It is wonderful that a flock so weak, defenceless and helpless in themselves are so kept.

He heals them. When they are exhausted and ready to faint, he revives them. When they are wounded, he tends their wounds. He even counts their sighs.

He restores them. When his sheep turn aside into forbidden paths, he humbles them and brings them back. He makes them more and more aware of their own weakness and dependence on his care. He will not lose one of them, but he makes them smart for their folly in straying from him.

Not all his flock are sheep; some are lambs. They are very weak, but they shall not be left behind. He gathers them in his arm, and carries them in his bosom. This is an encouragement to young people who trust in him. It also applies to young converts. As yet, they are weak, unsettled and inexperienced. They are often discouraged, even by their friends. But he carries them in the arm of his power.

There are also those “with young.” These he will gently lead. They are the burdened of the flock. Yet he will not allow them to be hurried and tempted above what they are able to bear. The word, however, signifies those who have young. These are parents who

are anxious about the spiritual state of their dear children. He helps them to bring up their children in the nurture of the Lord. There are ministers too who labour till Christ is formed in the hearts of their flock. (Galatians 4.19) How much they need the strength, wisdom and guidance of the great Shepherd. And so he who knows our frame leads and guides us too.

This is the character of our great Shepherd.

He is the supreme example of all who are called to feed his lambs and his sheep. Brethren, pray for us (1 Thessalonians 5.25) and pray for more labourers. (Matthew 9.38)

Dear fellow ministers, do you have a shepherd's eye and a shepherd's heart? Do you serve the flock, not for filthy lucre [money], but willingly, for their good? Do you consider yourselves lords over God's heritage, or examples to them? Do you preach yourselves, or Christ Jesus the Lord? He who wins souls is wise. (Proverbs 11.30) O care for his flock as one who looks forward to the day when the Shepherd and Bishop of their souls shall appear. (1 Peter 2.25; 5.4) Let no trials or hardships move you, and do not count your lives dear to yourselves. (Acts 20.24) Then you will receive a crown of life, along with all who love him.

But there are others, idle shepherds, who do not feed the flock, but themselves. (Ezekiel 34.2) They neither heal the sick, nor strengthen the feeble, nor bind up the wounded, nor recover those who have gone astray. The New Testament warns us to expect such persons, going under the name of ministers, in the visible Church of Christ. These are men of corrupt minds, destitute of the truth, who do not serve the Lord Jesus, but their own belly. Avoid them. They may be admired and flattered; they may shine as scholars. But nothing short of repentance and faith in the Redeemer can screen them from that awful sentence: "Woe to the idle shepherd who forsakes or neglects the flock. The sword shall be upon his arm, and upon his right eye; his arm shall be clean dried up, and his right eye shall be utterly darkened." (Zechariah 11.17)

Sermon 14

Rest for the Weary

‘Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.’ Matthew 11.28

Which shall we admire most, the majesty or the grace of this invitation? The riches of Christ are inexhaustible! If billions of sinners go to him for relief, he has enough for them all! His mercy is infinite to pardon all their sins, his grace is infinite to meet all their desires, his power is infinite to help them in all their difficulties. A countless number has been waiting on him from age to age, and none of them have been sent away empty. The stream of his bounty is still flowing and full. Can we then fail to adopt these words as full proof of MESSIAH’s divine character? Can a mere creature use such language as this? Who but the Lord God can raise up those who are bowed down, and comfort all who mourn?

As is his majesty, so is his mercy. The Saviour excludes none who do not wilfully exclude themselves. As no case is too hard for his power, so no person who applies to him is shut out from his compassion. He who goes to him will in no wise cast out. (John 6.37) His sovereign mercy is no less a divine attribute than his almighty power. It is while considering his pardoning mercy and salvation of sinners that the prophet exclaims: “Who is a God like thee?” (Micah 7.18)

This passage (including the two following verses) closes the First Part of Handel’s oratorio. So far, we have traced several prophecies foretelling MESSIAH’s appearance, his birth and some of the effects of his love. We have learnt of him as our Restorer and Shepherd. Here the evangelist reveals him graciously inviting weary and heavy laden sinners to receive refreshment and rest at his hand.

The two main points of the text are the *invitation* and the *promise*.

I. The Invitation

The invitation is expressed in general terms: "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden." There is no qualifying or restraining clause to discourage any one who is willing to accept it. Whoever has an ear to hear, let him hear. "Let him that is athirst come, and whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely." (Revelation 22.17)

These words authorize me to address every one here. I speak first to you who are spending your money for what never satisfies. (Isaiah 55.2) You are weary in seeking happiness where it cannot be found. You are digging pits that can hold no water. (Jeremiah 2.13) While you pursue the wealth or honours of this world, and waste your time and strength indulging your sensual appetites, and look no higher, are you happy and satisfied? How can you charge believers with hypocrisy when you claim to be happy but are not? You know you are not happy, and we know it too. Are you not heavy laden, burdened with guilt, fears and forebodings? Are you not harassed with cares, crosses and disappointments? Are you not often like children, afraid of being alone? And do you not often seek to hide your unhappy thoughts from yourselves?

I tell you of One who can lift off your burden and comfort you. His favour is better than life. Will you refuse to hear his voice? Only come to him, and he will give you that peace and rest to which you have so far been strangers. But though you are invited, I know that of yourselves you will not come; you *will not*, and therefore you *cannot*. Be assured, the invitation does not mock you; if you finally refuse it, the fault will lie at your own door. But may I not hope that you will refuse it no longer? The gospel is appointed by God, and has a great effect, when accompanied by the power of the Holy Spirit, to make a willing people. (Psalm 110.3)

There are others to whom this invitation speaks more directly. The convinced sinner is 'heavy laden' with the guilt of sin, and is 'weary' with striving against it. He is weary of the burden of

God's law, whose commands he cannot keep and whose penalty he cannot escape. He sighs anxiously for pardon and freedom. Yet nothing but the knowledge of the Saviour and the supply of his Spirit can bring him peace of mind and victory over sin. But here is an invitation perfectly suited to his case: "Come unto me." Only comply with it, and you shall have the promised rest.

But what is it to come to Christ?

It is to believe in him, to apply to him, to make his invitation and promise our ground and warrant for putting our trust in him. When he was on earth, many who came to him and followed him for a time received no saving benefit from him. Their motives were wrong. But whoever comes to him aright believes he has power to save them, and so they apply to him for salvation. He has promised to be found by all who seek him in his Word, for he has said he would be in the midst of his people. (Matthew 18.20) He sits on a throne of grace, and will remember with the favour that he bears to his own people all who pray that they might know him. (Psalm 106.4) They come to him, and he assures them that they shall never be cast out. Of course, in coming to him, they come out from the world and are separate. (2 Corinthians 6.17) If they take refuge in him, they renounce all other refuges, and trust in him alone.

II. The Promise

The promise is: "I will give you rest." The word signifies both rest and refreshment. He brings relief from labour and bondage, and gives a peace, joy and comfort that revives the weary spirit and satisfies the longing soul.

This rest includes freedom from the fears and accusations of a guilty conscience; from the long and fruitless struggle between the will and conscience; from the condemning power of the law; from the tyranny of indwelling sin; and from the dominion of pride and self.

Also he frees us from those anxieties that disquiet those who have no solid Scriptural dependence on God, especially from the dread

of death and what lies beyond it. The believer is taught to rest in the Lord's care (1 Peter 5.7) and protection. In chapter 17.5-8 the prophet Jeremiah describes him in contrast to the sad state of those who live without God in the world.

Along with rest he gives refreshment. They enjoy comforts in communion with God superior to all that the world can give, so that many have been able to say: "As the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation in Christ also abounds." (2 Corinthians 1.5) The all-sufficient God can increase these comforts to such a degree that they are supported under the most distressing pains. One proven example is that of [Paul] Bainham, who was burnt to death in Queen Mary's reign. When he was in the fire he called to his persecutors: "You call for miracles in proof of our doctrine. Now behold one: I feel no more pain from these flames than if I was laid upon a bed of roses."

Therefore come to him, venture on his gracious word, and you shall find rest for your souls. Can the world outbid this gracious offer? Can the world give you rest when you are burdened with trouble, or terrified by the approach of death? Such a moment certainly awaits you; and when it arrives, if you are not given over to a hardened heart and blinded mind, you will certainly tremble, if you never trembled before! O, be persuaded! May the Lord himself persuade you to be wise in time, to seek him now while he may be found, to call on him while he is still near; lest that dreadful threat be your portion: "Because I have called, and you refused, I have stretched out my hand and no man regarded, I also will laugh at your calamity, I will mock when your fear comes." (Proverbs 1.24, 26)

Sermon 15

Messiah's Easy Yoke

'Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest to your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.' Matthew 11.29-30

Though education and example may dispose us to admit that the gospel is a revelation from God, no one will rightly understand or duly prize it except those who feel themselves in the distress that it is designed to relieve. No Israelite would flee to a city of refuge unless he had unintentionally slain a man and was being pursued by the avenger of blood. (Joshua 20.2-3) No one would go to a doctor unless he felt sick. (Matthew 9.12)

So too our Saviour's gracious invitation to come to him for rest will not be acted on till we feel ourselves weary and heavy laden. This is a main reason why the gospel is heard with such unconcern. For though sin is a deadly sickness and a hard bondage, one of its effects is to make us unfeeling as to our true spiritual state. It is therefore a happy time when the Holy Spirit convinces us by his power that we really are guilty before God and deserve to be punished. However painful this conviction may be, it is the first hopeful sign that a sinner is being awakened and perhaps ready to take Christ's yoke on himself.

Oxen are yoked in order to work. The term yoke suggests service. Here our Lord seems to offer to remove our prejudices against serving him. Though he submitted to suffering, reproach and death for the sake of sinners, and though he invites us to come to him because we need him, our ungrateful hearts think his service too strict, too severe. We imagine we would be happier living according to our own plans. Such unfriendly thoughts of him whose heart is full of tenderness prove that we are depraved. Yet he still invites us. It is as if he says: Do not be afraid of me, but

only try my service, and you will find that my yoke is not heavy, but light, and my service is perfect freedom.

If we are truly his disciples, Jesus is our Lord, and we are his servants. He is our Teacher, and we are his scholars. This is why he says: “Learn of me.” Those whom *he* teaches will learn what indescribable advantages come to his scholars.

1. He enables us to receive his sublime instructions. We excel in human arts and sciences when we have a natural ability suited to them; for example, in music or mathematics. Jesus makes his disciples able and willing to receive and relish divine truth. He teaches the spiritually blind to see and the spiritually deaf to hear. Happy are his scholars! They overcome all difficulties. He takes away the heart of stone and every prejudice, and gives us a taste for and ability in every lesson he teaches. No one teaches like him. (Job 36.22)

2. He teaches the most important things. Human subjects are by comparison trivial. “He who increases knowledge increases sorrow.” (Ecclesiastes 1.8) Human learning cannot support the mind under trouble, weaken our attachment to worldly things, control our passions, or overcome the fear of death. The learned Dutch scholar Grotius confessed on his deathbed: “Alas, I have wasted my whole life in taking much pains to no purpose.” But Jesus makes his scholars wise to salvation and eternal life.

3. Other teachers can only inform the head, but he teaches the heart. Moral philosophers abound in fine words, but their ideas are all empty notions. Indeed, some of their best writers have been the most evil livers. But Jesus Christ teaches his disciples to shun whatever is contrary to moral purity, so that their lives are a good example.

4. The disciples of Jesus are always learning. He so disposes their lives and circumstances that the whole world is a great school. They learn heavenly lessons by earthly objects. Scripture shows us

many beautiful similarities between the world of nature and the kingdom of God. (John 3.12) Similarly, the events of human life, the characters we meet, the conversations we hear, the changes that take place in families, cities and nations all teach us the wickedness of human nature as it now is, and bring home the lessons we must learn in life.

5. Those who are well qualified to teach human arts and sciences often discourage and intimidate their scholars, but Jesus, who knows our weakness and dullness beforehand, is meek and lowly of heart. With what meekness he trained his disciples on earth, despite his greatness! He who humbles himself to see the things that are in heaven and on earth (Psalm 113.6) condescends to teach his followers still. Besides this, he teaches us by his example of lowliness in stooping to our level.

The happy result of all his teaching is rest to our souls. He does this by restoring our dependence on God, giving us peace, delivering us from guilt and fear, showing us the emptiness of the world, and by bringing us richer pleasures than this world can provide. Indeed, he furnishes us with those helps, motives and encouragements that make our duty desirable and pleasant. How truly then is it said: "his yoke is easy and his burden light!" Only those who live without God are strangers to this easy yoke.

In conclusion, let those of us who have become his scholars ask ourselves: "What have I actually learned from him?" Surely the proud, the sensual and the worldly have not sat at his feet, even though they have heard of his name. O seek this precious spiritual blessing, rest for the soul! You must remain restless without it, even if you lived in a palace. But if you have it, you may be happy in a prison. Today, therefore, hear his voice, while he calls to you: "Come to me, and learn of me." Let your hearts reply: "Behold, we come to thee, for thou art the Lord our God." (Jeremiah 3.22)

PART TWO

Sermon 16 The Lamb of God, the Great Atonement

‘Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.’ John 1.29

Great and marvellous are the works of the Lord God Almighty! We live in the midst of them, and the little impression they make on us proves our depravity. How greatly would we be affected by them if sin had not blinded our minds and hardened our hearts! Thus by nature we live without God in the world, even while we live, move and have our being in him! What can engage the attention of such creatures?

Behold, the most wondrous of all his works: God has so loved rebellious, ungrateful sinners as to appoint them a Saviour in the Person of his only Son. The prophets foresaw his appearance in the flesh, and foretold its happy consequences – that he would give sight to the blind, life to the dead, liberty to the captive, relief to the burdened, and rest to the weary.

But this change was not to be wrought merely by a word of power, as when he said: “Let there be light! And there was light.” The salvation of which he is the Author, though free to us, must cost him dear. Before the mercy of God can be dispensed to offenders the rights of his justice, the demands of his law, and the honour of his government must be provided for. The long-continued use of sacrifices had clearly pointed out the need for atonement, but the real and proper atonement could be made only by MESSIAH. The blood of slain animals could not take away sin, nor display the righteousness of God in pardoning it. This was the appointed,

covenanted work of MESSIAH, and he alone could perform it. With this view he had said: "Lo, I come." (Psalm 40.7) And in this view John pointed him out: "Behold, the Lamb of God!"

Three points offer themselves to our consideration:

- I. The title here given to MESSIAH: "the Lamb of God."
- II. The efficacy of his sacrifice: "he takes away sin."
- III. The extent of its efficacy: "the sin of the world."

I. He is "the Lamb of God."

The Passover lamb, and the lambs that were offered daily in Israel, morning and evening, were of God's appointment. This Lamb too was of his providing. *They* were only types, for they could never cleanse the conscience of the offerers of guilt (Hebrews 10.1). But MESSIAH, by the one offering of himself once for all made an end of sin and brought in an everlasting righteousness for all who believe on his name.

This title, "the Lamb of God," refers to his voluntary substitution for sinners, that by his sufferings and death they who deserved to die might obtain eternal life through him, and for his sake. All mankind have broken the law of God. The death penalty is annexed to this law. To this penalty we are all liable. Now it is not consistent with the Lawmaker's truth, holiness and honour to remit this penalty without satisfaction. The forgiveness of one sinner, and even of one sin, by an act of mere mercy, is not compatible with the inflexibility of the law or the justice of the Lawgiver.

But here the Lawgiver is seen to be glorious. His wisdom proposed, and his love provided, the solution. The perfect obedience of his Son, unto death for sins not his own, both shows God's infinite hatred of sin, his justice in punishing it, and his mercy in pardoning it. And though he was the Beloved of God, he was not spared, once he had offered himself. This is what I understand by atonement and satisfaction for sin.

II. The efficacy of the atonement is complete. The slain Lamb of God “takes away sin,” both in its guilt and in its defilement. Just as the Israelites, by looking at the brass serpent, were healed of their snake bites and saved from death (Numbers 21.9), so, when the Holy Spirit opens the eyes of the blind, the sinner sees the Son as slain, believes on him, and is delivered from sin, guilt and condemnation, and is justified by God. He has God’s own warrant to plead the obedience, sufferings and death of the Lamb of God, as the ground and title of his own acceptance with God. His guilt or liability to punishment being removed, he now has access to God, and is able to receive blessings from him. The Saviour is now enthroned in his heart, and from his fullness the life of grace is drawn and maintained. Thus, not only the guilt, but also the love and dominion of sin are taken away, subdued by grace, and cordially renounced by the believing pardoned sinner. The blood that frees him from distress preserves the memory of his deliverance warm on his heart, fills him with gratitude to his Deliverer, and furnishes him with an abiding and irresistible motive for cheerful, all-round obedience.

III. The designed extent of this gracious removal of sin by the sacrifice of the Lamb of God is expressed in an indefinite way: he “takes away the sin of the world.”

Many of my hearers need not be told what fierce disputes have taken place over the extent of the death of Christ. I fear the advantages of such controversies have not been equal to the zeal of the disputants. For myself, I wish to be known by no name but that of Christian, and to adopt no system but that of the Bible. I usually try to preach to the heart and the conscience, and to pass by controversies. But as the subject is now before us, I will simply and honestly tell you my sentiments on it.

If, because the text says “the sin of the world,” men infer that God intends to save all men, their inference is contradicted by the fact. For it is certain that all men are not saved. (Matthew 7.13-14) The greater part of those to whom this word of salvation is sent

perishes in their sins. Since therefore God cannot be disappointed of his purpose, and since many perish, he could not have intended all men to be saved.

Besides, the vast number of those who are saved are spoken of as Christ's sheep, for whom he laid down his life (John 10.11,16), his elect (Mark 13.27), his own (John 13.1), those to whom it is given to believe in his name (Philippians 1.29), and those predestined to adoption (Ephesians 1.5). By nature they are children of wrath, just like others (Ephesians 2.3), and are no more disposed to receive the truth than those who reject it. Whenever they become willing, they are made so in the day of God's power (Psalm 110.3); and they differ from others only because grace makes them to differ (1 Corinthians 4.7).

The passages of Scripture to this effect are numerous, so that he who runs may read. It is not the language of probability, but of inspiration, that those whom the Lord foreknew are predestined to be conformed to his Son (Romans 8.29). And though some vex themselves over the sovereignty of God in dealing so with mankind, when they are enlightened they find their own experience confirms this truth. They come to acknowledge as well as we that God first sought them before they sought him, and that it pleased the Lord to make them his people (1 Samuel 12.22).

On the other hand, I cannot think that the expression "the world" means the nations outside Israel, and that it refers to a determinate number of people called the elect who are scattered among all nations. This is true, as far as it goes. But it is not said that Christ Jesus came into the world to save the elect, but to save sinners, to seek and save those who are lost (1 Timothy 1.15; Luke 19.10). On this ground I believe ministers have a warrant to preach the Gospel to every human being, and to address every conscience in the sight of God.

Moreover, I believe that every hearer of the Gospel has a warrant, even an encouragement and a command, to apply to Jesus Christ

for salvation; and that those who refuse exclude themselves, and perish, not because they have nothing to do with the atonement, but simply because they will not come to Christ that they might have life. When I meet with things beyond my scanty thought in a book inspired by him whose ways and thoughts are altogether higher than ours, I am not disheartened. But I believe that vain reasonings, self-will, an attachment to names and parties, and a tendency to draw our faith from human systems rather than from a close and humble study of the Bible, with prayer for divine teaching, are the chief sources of our perplexities and disputes.

Under the Gospel dispensation God commands all men everywhere to repent (Acts 17.30). All men therefore are encouraged to hope for forgiveness; and the command to repent implies a warrant to believe on the name of Jesus as taking away the sin of the world. Let it not be said that to call on men to believe, an act beyond their power, is to mock them. Our Lord did not mock the rich young ruler when he told him that if he would sell all and follow him he would have treasure in heaven (Luke 18.22). Had he no *power* to sell his possessions? But because he loved his money more than Christ, and preferred earthly treasures to heavenly, he had no *will* to part with them. Let no one offer excuses for not coming to Christ. We cannot ascribe too much to the grace of God, but we should be careful not to encourage the slothful and unbelieving in their *wilful* refusal of Christ. God is gracious, but man is also responsible for his own sin.

The whole may be summed up in two points:

1. Salvation is indeed all of grace. From the foundation to the topstone, all is of free grace.
2. Now that the Lamb of God is preached to you, if you reject him, your blood will be on your own head. You are warned. You are invited. Do not dare to say: 'Why does he yet find fault, for who has resisted his will? (Romans 9.19) If he will save me, I shall be saved; if not, what can I do?' God is merciful, but he is also holy and just.

Sermon 17

Messiah Despised and Rejected of Men

‘He is despised and rejected of men: a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief.’ Isaiah 53.3

The heathen moralists, ignorant of the character and perfections of God, the true dignity and immortality of the soul, and the root and extent of human depravity, had no better foundation for virtue than pride, no higher aim than the interests of society and the conduct of civil life. And Brutus, one of the most admired characters of antiquity, confessed, just before he took his own life, that having long sought virtue, found it at last to be only an empty name.

Socrates, however, differed from them. Having described the perfect man, he ventured to predict how he would be received by the world if such a one could be found. He thought that he would be so different to others, that his testimony against their wickedness would be so strong, and his attempts to reform them so unwelcome, that instead of being admired he would be hated. He even went so far as to state that mankind was too degenerate and obstinate to bear either his example or his reproof, and that they would probably revile him and put him to death as an enemy to their peace.

In this instance, Socrates agreed with Scripture. MESSIAH was this perfect man. Isaiah describes him as such. He also foretells how he would be treated; namely, despised and rejected. And so it proved. When Jesus was on earth his virtue was so notable, and others’ wickedness so conspicuous, that they preferred a robber and murderer to him. They saved Barabbas, justly condemned for these crimes, and crucified Jesus, the innocent One (John 18.40).

When MESSIAH appeared, the Jews professed to blame their fathers for slaying God's prophets. Might it not be hoped, then, that they would reverence God's Son? (Matthew 21.37) But instead he was despised and rejected by them. Angels had sung his praises, but men despised him. He took on him not the nature of angels, but of men, yet they rejected him. Sinful, helpless men despised and rejected the only Saviour. "He came to his own, but his own received him not." (John 1.11) How lamentable and fatal was their stubbornness! They eagerly followed false messiahs, but they despised and rejected the true MESSIAH!

Let us consider the clauses of the text in order.

I. "He was despised and rejected of men."

It would be a great mistake to think that the Jews were the only people capable of such ingratitude. If any one here thinks: 'I would not have despised and rejected him,' he does not know the prejudices that are deeply rooted in the nature of fallen man. The same principles that moved the Jews to oppose and despise him still sway multitudes to oppose his doctrine and reject his person.

In proof of this, we mention some of the main causes of the contempt that MESSIAH met with from the men of that generation.

1. They despised him for what they saw as his mean appearance. His poverty made him contemptible in their eyes. They expected MESSIAH to appear in pomp and power. But when they saw him, they scorned him, saying: "Is not this the carpenter's son?" (Matthew 13.55) He who had no money to pay tribute (Matthew 17.27) was of small esteem to the covetous, the proud, the fond of praise and admiration.

2. Their contempt was heightened when he claimed to be the Son of God, the resurrection and the life (John 5.18; 11.25). For this apparent inconsistency between his appearance and his claim they denounced him as a madman (John 10.20). "Art thou greater than our father Abraham? Whom makest thou thyself?" (John 8.53)

3. They objected to the low state of his followers. Some of them were of low rank in life. Most were fishermen. Others had been tax collectors and harlots, sinners of ill repute. For this they reproached him, and felt justified in their contempt: “Have any of the rulers or Pharisees believed on him?” (John 7.48)

4. They were further angry with him because of the authority with which he taught. True, he was gentle and meek to all who came to him for help or teaching; he received them all, and treated them with the greatest tenderness. But he upheld the honour of the law of God against its corruption and the traditions of its professed teachers. He exposed their hypocrisy, compared them to cave graves (painted white on the outside but full of dead bones and rotten flesh within), and warned the people against them as blind guides and deceivers.

5. They strengthened the prejudices of their blind followers by misrepresenting him, even calling on Scripture to support their slanders. They made the most of a prevailing mistake – that Jesus was born in Galilee, because he was brought up in Nazareth – claiming that therefore he could not be the MESSIAH, who, as the prophets said, was to be born in Bethlehem. When he healed people of their diseases, they said he was breaking the Sabbath, and therefore he could not be God. (John 9.16) And when they could not deny his miracles, they said that he worked them through the agency of Satan. (Matthew 12.24)

From this distance in time, we can see their folly and madness, but the scribes and Pharisees were the appointed teachers of the people, and were supported by the powers that be, or church and state. Even if the people were impressed by the majesty of his words and works, they were soon silenced by traditional laws, or were put out of the synagogue. (John 9.22; 12.42) This last was a terrible punishment for a Jew.

These things can easily be applied to the church. The Gospel is still despised and rejected on similar grounds. The proud will not

accept its simplicity and plainness. They are also disgusted with its sublime doctrines, which refuse to bend to their reason, and can only be received by humble faith. Its faithful ministers, too, offend them by their refusal to give comfort where God gives none. How often has a dread of university men, bishops, councils and popes prevented people from obeying the light God has given them! How few among the wise and learned have embraced the doctrine of the cross! We lament that this way is “almost everywhere spoken against.” (Acts 28.22) Even where poor converts have praised the grace of God for changing them, their very praise has been reproached as vile. Lastly, what subtlety has been used to undermine people’s faith by an appeal to perverted passages of Scripture, and by misrepresenting the work of the Holy Spirit as folly, hypocrisy or enthusiasm. In short, the spirit of the world is so powerful that what our Lord said in Judea is equally true in Christian lands: “Blessed is he who is not offended in me.” (Matthew 11.6)

I will mention distinctly one reason more why the Gospel is despised and rejected: I mean the scandal arising from the misconduct of those who profess it. There were pretended Christians in the apostles’ time, who were “enemies of the cross of Christ.” (Philippians 3.18) And so, offences must come; but “woe to them by whom they come!” (Matthew 18.7)

But you who love the Lord must hate evil. (Psalm 97.10) There are many who watch for your fall into sin, and are ready to say: “We told you so.” It will be vain for ministers to claim that Gospel doctrines are doctrines according to godliness unless our witness is supported by the spirit and conduct of our people. The world will probably judge by what they see in you rather than what they hear from us. Nor will it be enough to say you are not an adulterer, a drunkard, a miser or a cheat. If you profess to believe our doctrine, they will expect you to be humble, meek, patient and kind, and see honesty and punctuality in your life. What must they think of our principles if those who profess them are fretful, envious, censorious, discontented, slothful, unfaithful, mean, hard-hearted,

sensual, implacable and revengeful? Those who lay stumbling-blocks before the blind and confirm the prejudices of the ignorant, will have much to answer for.

II. Further, MESSIAH was “a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief.”

He was surrounded with sorrows on every side, and grief was his inseparable companion. Surely this will animate *us* to endure the cross, and despise the shame we may be exposed to for his sake.

Let us assign three causes of his sorrows.

1. The outward course of life to which he submitted for the sake of sinners exposed him to want, weariness, contempt and opposition. His human feelings were therefore painfully exercised: he was hungry, thirsty, weary. (Matthew 4.2; 21.18; John 4.9) His character was vilified, his person despised, his words twisted, his actions misrepresented. He was misunderstood even by his friends (John 7.5), betrayed by one disciple, denied by another, and forsaken by the rest. In all this he has left us an example of suffering, that we should cheerfully follow his steps. (1 Peter 2.21)

2. His perfect foreknowledge of his sufferings and death caused him much pain. How often he speaks of them as if they were actually present! If some of you could have foreseen your future sufferings, you would probably have sunk under the sight. But Jesus, long before he atoned for our sins, counted the cost. And though his love was determined to save us, the prospect of his soul agonies must have been a constant source of sorrow.

3. His holy and sensitive spirit was burdened and grieved by the wickedness he saw all around him. And if we were spiritually minded, we too would be grieved by the dishonour done to our heavenly Father by those around us. But the holiness and hatred of sin of MESSIAH were perfect. How much, then, he must have been grieved by what he saw, not only around him, but also in men's hearts! Surely he could say with the psalmist: “I beheld the transgressors, and was grieved.” (Psalm 119. 136)

We call ourselves the followers and servants of him who was thus despised and rejected by others, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. Shall we then seek great things for ourselves? Shall we think it a great hardship to suffer shame for his sake? Rather, may we reckon it our glory, and like Paul, esteem every worldly gain to be loss and dung in comparison to the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord. (Philippians 3.8)

Sermon 18

Voluntary Suffering

'I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting.'
Isaiah 50.6

That which often passes among men for courage is in reality nothing but bravado, as is the case with duellists. They fight, not because they are not afraid of death, but because they are too proud to have their 'honour' besmirched.

But a patient enduring of disgrace and contempt is a sure proof of true courage. Such greatness of mind is essential to the Christian. He aims in his life to glorify God, enjoy communion with him, and grow in obedience to his holy will, whatever this may cost. And for this way of life he looks to Jesus for wisdom and strength. But Jesus is also his example; and so he is willing to suffer, following him who gave his back to the smiters, his cheeks to those who plucked off his hair, and his face to shame and spitting.

We may observe from these words that MESSIAH's humiliation was both *voluntary* and *extreme*.

1. Voluntary

As the Mediator between God and sinners, MESSIAH was given a great work to do, and he was bound to do it. But his acceptance of the work was voluntary, for he gave himself up to suffer freely, the just for the unjust. Could he have left us to our deserved punishment, legions of angels would have appeared to rescue him when his enemies seized him (Matthew 26.53); but as he was determined to save others, then his own sufferings were unavoidable. They were necessary to his design, precisely determined, and present to his view beforehand; so nothing took him by surprise. He knew that no blood but his own could atone

for sin, and if he did not suffer, sinners must inevitably perish. Such was his love, therefore, that he gave his back to the smiters, and his cheeks to those who plucked off his hair. The glory of God and the salvation of sinners were before his mind; and for the joy set before him, he was willing to endure the cross and despise the shame.

His chief end in giving himself was to display the glory of God's perfections – his manifold wisdom, holiness, justice, truth and love; the stability of his moral government – all illustrating each other and shining forth in his work as Mediator. Much of God's glory may be seen in creation and providence, but the *brightness* of his glory can be known only in Jesus Christ. Accordingly, even the angels desire to look into these things, as his grace is dispensed to the redeemed church in the world.

Closely linked to this great design is the complete and eternal salvation of a multitude of miserable sinners who, according to the purpose of God, and by the working of his almighty power, shall believe in the Saviour, and renouncing every other hope, put their trust in him, on the warrant and command of God, yielding themselves to be his willing and devoted people. Many are their troubles in this present life, but they shall be delivered out of them all; they shall overcome by the blood of the Lamb and the word of his testimony. (Revelation 12.11) Then they shall shine like the sun in the kingdom of heaven. Their eternal happiness was a part of the joy that was set before him. For their sakes, as well as for the glory of God, he voluntarily substituted himself to suffer and die.

2. Extreme

This prophecy was literally and exactly fulfilled, as we learn from the evangelists, who tell of the cruelty and contempt he received, both in the hall of the Jewish high priest and by the Roman soldiers. Let us then consider his extreme sufferings as he endured the contradiction of sinners against himself.

(a) They spat upon him in the high priest's hall. So did the Roman soldiers afterwards. In contempt, they dressed him in a scarlet robe, bowed the knee to him, and mocked him as a king. Even the lowest of the servants spat in the face of the Son of God! They never spat upon Alexander or Caesar!

(b) They beat him on the face; and when he meekly offered his cheeks to them, they plucked off the hair. With savage violence they tore the hair from his beard; and he, like a sheep before her shearers, remained silent as he quietly gave himself to their outrages.

(c) They tore his back with scourges, just as the Psalmist foretold. (Psalm 129.3) The Jewish council condemned him to death for blasphemy, because he said he was the Son of God. Stoning was the proper punishment for blasphemy (Leviticus 24.16), but this was not drawn out or tormenting enough to satisfy their malice. So they were willing to hand him over to the Roman power (John 18.31) in order to fulfil prophecy of his crucifixion. (Psalm 22) Thus, when they had mocked him, they pressed a crown of thorns on his head, put a reed in his hand as a mock sceptre, then stripped and scourged him. And even when greater tortures were before him, he was determined to make full atonement for sin; and because he had power over his own life, he would not dismiss his spirit till he could say: "It is finished."

And now, "Behold the man!" (John 19.5) that we may be duly affected both by his love to sinners and by the evil of our sins, which made it necessary for him to suffer such cruelties. Behold the Lamb of God, mocked, blindfolded, spat upon and scourged.

Shall we then refuse to suffer shame for his sake? Shall we be intimidated by the contempt of men? Ah, Lord, we are certainly capable of this. But only strengthen us with thy Spirit, and we shall reckon our disgrace our glory. And shall we continue in sin, now we know what it cost him to put it away? God forbid! May our hearts be filled with a determined hatred of sin, the procuring cause of the death of our best Friend and our Saviour!

Sermon 19

Messiah Suffering and Wounded For Us

‘Surely he hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows. He was wounded for our transgressions; he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed.’
Isaiah 53.4-5

When our Lord was transfigured, Moses and Elijah appeared in glory and spoke with him. (Matthew 17.1-8) They did not speak about the trifling things that the world calls important, but about the death that he would accomplish at Jerusalem. This is the grand theme of heaven and heaven-born souls.

We recently considered the cruel insults MESSIAH suffered in the high priest’s hall and before Pilate. Our text leads us now to the foot of the cross. May the Holy Spirit apply it to our hearts! Here the perfections of God are revealed – as a just God and a Saviour – with special glory. Here the believer contemplates the evil of sin and the unsearchable riches of mercy. This gives him a true sense of the misery that he deserves, at the same time assuring him that there is forgiveness with God, and a sure ground of hope for eternal life.

Thoughts of the Redeemer’s sufferings may excite tears and move feelings; fine speech, romances and tragedies can have the same effect. But we need light in the understanding to convince and change the heart. We shall therefore consider the *cause* and the *effect* of MESSIAH’S sufferings, as outlined in the text.

I. The cause of the Redeemer’s sufferings is implied in the word ‘our.’ He bore the griefs and sorrows that we deserve. This will be the confession of all who believe in his name. Delivered by grace from the spirit and power of this evil world, they gratefully

consider him as dying for *them*, just as those who were healed by looking at the serpent in the desert (Numbers 21.9) had proof in themselves that it was placed before their eyes for *their* sakes. “He bore *our* griefs.” This does not mean that we would have been crucified had the Saviour not suffered in our place. It means that, unless he had stood between us and God, we would be liable to extreme misery. That we enjoy health, peace and comfort, and are not a terror to ourselves, is due entirely to him. Being under the curse of the law by breaking the law, we deserve every kind of misery, in body, soul and goods. But *he* was appointed to bear and exhaust the curse for us. This is why we receive all the blessings of this life. We receive them from his hand, as tokens of his love and pledges of his favour, sanctified to our use by his blood and promise. This thought cheers his poor people with the plainest fare, as the versifier says:

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

Even so, the whole of his bodily sufferings can never give us a just idea of what he endured for us. Grievous as they were, they were light compared with the sufferings of his soul. These drew blood from his body (Luke 22.44) even before the hand of man touched him. And when, on the cross, he uttered that cry of desertion, it was not on account of the pain from his bodily wounds, but from his separation from the felt presence and comforts of God. (Matthew 27.46) True, he never knew remorse of conscience and the horrors and rage of despair, for he had no personal sin. But a sword pierced his soul, and it pleased the Father to bruise him. (Isaiah 53.10)

All this was agreed to before the foundation of the world. The following expressions confirm this:

1. “He was wounded,” pierced, or stabbed. Crucifixion was unknown to the Jews until they came under the Roman yoke. Yet it was foretold in Psalm 22.16, typified under the law of Moses (Deuteronomy 21.23; Galatians 3.13), by the Passover lamb and the brass serpent. It was a fit death for a sinner, painful and

shameful. Yet all these types and prophecies were fulfilled in the Saviour, because it was determined and appointed in the eternal counsel of God. (Acts 2.23) For it is he who over-rules all the designs of men according to his own will and for his own glory.

2. "He was bruised." If we distinguish bruised from wounded, we think the latter refers to the distress that broke his heart, beginning in the Garden of Gethsemane. (Matthew 26.38) How can anyone who denies that his sufferings were an atonement for sin explain his dejection here? Jesus suffered from the hand of God. One stroke of his mighty hand can bruise the spirit more than the united power of all the creatures on earth. The death of Jesus was death indeed, not the death of a martyr, but death in all its horrors, death that sinners deserve to suffer as breakers of God's holy law.

3. "The chastisement, or punishment, of our peace was upon him." That is, the punishment by which sinners obtain peace with God. Recall: our Lord had committed no sin; he was perfect both before and in suffering. But standing in the place of sinners, and engaged to expiate their offences, he was made a public example of the distress that sinners deserve. Thus justice was vindicated while mercy was exercised; and sinners believing in his name are exempt from punishment on his account. In this way our peace is procured.

II. The effect of his sufferings for sins not his own: "that by his stripes we may be healed." The Hebrew word here, and the Greek equivalent in 1 Peter 2.24, which we render "stripes," refers properly to the wounds or scars left on the body by scourging and piercing. John saw him before the throne as a lamb that had been slain (Revelation 5.6); that is, though his death was past, its effects were still visible. How wonderful that by faith, millions are healed by beholding the wounds of another! Yet this is the language of the Gospel: "Look unto me, and be ye saved." (Isaiah 45.22) Look, and live! Three great wounds are ours: guilt, sin and sorrow; but by seeing his scars with enlightened minds, we are healed of all three!

You who live by this medicine, speak well of it. Tell others what a Saviour you have found. By publishing your case, how greatly would his power and grace be displayed! There is enough in it both to heal others and leave the world without excuse. The *Confessions* of Augustine are ample proof that the Gospel is not a system of notions, but the power of God unto salvation. Pray for grace to take the opportunities God gives you to tell of his saving grace; then speak the truth simply and in love. You do not know whether the Lord will bless your testimony, and honour you as a means of good to other souls. To convert one sinner from the error of his way is more important than to deliver a kingdom from some temporal evil.

Yet remember too, that if you profess Christ to others, they will expect your character to be consistent with your profession. Without this, you had better be silent. There are too many people who treat these great truths as mere opinions, points of speculation that form the password of a party. There are others who think attachment to them is a sign of enthusiasm or deluded imagination. And there are still others who misrepresent them as harmful to morality and affording a cloak for licentiousness. Beware, lest by improper conduct you lay stumbling-blocks before the blind, strengthen the prejudices of the ignorant, and give weight to the slanders of the malicious. The people of this world are quick-sighted to the faults of professing Christians, and are tolerable judges of what is expected from those who name the name of Christ. They make allowance for others, but they will not spare you. If your zeal for truth, and regular attendance on ministers who preach it, are not accompanied with a spirit of humility, integrity and kindness; if you are peevish, passionate, discontent, censorious or proud; if they see you greedy of gain, close-fisted or hard-hearted; or even if you comply with their customs and spirit, mingle with them in their sinful amusements, and not maintain a noble avoidance of all evil; they will not only despise you, they will also speak evil of the truth on your account.

But if you are all of a piece, and are concerned to adorn your profession by walking agreeable to the Gospel and to the glory of God and the good of others, by such well-doing you will put them to silence (1 Peter 2.15), and stop their mouths in some measure, even where you cannot change their hearts. And though they rail at you or ridicule you, they will be forced to feel a secret respect for you in their consciences.

But are there any hearts of stone among us, still unaffected by the love and sufferings of the Son of God, who still crucify him afresh, and still live in sin, though you know what it cost him to atone for sin? Yet now hear – now look – behold the Lamb of God! May the Lord in mercy open the eyes of your mind. And I beseech you once more, by his agony and bloody sweat, by his sufferings, cross and death, seek him, that your soul may live. Can you refuse these arguments? Then, should you live and die obstinate, you must perish!

Sermon 20

Sin Charged upon the Surety

'All we like sheep have gone astray: we have turned every one to his own way, and the Lord hath laid upon him the iniquity of us all.'
Isaiah 53.6

When wandering sinners are compared to wandering sheep, we have a striking image both of their danger and of their inability to recover themselves. If they are not sought out and guided back to the flock, they will be lost. Here the analogy breaks down: for sheep are not to be blamed for wandering off; but man's wanderings are rebellious. God made him upright, but he has sought out "many inventions." (Ecclesiastes 7.29) God appointed a safe and pleasant path for mankind to walk in, but they say: "We will not walk therein." Jeremiah 6.16) They knew the consequences of going astray, they were repeatedly warned of them, they were fenced in by wise and good laws, but they broke through all. And when they were invited again and again to return, they refused. They mocked God's messengers, and preferred their own chosen misery to the happiness of living under his direction and care. Surely he is the Good Shepherd who freely laid down his life to restore such sheep!

My text expresses the thoughts and feelings of those who know their fallen state, but who also approve of the method God has provided for their recovery. It therefore contains a confession of their guilt and an acknowledgment of his mercy.

I. A Confession of Guilt

Sin has deprived us both of the knowledge and presence of God. In consequence, every one of us wanders in his own way. All are under the power of sin, and are equally strangers to the paths of peace and safety. The paths we choose for ourselves are each

different from those of others, but they all end in the same point. They all lead to destruction.

1. This is sufficient proof of our depravity: we prefer our own ways to the Lord's. Nor can he inflict a heavier judgment on us in this life than to give us up to our own ways. He made us for himself, and gave us a desire that only he can satisfy. The lamb that grazes in the meadow, and the fish that swims in the stream, are each in their proper element. Take them out of it, and they perish. But they have no inclination to leave it. They remain faithful to the instincts their Creator put within them. The will of God is our proper element. If we depart from it, our sin will unavoidably bring punishment. We may have hard thoughts of God, and think the rule he has given us too strict and severe. This is how Satan persuaded Eve to stray from God, and we do the same. The Scriptures teach us that the ways of God are pleasant, but we will not listen. Experience proves that the way of law-breakers is hard, but we resist the proof, and hurry on in a whirl of disappointment. Are the proud, greedy, sensual, ambitious, happy? I appeal to conscience.

2. There is only one right way, but there are a thousand ways of going wrong. If you do not follow him who is "the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14.6), you are wandering far from God. The profane and the moral but self-righteous, the open sinner and the hypocrite, the pleasure lover and gold lover, the formal Papist and formal Protestant, though they seem to travel different roads, will meet at last (unless God's grace prevents) in the same state of final and hopeless misery. It is sad to see those who are all wrong disputing among themselves which of them is right. But the Scripture is the only rule to which you must conform now, and by which you must be judged at last; for it is given by the inspiration and authority of God. Whatever your character among men, if you lack faith and holiness, you are certainly not in the way of life. "He that believeth not, shall be damned." (Mark 16.16) "Without holiness, no man shall see the Lord." (Hebrews 12.14)

3. Just as wandering sheep are exposed to dangers that they can neither foresee nor prevent, so are we, until the Holy Spirit stops us in our tracks, turns us round, and brings us into the fold of the Good Shepherd. Oh, the misery of man without God! Every hour he is exposed to death in some form or other; and this would plunge him into the pit from which he cannot be redeemed. He is also harassed with cares and fears, needs and sorrows, without either guidance or refuge; and yet he is so blind that he thinks himself safe, and that his crooked ways will lead him to happiness!

II. An acknowledgment of mercy.

Where sin abounded, grace has much more abounded. Man sinned, MESSIAH suffered. "The Lord hath laid (or caused to meet) upon him the iniquity of us all;" that is, the punishment due to us. The evils we deserve were pursuing us; but Jesus interposed, and they seized on him; and he endured them, so that we might be spared. Do we ask on what grounds? It was on the ground of his voluntary substitution for sinners, as their covenant head and representative.

There is a parallel in human justice. If a man is unable to pay a debt, and the creditor demands payment, a third person may step in and make himself liable to pay in law. But MESSIAH paid our debt by divine appointment. To do this, the Son of God took on the nature of man, so that all those who believe in him are considered in law as one. He represents them, and so pays their debt.

1. He was appointed to be their Surety before the world began, according to a holy purpose and covenant agreed on from everlasting. (Proverbs 8.31; Titus 1.2) For the fall of man into sin was not unexpected; God foresaw and provided for it even before man was created, yes, even before the earth's foundations were laid.

2. After man had sinned, this glorious Head and Surety made himself known in mercy to Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, his church in the wilderness, David, Isaiah and many others. David even calls him "the LORD my shepherd." (Psalm 23.1) He was

thus the Almighty Shepherd of his people before he was revealed in our nature.

3. In the fullness of time he veiled his glory, and though he is equal with God, he appeared as a servant, under the law. (Philippians 2.6-7; Galatians 4.4) Because the children were flesh and blood, he took the same (Hebrews 2.14); and so the Word, who was in the beginning with God, became man. (John 1.1, 14) And though he had no sin of his own, he was treated as a sinner, suffering once for all, the Just for the unjust, to bring us to God. (1 Peter 3.18) And now God is revealed both as just and merciful, when he justifies all who believe in Jesus. God is well pleased in him, and with all who accept him. Their sin is put away by his suffering, and his righteousness is reckoned to them on their union to him. (Romans 4.6; Jeremiah 23.6)

By virtue of this union he is their life also. They receive from his fullness, just as branches receive life from the tree on which they grow. (John 15.1) Therefore the apostle says: "I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." (Galatians 2.20) This is the great mystery of Christianity, which words cannot explain. It is hidden from those who are wise in their own eyes; but is revealed to all who, like simple children, desire to be taught by God, and who wait on him for the light and influence of his Holy Spirit in the use of his appointed means.

From the substitution of MESSIAH for his people we may learn:

1. How to estimate the evil of sin. It must be a great evil that deprived Adam of the presence of God, and brought death into the world. It caused the destruction of the old world by water. It is the source of all the misery that fills the present world. And it will kindle the last great fire, which will never be quenched.

But in nothing does sin appear so sinful than in the sufferings and death of MESSIAH. If sinners were to be saved, it was necessary for him to drink the cup of wrath the Father poured out to him. We may fear the consequences of our sin; but it is only by looking to

him who was pierced for our transgressions (Zechariah 12.10) that we learn to hate it.

2. The complete justification of those who believe in him. They are delivered from all condemnation. (Romans 8.1) Every charge against them is over-ruled by this plea: Christ has died, is risen on our behalf, and ever lives to intercede for us. And though they are children under discipline, none of their trials are penal. They are not tokens of his anger, but fatherly chastisements, and tokens of his love, to promote the work of grace in their hearts and to make them partakers of his holiness.(Hebrews 12.6-11) Though necessary at present, the hour is soon coming when God will wipe all tears from their eyes, and they shall weep no more. Those who are still being tossed on the tempestuous sea of this life are just as safe as those who are already in the harbour.

3. The reason why believers are not overpowered by the difficulties of their service or the assaults of their enemies. They are one with Christ. He who has all power in heaven and on earth is engaged for their support. When they faint, he revives them; when they are wounded, he heals them; when they slip, he upholds them. He has said: "Because I live, ye shall live also." (John 14.19) Therefore, who can prevail against them, when their life is hidden with Christ in God" (Colossians 3.3)? Furthermore, their knowledge of their Saviour's love, and their heavenly Father's holiness displayed in his death, is the source of their love, gratitude and cheerful obedience to him. It makes hard things easy, and bitter things sweet. "The love of Christ constraineth us." (2 Corinthians 5.14) They look to him, and are enlightened. And when they consider who he is, and at what price he redeemed them, and hear his gracious words: "Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life" (Revelation 2.10), they are made strong; they are inspired with fresh courage; they take up their cross cheerfully; and say with the apostle: "None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear, so that I may finish my course with joy." (Acts 20.24)

Sermon 21

Messiah derided on the Cross

‘All they that see me laugh me to scorn; they shoot out the lip; they shake the head, saying, He trusted on the Lord, that he would deliver him; let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him.’
Psalm 22.7-8

Though alienated from the life of God, fallen man is not wholly devoid of compassion towards others in their sufferings, especially when self-interest does not interfere, and when envy, hatred, malice and revenge are restrained. Such compassion, along with the desire to relieve suffering, is among us called *humanity*. But it is to be ascribed to the goodness of God rather than to any goodness in man. Without this, the native evils of our heart would turn earth into the very image of hell, and there could be no such thing as society. To prevent this dreadful state of affairs, God restrains our hearts. Yet by nature man is an inhuman creature.

The rage, cruelty and callousness with which sin and Satan have poisoned our nature never appear in such a strong light as they do in religion, when ignorance, bigotry and blind zeal oppose the will and grace of God under the pretext of serving him. Then every hateful feeling is ‘sanctified,’ and every feeling of humanity is stifled. It is a noted fact, however, that when the most atrocious criminals draw pity and tears from others, the agonies of God’s servants produce derision and scorn.

My text leads us to consider the highest instance of this. The 22nd Psalm undoubtedly speaks of MESSIAH. Indeed, it begins with the very words he uttered on the cross. (Psalm 22.1; Matthew 27.46) Nor could King David be referring to himself when he said: “They pierced my hands and my feet.” (Psalm 22.16) MESSIAH was God’s servant in the most eminent sense of the word. He spent his earthly life doing nothing but good, and his enemies could not fix a single stain on his conduct. Yet they thirsted for his blood;

and because he came into the world to save sinners by it, they accomplished their cruel design. And in so doing, they laughed him to scorn, and insulted both his character and his hope. These things write the evangelists; and they take special notice of both his gracious purpose towards sinners, and the strong confidence he had in God his Father.

III. But who were those who scorned him?

III. The chief priests, elders and rulers of the people. They had been his avowed and determined enemies from the start; they had long plotted to take his life, and in their appointed time they were allowed to succeed. Now they exulted in their success. As teachers and expounders of the law, they ought to have pointed the people to MESSIAH as the object of their reverence and hope; but having rejected him themselves, they used all their authority and influence to make him the object of the people's contempt.

2. The people themselves derided him. After being urged by the priests to demand from Pilate his death, they clamoured for him to release Barabbas, a thief and a murderer, in his place. (Matthew 27.20) Only a few days before, they had been constrained to cry: "Hosanna to the son of David," (Matthew 21.9); now they cry: "Crucify him! Crucify him!" (Luke 23.21) The priests had wound them up, first to reject him, then to mock and deride him.

3. The Roman soldiers, who had already clothed him in a scarlet robe and bowed the knee to him in mockery, continued to mock him hanging on the cross. Because the Jews, whom they despised anyway, were now subject to them, and MESSIAH had been hailed as their king, the Romans saw the title fixed to the cross – JESUS, KING OF THE JEWS – as a spur to their sarcasm.

4. One of the thieves, crucified alongside him, unconvinced of his own guilt, joined them all in deriding him.

5. Even passers by paused to insult him, wagging their heads, as if to remind him of the supposed arrogance of his claims.

In sum, those who were so different in character from each other, and who for other reasons hated each other, now united in pouring scorn on him who had done nothing amiss.

II. They showed their scorn in the most pointed and cruel manner. When he said: "I thirst," they gave him vinegar and gall to drink. When he cried: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" they twisted his words to make them refer to Elijah. (Matthew 27.47-49) We cannot conceive how the holy angels felt when they saw their Lord treated by sinners with such scorn; but he had promised to suffer so, to satisfy the justice and law of God, and even to expiate the sins of many of his murderers, and to pardon the vilest offenders of all future ages who would come to trust in his name. Thus he must be tormented without the least relief or comfort from his Father, till he could cry: "It is finished." (John 19.30) Then, and not till then, he bowed his head, and gave up his spirit into the hands of his Father. (Luke 23.46)

There were, however, confirmations of his claims when he was at his lowest. He showed the penitent thief that he could still forgive sins, while the sun withdrew its light and the rocks broke in pieces, though daring sinners derided and mocked.

III. Most of the people bore their part in his death through impulse and ignorance. In his prayer for their forgiveness (Luke 23.34) he pled that they knew not what they did. His prayer was answered after his resurrection. But it was otherwise with those who were foremost in procuring his death. They had ascribed his miracles to Beelzebub, the Philistine god of flies. (Matthew 12.24) They thus sinned against the Holy Spirit, and gave the sign of their final impenitence. They scorned him as being unable to save himself, when he had claimed to be able to save others. (Matthew 27.42) They even brought down on themselves and their children the punishment for shedding his blood. (Matthew 27.25) Nor would they have believed, had he offered to come down from the cross;

for they had often rejected evidence equal to what they now demanded. They even reproached him for trusting in God and calling God his Father. (Matthew 27.43; John 5.18) How often had he appealed to witnesses to his claims – the Scriptures, John the Baptist, his mighty works – but having fastened him to the cross, they unknowingly triumphed over him in the very words that David had foretold in this psalm (22).

But what is all this to us? Very much. True, MESSIAH could suffer only once; yet we read of those who “crucify him afresh to themselves.” (Hebrews 6.6) His Gospel shows us his ministry, declares his character, reveals his love; yet many still scorn and reject him, him, like the Jewish crowd of old, through ignorance. But it is hoped that he who prayed for others may now intercede for them in heaven, and prevail for their conversion. If ever their eyes are opened, they will be pricked to the heart (Acts 2.37), and enquire: “What must we do to be saved?” (Acts 16.30)

Yet it is to be feared that there are many in Christian countries who too much resemble the spirit and conduct of the Jewish rulers. Their opposition proceeds not so much from ignorance, but from rooted hatred of the truth, persisted in against the light that has been forced on their minds. Though they are convinced, they will not be persuaded. They would do the same to the Author of the Gospel as the Jews did if he was within their reach today. Thus he said to Saul of Tarsus: “Why persecutest thou me?” (Acts 9.4) Those who reject his ministers reject him. (Luke 10.16) Those who speak with disdain of him dying to save others, of his people’s humble trust and hope in him; who have no compassion for them in their misery, but rather wound them with the taunt: “Where is now thy God?” (Psalm 115.2) are certainly treading in the footsteps of the Jewish rulers. May the Lord in mercy show them the danger of their path, and the destruction to which it leads! That they may humble themselves to his will, beg his pardon, espouse his cause, and experience the comforts and privileges of that Gospel they have so far reviled and scorned.

Sermon 22

Messiah unpitied and without a Comforter

‘Reproach [Rebuke] hath broken my heart, and I am full of heaviness; and I looked for some to take pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none.’ Psalm 69.20

The Lord has had many followers who have endured terrible deaths for his sake. Yet he himself was filled with anguish when he suffered for us. But then, they derived all their strength from him! *His* sufferings were aggravated by the fact that those divine supports that upheld his followers were suspended in his case. It is true that the dignity of his person gave efficacy to all he suffered. It is equally true that the weight laid on him was more than any mere creature could bear. But in whatever way his human nature was upheld by his eternal power and Godhead, he derived no comfort from it when it pleased God to forsake him. His divine nature could neither bleed nor suffer. He suffered as a man, and he suffered alone. But as he suffered he experienced to the utmost all that sin deserved; and this was consistent with his perfect character. My text expresses, as far as human language can reach, the exquisite distress he suffered when he bore our sins in his own body on the tree. Reproach broke his heart, and when he looked for pity and comfort, he found none.

I. “Reproach hath broken my heart.” We must not confine our thoughts here to the reproach of his enemies. In Handel’s *Messiah* the words are “Thy *rebuke* hath broken his heart.” Though he knew no sin, he was made sin for us. He was accounted and treated as a sinner. Thus he incurred the reproach of the law and justice of God. The Holy Father, who charged the Son of his love with the sins of his people, forsook him. God infinitely hates sin, and will have no fellowship with it. Of this he gave the most awful proof by forsaking his beloved Son when he answered for the sins of men.

Then the sword of the Almighty awoke against him (Zechariah 13.7) and he spared him not.

This was the rebuke that broke his heart. Let broken-hearted sinners look by faith on a broken-hearted Saviour. The phrase denotes inconceivable dejection, with a failure of all help. Anything may be borne while the spirit holds firm; but if the heart itself is broken, who can endure? “A wounded spirit who can bear?” (Proverbs 18.14)

It is not therefore surprising that he says: “I am full of heaviness.” Even in the garden he “began to be sore amazed, and very heavy” (Matthew 26.37-38), and he said to his disciples: “My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death.” (Mark 14.34) That is, he was struck with terror and surprise by the supernatural power that came against him. He was surrounded by sorrows. He was also in an agony (Luke 22.44), arising from the prospect of the impending, unavoidable evil. The evils he was to bear were now collecting into a point, and formed a dark tremendous storm, ready to break on his devoted head. The prospect filled his soul with unutterable horror.

Let us adore in humble silence this manifestation of the goodness and severity of God in the Redeemer’s sufferings. What is expressly revealed we may assert, contemplate and admire. “His soul was made an offering for sin.” (Isaiah 53.10) *We* know little of the extreme evil of sin, because we have such faint views of the majesty, holiness and goodness of God against whom it is committed. We also have slight thoughts of the extent of sin, not only positive disobedience, but also lack of conformity to the law of God. The sins of *one* person, in thought, word and deed, of omission and commission, are countless. How then can we imagine “the sins of the world”? What must be the atonement on account of which God, both righteous and merciful, forgives the sins that his inviolable truth engages him to punish? And they *are* punished, though forgiven. They were charged on Jesus; they exposed him to the rebuke that broke his heart. They filled him

with heaviness. When, therefore, we are assured that the justice of God is satisfied with respect to every human sinner who makes the Saviour's sufferings his plea for pardon, and trusts in him for salvation, and that on this ground he is freed from all condemnation and accepted as a child, we see how great were the sufferings of Christ, which frees millions from the guilt of countless sins!

II. Though his will was perfectly submissive to the will of God, and though he was determined to endure all that was required of him, yet he still suffered as a man. All his human affections felt the need of pity and comfort; yet he found none. To be neglected in such an extremity is the most distressing loneliness imaginable. But thus it was with MESSIAH. Both the cruelty of his enemies and the inconstancy of his friends (who had professed the most cordial attachment to him) were ingredients that were poured into the bitter cup of his sufferings.

Added to all this, the loss of the light of his Father's face completed his sense of desertion. Those who have never tasted the Lord's goodness so as to feel a sense of its absence, can have no idea of what he suffered. Neither can those whose minds are wholly occupied with earthly things. As long as they are taken up with trifles, they cannot believe that separation from the felt presence of God involves the very essence of misery. But should death surprise them, tear them away from all they have loved, and plunge them into an unknown, unchangeable world, only then (alas, too late!) will they feel their immense, irreparable loss, cut off from the fountain of life and comfort. Yet this was the most dreadful part of the Redeemer's sufferings. He was perfectly united to the will and love of his heavenly Father; yet when he endured the curse of the law for us, he looked for pity from God, but found none.

In this picture we contemplate the demerit of sin. But there are some sufferings due to the impenitent sinner of which MESSIAH is not capable. I mean consciousness of personal guilt, the

gnawings of a remorseful conscience and the rage of despair. If we add to these the eternity of their sufferings, we may form some faint idea of what those who believe in him are delivered from. Awful thought, to reject the only Saviour! If they refuse his mediation, they must answer in their own persons. Then they will find no pity, no comforter. For who or what can comfort when the Lord God omnipotent arises to punish? What will your pleasures, your wealth, your friends, do for you, when the hand of the Lord shall touch you to the quick?

Should any of you hear Handel's *Messiah* performed again, may God impress upon your heart the sense of this passage. Then you will understand that the sufferings of the Son of God are by no means a subject for amusement.

Sermon 23

No Sorrow like Messiah's Sorrow

'Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? Behold and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow.' Lamentations 1.12

Although the Old Testament Scriptures – the law, psalms and prophets – bear a harmonious testimony to MESSIAH, we may not suppose that every passage refers to him. A fanciful and allegorical interpretation, pretending to spiritualize the Word of God, has tried to discover types and mysteries in the plainest historical passages, where we have no evidence that the Holy Spirit intended to teach them. Proof for the great doctrines of the faith has also been sought on very slight grounds, when these doctrines can be found plainly and expressly revealed. This method is more perplexing than enlightening. It leads people to ask if there is any fixed meaning in Scripture that may be relied on. True, we are promised the Holy Spirit to guide us into the truth, but this does not warrant us to strike out a path on our own, and trust to conjectures. The Letter to the Hebrews explains many things in a higher sense than perhaps we might understand them; but it is best to keep within safe bounds, and state our own views modestly, lest we are censured for being wise above what is written. The history of Sarah is an allegory, as Paul says (Galatians 4.24), but that does not warrant me to allegorize the history of Leah and Rachel. I *may* preach the gospel from the manna and the brass serpent, because our Lord expounds them of himself. (John 3.14; 6.31,35) But I must not imagine that everything that suggests the Saviour to my mind is actually meant to do so.

There is, however, a useful way of preaching, when we state the literal meaning of a passage, and then use it to illustrate a doctrine clearly taught elsewhere in Scripture. The text from Handel's MESSIAH at the head of this sermon is a case in point. I am not sure that it refers to him literally in context; it is a sorrowful

question of Jeremiah's to those who passed by him regarding his grief and the grief of Jerusalem, which has recently been ravaged by the Chaldean army. But we are able to answer the question thus: Yes, there has been a greater sorrow than your sorrow. For those who have heard of the sorrows of Jesus will be immediately reminded of him.

The clause "Is it nothing to you?" is not in the text of Handel's oratorio, but I am not willing to leave it out. The greatest wonder to men and angels is the suffering and dying of the Son of God for sinners. Next to this is the gross insensitivity of those who inflicted him and those who are still indifferent to him. If they believe in him, they will be healed by his wounds, and live by his death. But if they finally reject him, they must perish, and their guilt and misery will be greatly aggravated by what they have heard of him! But sin has so blinded our understanding and hardened our hearts that naturally we have no feeling, either for him or for ourselves.

I. Is the reproof suited to any person here? Can I say: Is it nothing to you? Then surely it must affect you now. If you had read in the newspapers that a fine person had been cruelly murdered, would it not be something to you? Could you avoid being surprised, indignant and grieved? Surely it would engross your thoughts.

You hear that Jesus Christ was cruelly crucified. Is this nothing to you? Perhaps you are affected by the thought of his death. But would it affect you so that you could no longer live in the practice of those sins that could not be atoned except by his blood? And could you crucify him afresh by bearing the name Christian while living in a way and spirit wholly unsuitable to his gospel?

But if you are indifferent to *his* grief, is it nothing to you whether you are saved or lost; whether he says to you at the last day "Come, ye blessed," or "Depart, ye cursed"? There is no alternative.

This senseless unbelief of the heart is the sins of sins, the root of every evil; and yet it is so congenial to us that only God can make us feel it and make us grieve over it more than over any other sins.

II. To the question that is put to us, we may answer without hesitation, Never was sorrow like MESSIAH'S sorrow. True, history may furnish us with accounts of those who have suffered excruciating torments. But:

1. Was there ever a person so excellent who suffered like him? Job suffered greatly (30.8-14), and he was a good man. But Jesus is the Lord of glory. The angels worship him; but the rabble spat upon him. Even if an earthly king was treated like this, it would be a small thing compared with the way they humbled the Kings of kings, and Lord of lords.

2. Was there ever such an innocent sufferer? When Aaron lost his sons, he held his peace. (Leviticus 10.3) Yet he had led the worship of the golden calf. David mourned over his sin, yet he did not complain at his punishment. (2 Samuel 16.11) The thief on the cross submitted to his sentence, because he was a thief. (Luke 23.41) So do all who know themselves. They do not complain because they know their deserts. (Lamentations 3.39,22) But Jesus was holy, harmless, and undefiled; he had kept the whole law, and done nothing amiss; yet he went to his death like a lamb to the slaughter. (Isaiah 53.7)

3. Did any other sufferer experience the same degree of God's fierce anger? In our greatest sufferings, there is always a mixture of mercy. At worst, we must always admit that he has not dealt with us according to our sins. (Psalm 103.10) If every calamity were to overtake us all at once, all is still less than we deserve. Our proper desert is hell, exclusion from God, and imprisonment with Satan and his fallen angels. Everything less than this is a mercy. But Jesus, though he had no sin of his own, bore the sins of many. His sufferings were indeed temporary, yet they were extreme.

On these accounts, then, there was no sorrow like his sorrow! The unknown sorrows of the Redeemer are a source of continual support and comfort to his believing people. In his sufferings they contemplate his atonement, his love, his example, and his glory.

1. His atonement, received by faith, delivers them from guilt and condemnation, gives them peace with God and access to him as children. Having a way opened for the supply of every needed grace, they are therefore prepared to take up *their* cross, and follow him.

2. His love, in submitting to such sorrows for their sakes, attaches their hearts to him. Great is the power of love! It makes hard things easy, and bitter things sweet. But this noblest grace of the soul can never exert its full strength till it is fixed on its proper object. The love of Christ constrains indeed! (2 Corinthians 5.14) It is stronger than death. It overcomes the world. And we love him, because he first loved us; because he loved us, and gave himself for us. (1 John 4.19; Galatians 2.20)

3. His example arms them with the same willingness to suffer. By his cross they are crucified to the world, and the world is crucified to them. They no longer court its favour nor fear its frown. They know what to expect from it, by how it treated him, and they are content. He who endured the contradiction of sinners against himself for them, is worthy that they should suffer similarly for him. They commit themselves to him, and are sure that he will not let them suffer as he did. Thus they have fellowship with him in his sufferings.

4. His passing through sufferings to glory assures them that if they suffer with him, they shall also reign with him. (John 12.26; Romans 8.18) Since the sufferings of this present time are not to be compared with their eternal joy, they know that when Christ, who is their life, shall appear, they too shall appear with him in glory. (Colossians 3.4) Therefore they are comforted in all their troubles, and can say: "None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I may finish my course with joy." (Acts 20.24)

Sermon 24

Messiah's Innocence Vindicated

'He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation? For he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken.'

Isaiah 53.8

Christians should not be stumbled because there are difficulties in the prophetic parts of Scripture, and because translators and expositors sometimes explain them differently. Whatever relates to our faith, practice and comfort may be collected from the plainest passages, in which all the versions and expositors agree. To a humble mind, proof that Holy Scripture was originally breathed out by God, and that the [Authorized] version preserved to us in his good providence is authentic, is the effect it has on the heart and conscience when enlightened by the Holy Spirit. Without this internal experiential evidence, the learned are no less at a loss than the unlearned.

The first clause of our text does not appear in Handel's *Messiah*, but the Hebrew original suggests a meaning in it that may not readily occur to an English reader. It is no mere repetition of what was said before of the Redeemer's sufferings. Rather, it opens a bright and glorious subject; namely, what followed those sufferings. He was taken, or taken up, like Enoch and Elijah, from judgment, and who can declare the dignity, influence and duration of his government? For though he was cut off and cursed from among men, it was as a substitute for the transgression of God's people. In the flesh he suffered as an evildoer, but his character was vindicated. I shall therefore consider the testimonies to his innocence.

1. The first is that of Judas. He was one of the twelve appointed to be near the Lord. And though the Lord knew his heart was corrupt,

and that he would prove a traitor, he did not treat him differently to the other apostles. But Judas, who had often been with him, was compelled by his guilty conscience to return his ill-gotten gain to the chief priests and elders, and to confess: "I have sinned, in that I have betrayed the innocent blood." (Matthew 27.4) Thus he was a witness to the Redeemer's innocence.

2. Pontius Pilate also repeatedly declared his belief that Jesus was innocent. "I am innocent of the blood of this just person," he said. (Matthew 27.24) He tried to have him released, but the fear of man prevailed at last, and he acted in defiance of his conscience. From him we learn that Herod, too, despite his mocking of Jesus, considered his accusations to be groundless. (Luke 23.15) Pilate further indicated his belief in Jesus' innocence when he refused to change the title 'Jesus King of the Jews' when they demanded it of him.

3. The dying thief said: "This man has done nothing amiss." (Luke 23.41) Though he had very little knowledge of Jesus, he must have heard from the people that he was innocent.

4. His heavenly Father bore a remarkable testimony to his character. The heavens were darkened, the sun withdrew its shining, the veil of the temple was torn in two, the earth trembled, the rocks were split, the graves were opened, and the dead rose. Even the Roman centurion who executed him declared his innocence.

It may be thought unnecessary to prove the innocence of one whose nature is perfect, and in whom dwells all the fullness of the Godhead. Indeed, it is unnecessary to those who believe on his name. But to those whose minds are blinded and whose hearts are hardened, these testimonies may leave them inexcusable, or convince them that he who hung on the cross is indeed the Son of God, and Saviour of sinners.

True Christians may learn from their Lord how to suffer patiently when they suffer unjustly. The apostle presses this argument on his hearers. (1 Peter 3.18-21) To resent every injury, and ready to retaliate, are properties of a small and narrow mind. It requires no sacrifice or resolution to acquire such a disposition. It is natural to us.

But to act as true servants of God, and cheerfully undergo whatever hardships he may send us, indicates true nobility of soul. And to this we are called, for this is how Christ suffered. He did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth; he was reviled, yet he reviled not again; though he suffered, he threatened not; but prayed for those who nailed him to the cross. This was a distinguishing mark of his character, and it should be of ours. Is the disciple above his Lord? Should his conduct contradict that of his Lord? "If we say we abide in him, we ought to walk even as he walked." (1 John 2.6)

But those who, while calling themselves Christians, are full of the spirit of self-justification, contention and complaint, deny him by their works. By contrast, Peter and John rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his sake. (Acts 5.41) And he deserves no less from us than he did from them. It was for us, no less than for them, that he endured reproach, and was content to die as an evildoer, though he was innocent.

Sermon 25

Messiah Rising from the Dead

**‘For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer
thine Holy One to see corruption.’ Psalm 16.10**

That the Gospel is a divine revelation may be proved from the character of its Author. Even if an unprejudiced and candid infidel were to read the history of Jesus Christ as recorded by the evangelists, I think he would be sufficiently convinced that man could not possibly have invented such a character. In his *Internal Evidence of the Christian Religion* Jenyns forcefully expresses the truth that Jesus Christ is the only Founder of a religion that is wholly unconcerned with human politics, and therefore foreign to earthly purposes. All others, including Mahomet and even Moses, blended religion with the state, and so obtained dominion over their people. But Christ neither aimed at nor would accept such power. How different he is to the many impostors and enthusiasts who have tried to impose revelations on the world, some of whom have been ready to die for their delusions! But I defy anyone to show me, Jenyns challenges, anyone who made his own sufferings and death essential to his mission. This Christ actually did.

The death of our Lord was indeed essential to his plan, and he often spoke of it. Probably it was his enemies’ plan too; and when they saw him dead and buried they expected to hear no more of him. But the Scriptures that were read in their synagogues every Sabbath day foretold his resurrection from the dead. The text before us is sufficient proof of this; and those who acknowledge the authority of the New Testament will see that the text is expressly applied to him by Peter. (Acts 2.27)

We saw in the previous sermon that those who were implicated in his death were constrained to confess he was innocent. But he is worthy of a more authoritative vindication. Accordingly “he was

declared to be the Son of God with power by his resurrection from the dead.” (Romans 1.4)

The apostle Peter expounds the term ‘thine Holy One’ by the word ‘flesh.’ (Acts 2.26) The human nature that was formed by God and born of the virgin was holy. It was “a holy thing,” (Luke 1.35) perfect and pure, and therefore not liable to death. It was only as charged with our sins that he had to pay the price of our redemption. He made full atonement by his death; but by destroying death he opened the kingdom of heaven for all believers. It was not possible that he should be detained in the grave. (Acts 2.24) His resurrection therefore is the ground on which the truth and importance of Christianity rests. For had he not risen, your faith and our preaching would be in vain, and we would be yet in our sins. (1 Corinthians 15.17) And although his resurrection was not as publicly known as his crucifixion, the evidence for it is decisive. Those who preached it changed the moral world wherever they went, a thing the philosophers were unable to do.

The clearest proofs, however, are open for all to see; namely, the effects of this doctrine on the hearts and lives of those who truly receive it on the authority of Scripture under the influence of the Holy Spirit. These are made partakers “of the power of the resurrection.” (Philippians 3.10) It delivers them from guilt and fear, animates them with confidence towards God, weans them from the love and spirit of this present evil world, fills them with great and glorious hopes, and delivers them from the fear of death. They are “risen with Christ,” and “seek those things which are above,” where they know their Lord and Saviour is seated in glory.

I merely touch on these things at present, as I shall consider the subject again (if my life is spared). But the most satisfactory proofs are the most obvious, and I trust that most of you are already persuaded that “the Lord is risen indeed!” (Luke 24.34) I am not preaching to Jews or Moslems, but to professed Christians.

But I ask: what influence has this truth on your hopes, tempers and conduct? The powers of darkness know that Christ is risen. They believe, feel and tremble. I hope none of you will be content with the faith of fallen angels. As surely as he is risen, he will return to judge the world. "Behold, he cometh in the clouds, and every eye shall see him." (Revelation 1.7) Those who long for his appearing have reason to rejoice that he is risen!

Many advantages arise from this doctrine to true Christians. I will mention only a few.

1. As MESSIAH was delivered up for our offences, so he was raised for our justification. He is the legal representative of all who are united to him as their Head; he and they are considered as one. His sufferings and death are so imputed to them that they are exempt from condemnation. And as he was vindicated by his resurrection from every reproach of his enemies, they have fellowship with him in the same. God exalted him to glory, and gave him a name above every other name, that their faith and hope might be in God. (1 Peter 1.21) They are not only pardoned, but also accepted in the Beloved. And after this present state of discipline has ended, they shall be received as if they had never sinned. If their sins are sought for in that day, they shall not be found. If any charge shall be brought against them, it shall be overruled by the plea: "Christ has died, yea, rather, is risen again," and he appears in the presence of God for them, acknowledges them as his own, and intercedes for them. (Romans 8.33-34)

Justification is God's way of pardoning and accepting sinners according to the sovereignty and riches of his grace in the Son of his love. Whom he pardons and accepts, he justifies; and whom he justifies, he glorifies. Even now in this life they are his children. (1 John 3.2) In the midst of all their trials and troubles, they can by faith trust in their Saviour for justification, and rejoice in knowing their acceptance, and rely on him for their perseverance. They even dare approach the great, holy and heart-searching God as their Father, and pour out their hearts to him with greater freedom than to their dearest earthly friends. And though they feel and

confess themselves unworthy of the least of his mercies, they are not afraid to ask him for the greatest blessings.

2. The resurrection of Christ is a pledge of that almighty power that is engaged on their behalf to overcome every obstacle and enemy in their pilgrimage that threatens to prevent them reaching their heavenly inheritance. That same principle which raised his dead body from the tomb is pledged to keep them, even unto the end. (Ephesians 1.19-21) Many nations tried to exterminate the Christian Church, but they all perished in the attempt; for it is founded on a rock, and the gates of hell cannot prevail against it. (Matthew 16.18) None shall pluck them from his hands. (John 10.28) And while he remains faithful to his word, and able to fulfil it, they are safe. Even at their lowest, the Lord is their helper; and they are taught by him to trust not in themselves, but in him who raised the dead. (2 Corinthians 1.9) This is the Lord's usual way of training them to depend wholly on himself. The history of Abraham, Israel and David proves this. And I do not doubt that the history of some in this assembly can illustrate its truth also. You have been, and perhaps are now, in circumstances where you have no resources in yourself, and where no help from man can relieve you; but while your help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth (Psalm 124.8), and while you are warranted to trust in him who raised the dead, you have no reason to despond. It was a dark day when the disciples thought that he whom they trusted would have redeemed Israel. (Luke 24.20-21) But their fears were disappointed, and their mourning was turned into joy.

3. His resurrection is the pledge and pattern of ours. As sure as Christ the first-fruits is risen, so sure shall they arise at his coming. Each one shall arise another, and yet the same. Their bodies, truly their own, shall be changed, and fashioned like his glorious body. (Philippians 3.21) This corruptible must put on incorruption; the body that is sown in dishonour must be raised in power and glory. These things we know only in part; but then we shall know wholly. Now, pain and sickness clog our bodies time and time again; but then our new spiritual bodies will be free from all defilement or

defect. Then, we will be on the wing in his service, and perfectly conformed to his image in light, holiness and love; for then “we shall see him as he is”, without any interposing veil or cloud. (1 John 3.2)

Sermon 26

The Ascension of Messiah To Glory

‘Lift up your heads, O ye gates, and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors, and the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle. Lift up your heads, O ye gates, even lift them up, ye everlasting doors, and the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The Lord of hosts, he is the King of glory.’

Psalm 24.7-10

The Levitical law was a shadow or sketch of good things to come. It exhibited a faint outline of the work and glory of MESSIAH. Like an engraving on a seal, it needed the [magnifying] glass of the gospel to enable us to see its detailed lines and precision.

The similarity between this twenty-fourth Psalm and Psalm sixty-eight suggests that they were both penned on the same occasion, when the ark of the covenant was brought to its fixed place in Zion. When the ark approached the tabernacle, the priests demanded admittance, singing: “Lift up your heads, O ye gates,” and those within responded: “Who is the king of glory,” to which they replied: “The Lord of hosts, he is the king of glory.”

This solemn occasion typified an event unspeakably more glorious, the entrance of MESSIAH into heaven itself. We think of him, then, ascending to his Father and our Father, to his God and our God, greeted by worshipping angels.

The main points we shall consider are:

I. His title: “The Lord of hosts.”

II. His victories: “The Lord strong and mighty in battle.”

III. His mediatorial title: “The King of glory.”

IV. His authoritative entrance into the Holy Place.

I. MESSIAH is “the Lord of hosts.” This truth, proposed by the authority of God in his Word, is the foundation of our faith and hope. As the husband of the church, he is the Lord of hosts. (Isaiah 54.5) It was the Lord of hosts whom Isaiah saw seated upon a throne in the temple. (Isaiah 6.1) The vision filled him with astonishment. The apostle John assures us that Isaiah spoke of MESSIAH and his glory. (John 12.41) He is the true God, and eternal life, and those who honour him as such have everything to hope, and nothing to fear.

II. He is “the Lord strong and mighty in battle.” It was in his human nature that he fought with his enemies and ours. But the battle was the Lord’s, and his own arm brought him salvation. He conquered sin, Satan and death. We were under their power, and he battled against their united force. He fought, bled and died; but in dying, he conquered. He subdued the law, which is the strength of sin, by obeying its precepts and suffering its penalty. He destroyed death, and disarmed it of its sting. He defeated Satan, who had the power of death, by overturning the foundations of his kingdom, breaking open his prison doors, and releasing the prisoners. Thus he spoiled principalities and powers, making a show of them openly, triumphing over them in his death, or cross. (Colossians 2.15) And like a Roman conqueror riding in his state chariot, he made the principal prisoners follow him in chains, and displayed the trophies he had won to adorn the procession. Thus MESSIAH subdued the powers of darkness, and gloriously led captivity captive, when he ascended up on high. (Psalm 68.18) And all his success falls to the benefit of his subjects. As MESSIAH their King has conquered for them, so they are more than conquerors through faith in his blood and by the word of their testimony.

III. The title “King of glory” I understand as uniquely given to him as Mediator. In consequence of his obedience unto death, he obtained a name that is above every other name. (Philippians 2.9) There was no appearance of glory when he suffered as a man; but his true brightness and splendour appeared when he ascended to

his Father's glory. By his holy Word we are favoured with a sight of his glory, when he who is the brightness of his Father's glory and the express image of his person (Hebrews 1.3) reveals himself to us as the only begotten Son of the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1.18) This is life eternal, to know him whom he has sent. (John 17.3) In this sense he is the King of glory; for when we are enlightened by the Holy Spirit to see him as the Scripture reveals him, we see the glory of God in him. Other discoveries of it are merely scattered rays, but in Jesus the glory of God shines on us in its fullness. He is therefore the King of glory.

IV. As the acknowledged King of glory, he ascended in our nature; the everlasting gates opened wide to receive him, and he entered into the Holy Place not made with hands, there to appear in the presence of God for his people.

1. As their representative. The glory is his, the benefit is his people's. Sin had excluded them from his kingdom, but he claimed and took possession of it in their name. (Hebrews 6.20) This is why he is styled their Forerunner, for they shall surely follow him. He is their Head, and he will be followed by his members. He has said: "Because I live, ye shall live also." (John 14.19) And in his appointed time, each will follow him to be with him where he is, and to behold his glory. (John 17.24)

2. As their high priest and intercessor. He presents their persons and prayers as acceptable to God. He bears the iniquity of their holy things. With this encouragement, weak and polluted though they are, his people find liberty of access; and because he ever lives to make intercession for them, they know he is able to save them to the uttermost. (Hebrews 7.25)

3. He remembers them in all their varied circumstances. He is seated upon the throne of universal dominion, and exercises authority and rule with a special view to their welfare. While he pleads for them on high, he is with them by his Spirit below. He comforts their hearts, enlivens their assemblies, and manages their

concerns. He is their Shepherd, who feeds their hungry souls, wards off their enemies, revives their fainting spirits, and restores them after wandering. His ear is open to their cry, his eye is on them in every situation, and his arm is stretched out for their relief. Though persecuted, they are not forsaken; though cast down, they are not destroyed. And he has promised that he will never leave them nor forsake them; and he will do all for them that he has promised, till he has made them victorious over all their enemies, put a song of victory in their mouths and a crown of life upon their heads.

This King of glory dwells also in the humble and lowly spirit. He claims the throne of the heart of each of his people, which was usurped before by self and Satan. Thus he is acknowledged as their king. By nature, the bolts and bars of prejudice and unbelief withstand his entrance; but when he comes on a purpose of grace, he will take no denial. For a season he waits to be gracious; but in his appointed hour he reveals his great name, and makes the soul aware of who he is! Then the gates of brass and iron are broken before him. His greatness and goodness, what he is in himself, and what he has done and suffered for them, are irresistible motives to let him in; and Satan, who like a strong man armed, is dispossessed of his prey. The soul laments its former obstinacy, throws down its weapons, throws open its gates, and bids the King of glory welcome. What a wonderful change took place in the Gadarene demoniac, when he found himself sitting quietly at his Saviour's feet, clothed, and in his right mind!

Seeing them we have such a great high priest, who is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. (Hebrews 4.14) Let not those who know him be ashamed of their allegiance to him. At death you will not repent of thinking too highly of him, or expecting too much from him, or devoting yourself earnestly to his service. And do not yield to unbelief and despair. Though your enemies are mighty, and your trials great, greater is he that is with you. If the Lord, the Lord of hosts, the Lord strong and mighty in battle, is for you, who can be against

you? Continue instant in prayer; persevere in well doing. Our ascended Lord will one day return; and those who have loved, and served, and trusted him here, shall appear with him in glory. (Colossians 3.4)

Others must prepare to meet him. But how shall they stand before him? Or where shall they fly from his presence? Have they an arm like God? Can they thunder with a voice like his. As yet he is proclaimed by the gospel a Saviour, seated upon a throne of grace, holding forth the golden sceptre of his love, and inviting sinners to be reconciled to God through him. Now is the accepted time. But when he appears a second time he will be seen on a throne of judgment, to take vengeance on his enemies.

Sermon 27

Messiah, the Son of God

‘For unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee?’ Hebrews 1.5

Though every part of God’s revelation in Scripture is true, not every part is equally important. There are fundamental truths necessary to our peace and holiness; and there are secondary truths useful to our comfort. Our Lord pronounced Peter blessed (Matthew 16.17) for confessing the truth that he is the Son of God. This truth is fundamental; others are not so.

Though it is not always easy to draw the line between fundamental and secondary truths, lack of attention to their difference has led to bitter controversies in the church of Christ. As a result, fallible men, from a mistaken zeal, have tried to enforce their beliefs with equal and indiscriminating vehemence. It is evident that the truths essential to the very being of a Christian must be known and experienced by all who are taught of God (Isaiah 54.13), for they only are Christians indeed.

However, whatever doctrine Scripture teaches about MESSIAH must be fundamental. It cannot be a question whether the Saviour is God or a mere creature. He must be either one or the other; and the whole mould of our religion depends on the judgment we form of him. If he is only a man, or even the highest angel, he must be inferior to his Maker. Then all who worship him are guilty of idolatry. But if he is God over all, blessed forever, then those who refuse to honour him as God worship they know not what. (John 4.22) For there is only one God, and those who know him not in Christ know him not at all, but are without God in the world. (Ephesians 2.12)

The judgment we form of the Saviour also demonstrates how far we know ourselves. For if we think we can atone for our sins, or be the shepherd and bishop of all men's souls, we know not either the evil of sin or the wickedness of the human heart.

We ascribe it, then, to the wisdom and goodness of God that the doctrine of the Deity of Christ, so important as to be the ground of truth, is asserted in many places of Scripture. Like the blood that courses through our bodies, it pervades and enlivens the entire system of revelation. Moses, the Psalms, the Prophets and the entire New Testament all testify that he is superior to every creature.

The text contains three terms that require explanation: "My Son," "Begotten," "This day." But who is sufficient for these things? If I attempt to explain them, it will be in much weakness, afraid lest I darken counsel by words without knowledge. I know of no safe ground to go on but the sure testimony of Scripture. These are the deep things of God, and if we do not have the guidance of his Word and Spirit, we shall bewilder ourselves. Nor would I be dogmatic; at the same time I trust Scripture will give us sufficient light to preserve us from uncertainty.

"My Son." The Scripture was given to make us wise unto salvation. (2 Timothy 3.15) Its manner of teaching therefore accommodates itself to our circumstances. He teaches us heavenly things by things earthly. And to engage our trust, excite our thankfulness, and animate our duty, the Lord reveals himself by names familiar to us in the family, such as Father, Husband, Friend.

So when he informs us that he has a Son, an only Son, an only begotten Son, we are to receive his testimony, admire and adore. Here is a distinction plainly revealed in terms we may understand. There are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost, and these three are one. (1 John 5.7) To each of these three Scripture ascribes the perfections of God. Each of

them therefore is God. Yet if we try to explain how three are one and one is three, we simply cannot. It becomes us, therefore, to lay our hands on our mouths, and lie in the dust. Humble faith requires no other proof than Scripture gives.

The form of baptism prescribed by our Lord for his church (Matthew 28.19) names Father, Son and Holy Ghost. By comparing the text from 1 John with this, the WORD and the SON speak of the same person.

He is the same as the one of whom John the Baptist spoke when he said: "And the word was made flesh, and dwelt among us" (John 1.14), and of whom the Father spoke when he declared: "Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee." (Psalm 2.7; Acts 13.33) Had God spoken this to an angel, he would have made him equal with God, which is a property only of the Word. (John 1.1-3)

Speaking to Nicodemus, our Lord said: "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son." (John 3.16) It was clearly his design to show us just how much God loves us by giving his only begotten Son.

This name, then, is not a title of office. It tells us of the God-Man, he who is God and Man in one person. His manhood was the offering, but his Godhead was the altar that sanctified it when he made atonement for sin.

With us the term "begotten" expresses the relation between father and son, upon which the only son is heir of his father. I feel at a loss here; I shall not, therefore, try to explain the phrase *eternal generation*, because I do not clearly understand it. But Proverbs 8.22 and 31 give us some faint idea of the relation of the eternal Father to his eternal Son before the worlds were made. MESSIAH is therefore the eternal Son and the eternal God. I will not exercise my thoughts beyond this, in things too high for me.

As to the term “this day,” Scripture applies it to his incarnation. (Luke 1.35; Galatians 4.4; Hebrews 1.5)

It refers also to his resurrection. (Acts 13.32-33; Romans 1.4)

But when all is said, the best knowledge of the doctrine of the person of Christ must be given us from on high. Prayer, attention to the great Teacher, a humble study of Scripture, and obedience to his will, always brings life and comfort to the soul.

This is he with whom we have to do. In and by this Son of his love we have access by faith to God. Unworthy and helpless in ourselves, from him we derive our plea: here we find a refuge, and on this we rest and build our hope: that “God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son, who is so much better than the angels that he has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they.” (Hebrews 1.4)

Sermon 28

Messiah Worshipped

By Angels

‘Let all the angels of God worship him.’
Hebrews 1.6

Many of the Lord’s true servants have been tempted, like Elijah (1 Kings 19.10), to think they were left to serve him alone. But God has a faithful people in every age; and even if the number of professing believers were much smaller than it is, we need not be disheartened. If we could see into the invisible world, we would be satisfied that there are more with us than against us. (2 Kings 6.16) Such sight is attributed to faith, which is the evidence of things not seen (Hebrews 11.1), because it rests on Scripture testimony as a certainty. True Christians are therefore comforted by the assurance that their Saviour is not as neglected and despised as they think. There is a host of holy angels who worship him.

The MESSIAH has always been the object of their worship, both in his humiliation and in his exaltation. And as God, he is altogether worthy of their worship.

Isaiah saw the seraphim worship him in the temple, crying: “Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory.” (Isaiah 6) The apostle John was not mistaken when he applied this passage to our Lord Jesus Christ. (John 12.41)

John himself saw and heard angels joining in the chorus of praise, saying: “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing.” (Revelation 5.12)

In brief, he is the Lord of angels. Angels ministered to him in the desert; they are sent by him to minister to his people. (Hebrews

1.14) He is their head. (Ephesians 1.10) They are even called “elect angels” (1 Timothy 5.21), as distinct from those angels who kept not their first estate. He is their life, and strength, and joy, as he is ours, though they cannot sing the song of the redeemed.

Here, then is a pattern and encouragement for us. The angels, the whole host of heaven, worship him. He is Lord of all.

I close this subject with some reflections on it.

1. Those who love him may rejoice at the thought of his glory. They sympathised with him in reading of his humiliation. It was not a light concern to them that he suffered such agonies, and was reviled, rejected, scourged, and slain. But now he is no more a man of sorrows: his head, that was once crowned with thorns, is crowned with glory now; his face, once defiled by spittle, now shines like the sun; his hands, once tied together, now wield the sceptre of government; and instead of being surrounded by insulting men, he is now surrounded by adoring angels.

2. What an honour does his glory place upon his followers. The world that rejected him pays little regard to them: they are slighted, scorned, or pitied. Many of them are great sufferers, and a few are distinguished for their ability; they are strangers and pilgrims on the earth; yet this God is their God. He who is worshipped by angels is not ashamed to call them brethren. (Hebrews 2.11) It does not yet appear what they shall be, but the day is coming when their mourning shall end, their characters be vindicated, and they shall shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Lord. Then shall the difference between the righteous and the wicked be clearly discerned. And then the righteous shall say: “Lo, this is our God, we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the Lord, we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation.” (Isaiah 25.9) The others, by contrast, will cry to the mountains and rocks to fall on them, and hide them from the face of him who sits on the throne, for the great day of his wrath shall have come. (Revelation 6.15-16)

3. We may admire the condescension of this great King, who humbles himself even to notice the worship of heaven, when he accepts the worship of sinful men, and permits such worms as we are to take his holy name upon our lips. If we know ourselves, we will be filled with shame and humility at the defects that attend our best services. What wandering thoughts and workings of self-satisfaction mingle with our prayers and praises, in secret, in public, and even at the Lord's table! I hope we know enough of this to seek forgiveness. And the Lord searches all our hearts. (Hebrews 4.13) How vile must our sins appear in his sight! Yet he has provided an atonement for sin, and access to the throne of grace, sprinkled with his blood, which, unlike Abel's, does not cry out for vengeance. Because he is our Advocate, Intercessor, and High Priest, to bear the iniquity of our holy things, we are accepted in the Beloved. And we worship him whom the holy angels worship, knowing that, unworthy though we are, our worship is just as acceptable as theirs.

4. From this we infer the need of that change of heart which the Scriptures call the new birth, or new life, a new creation. And only his divine power can give us this. Till we undergo this great change, we cannot even see, much less enter, the kingdom of God. (John 3.3) Some of you, brought here by custom or relations, find that the subjects on which we preach do not bring you pleasure – Christ crucified, Christ Jesus the Lord. But he sees how indisposed are your hearts towards him. You are soon weary and uneasy, and you throw the blame onto the preacher, his method, his manner, his expressions, the length of his sermons, in hope of finding something to justify your dislike. But if you were faithful to yourselves, you would find that it is none of these that offend you. You are of the world, and you love the world: its amusements, business, commerce, customs. But here you are not in your proper element; and yet there may be people in the same seat or pew who think themselves happy to hear what you hear with indifference or disgust. If you knew your state as a sinner, your need of the Saviour, and the excellent glory of him whom we preach unto you, you too would be pleased.

But what ideas do you form of the eternal state? Surely you realise that you will not be able to fill your time with the vanities that occupy you now. Let it suffice to remind you that death will remove them all from you. If they are so necessary to your happiness now, how miserable will you be without them! Do you not desire heaven? But such a heaven as the Word of God describes would not give you happiness without the great change. In a state where all unite in admiring and adoring him who died on the cross, you would be more displeased there than you are here. Heaven itself would be a hell to an unhumbled, unholy soul. Consider this seriously, while there is time to seek his face; and tremble at the thought of being cut off by death in your present state, insensitive to who he is, and what he has done for sinners. May he enlighten your understanding, and enable you to see the things that belong to your peace, before they are hidden forever from your eyes!

Sermon 29

Gifts Received for the Rebellious

**‘Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive:
Thou hast received gifts for men; yea, for the rebellious also,
that the Lord God might dwell among them.’ Psalm 68.18**

When Joseph exchanged a prison for the position of viceroy in Egypt, those who little deserved them felt the benefits. (Genesis 45.4-5) His brethren had hated him, conspired to kill him, and sold him as a slave. He owed his imprisonment to them, and afterwards they owed him their lives, God in a wonderful manner overruling their evil for good.

In the same way, Jesus was despised, rejected, and sold, and was actually slain. But he rose from the dead, and ascended into heaven. The man of sorrows took possession of the throne of glory, not for himself only, but for those who were once his enemies. For their sakes he lived and died; for their sakes he lives and reigns. And now he receives such gifts as all their needs require.

The apostle authorizes us to consider our text as typifying our Lord’s ascension. He who obeyed on earth ascended on high; the everlasting gates opened to him, and he entered into the holy place not made with hands, there to appear in the presence of God for us. (Hebrews 9.24) In this exalted state he administers all power in heaven and on earth, and from his Father’s throne in glory he sends all needed help to those who believe on him. They have nothing to plead for themselves, but he is not ashamed to call them brethren, and assures them that all he has received is for them. The clauses of our text suggest the following meditations: his ascension, his victories, the gifts he received for men, and the end for which he bestows them.

I. "Thou hast ascended on high." God originally made man for himself. Accordingly, man is immortal. But sin ruined and degraded him, and the gates of paradise are closed against him.

Man destroyed himself, but wisdom and mercy interposed for his recovery. A promise was given that the seed of the woman would bruise the head of Satan, defeat his policy, destroy his power, and repair the mischiefs he had introduced through sin.

MESSIAH fulfilled this promise. And when he had finished his work on earth, he ascended into heaven, and opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers. God is reconciled to sinners, there is forgiveness with him for sinners who beg for his mercy; one in our nature and on our behalf has taken possession of the kingdom.

The series of texts in Handel's oratorio recalls this subject frequently. It is the ground of all our hopes, sublimest joys, and the only sufficient answer to all our guilt, fear, unbelief, and Satan's suggestions. Surrounded by such enemies, we plead that our Head is in heaven, that we have an Advocate with the Father, a High Priest upon the throne, who, because he ever lives to intercede for us, is able to save us to the uttermost. This is all our plea, and we desire no other. Even now we ascend by faith to the heavenly places, and know that without ceasing myriads of happy voices sing his praise. The Babe of Bethlehem, the Man who hung upon the cross, is now the Lord of glory. With this thought we rejoice, and love him, and expect shortly to be with him.

II. "Thou hast led captivity captive." The expression is emphatic. He has conquered every power that held us in captivity. Captivity itself is taken captive. Its spirit and force is destroyed, and his people have no more to fear from it than a conqueror has to fear from a prisoner in chains.

Man by nature is a captive: he is captive to sin, for a sinful state is a state of captivity. Even though he boasts of liberty, he is the slave of corruption. All his attempts to free himself are frustrated,

and come to nothing. And none can escape unless the Son of God makes him free. His grace can overcome the most ingrained habits of licentiousness, and implant the opposite habits of purity and temperance. But those who are not delivered by him must die in their chains.

III. “Thou hast received gifts for men, even for the rebellious.” To bestow gifts upon the miserable is bounty; to bestow them on rebels is grace. The greatness of the gifts contrasts sharply with the character of the rebels. It also displays the exceeding riches of the Redeemer’s grace. He came to save both the unhappy and the ungodly. He gives pardon, peace, and eternal life to his enemies.

Their minds are alienated from him till he makes them willing in a day of his power. They live in contempt of his law, and despise his mercy. If they sometimes admit they are sinners, they presume they can gain his favour by their own doings. They strangely imagine they have a good hope, if to themselves they appear not as bad as others. And when by the gospel the Lord deals with them as sinners, telling them of his unspeakable love, the pride of their hearts rise up against his words. To them, his wisdom is folly, and his love is to be scorned. The language of their hearts is: “We will not have this man to reign over us.” (Luke 19.14) They revile and oppose the messengers of his grace, charge them with troubling the peace, and if not restrained by the providence of God, inflict on them reproaches, stripes, imprisonment, tortures and death.

When dearest friends and family members yield to the Saviour, they are treated as defectors from the common opinion; and envy, hatred and malice rise up against those who they once professed to esteem and love. And can the spirit of rebellion rise higher than when those who have insulted God’s authority proceed to trample upon the overtures of his grace?

Such is the disposition of man’s heart against God. Such were some of us; and such, I fear, are some of us to this hour. Certainly, in a land of liberty like ours, such rebellion does not rage with

such violence as I have described. Nevertheless, such enmity resides in the heart of every man, and if it is dormant for a season, there are times when it rises into vigorous opposition. For as of old, he who is born after the flesh persecutes him who is born after the Spirit. (Galatians 4.29) And those who will live godly in Christ Jesus still suffer persecution from those who will not. (2 Timothy 3.12)

Thus are men characterized in the Word of God – rebels and enemies, having a neck of iron (to denote their obstinacy), a brow of brass (to express their insolence), and a heart of stone (to depict their resistance to all persuasion). (Isaiah 48.4; Ezekiel 36.26) They are incapable of receiving the most tender, kind and generous impressions, even when wooed by the mercies of God.

MESSIAH died, rose, and ascended on high, so that he might receive gifts for rebels of this spirit. The one great gift, inclusive of all others, is the Holy Spirit. To his sorrowful disciples he said: “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.” (John 16.7) Soon after his ascension, this promise was fulfilled. The disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 2.4-37), and those who had slain the Lord were convicted and converted, and experienced joy and peace in believing.

That the gospel is not rejected by all, when it is preached by ministers called and furnished for their office, is wholly to be ascribed to the Holy Spirit. It is his office and covenant engagement to convince the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment, and to glorify MESSIAH. (John 16.8) It is he who opens the eyes of the blind, subdues the stubborn will, and gives a feeling, tender heart. Then the rebels relent and sue for mercy; then they obtain faith, repentance, remission of sin, a full and free salvation, and all the gifts that MESSIAH has received for them.

IV. His ultimate design in bestowing these gifts is “that the Lord God may dwell among them.” Man was created in the image of God, who formed him for himself. But when man sinned, God forsook him. He withdrew his light and love, and man sank into darkness and misery. Sin and Satan took possession of his heart. But when in the day of his power, by revealing his light and love, God destroys the dominion of sin, and dispossess Satan, he reclaims the heart for himself. Sprinkled with the blood of Jesus, it becomes a consecrated temple of the Holy Spirit. “Know ye not,” says the apostle, “that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost?” (1 Corinthians 6.19) Again, he speaks of Christ “dwelling in the heart” (Ephesians 3.17) and “Christ in you, the hope of glory.” (Colossians 1.27) And in another place: “Ye are the temple of the living God, as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them.” (2 Corinthians 6.16) He lives in them as the principle of their life, wisdom, and power: therefore the apostle says: “I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.” (Galatians 2.20)

There is a mutual indwelling between the Lord and his people. They live in him, as the branch lives in the vine; and he lives in them, as the sap in the branch. And so we infer that the life he gives them will spring up into everlasting life: “Because I live, ye shall live also.”

He also lives in them collectively. His whole church, comprising all the members of his mystical body, is built up as a holy temple to the Lord, who has promised to be a wall of fire round about them, and the glory in their midst. (Zechariah 2.5,10) It is his presence that gives life to his ordinances and power to his Word, by which the hearts and minds of his people are enlightened, strengthened, healed, and comforted. Here he manifests himself to them as he does not to the world, and they can say: “A day in thy courts is better than a thousand.” To his presence they owe their peace and increase, their union and protection. But if he withdraws, *Ichabod* (the glory is departed) may be written on all their assemblies. (1 Samuel 4.21) Even his own institutions can give them no profit or pleasure unless they are animated by his

glory. Their graces languish, their harmony becomes discord, strifes and splits take place, evil roots of bitterness spring up to trouble and defile them (Hebrews 12.15), and men arise among them speaking perverse things, and fierce wolves break in, not sparing the flock. (Acts 20.29-30)

I trust he dwells and walks in our midst. He is here as an observer and a gracious benefactor. He sees who draw near him with their lips, while their hearts are far from him. Likewise, he takes note of those who fear and love him, and who value his favour more than life. The high and lofty One who inhabits eternity dwells with them, in their contrite and humble spirit, to revive and bless them. (Isaiah 57.15)

Sermon 30

The Publication of the Gospel

‘The Lord gave the word, great was the company of those that published it [or, of the preachers].’ **Psalm 68.11**

Perhaps no psalm has exercised commentators so much as the sixty-eighth. The difficulties do not lie in the psalm, but arise from our ignorance. The prevailing opinion is that the psalm was used at the bringing of the ark to Zion. Verse one is the same as the form of blessing used when the ark first set out in the wilderness. (Numbers 10.35) Verses seven and eight are almost identical to part of the Song of Deborah. (Judges 5.4-5) The scope of the whole psalm seems to be a reviewing of the Lord’s gracious dealings with Israel from the time of their deliverance from Egyptian bondage, followed by a prophetic view of what he would do for his people under the gospel dispensation. The text may refer to some season of victory, such as is recorded in Exodus 15.

Whatever the occasion of its writing, it is introduced into Handel’s *Messiah*, and is given its place after the view of his triumphant ascension. It may refer to the Day of Pentecost, when the promised Holy Spirit was poured out on the preachers of the gospel, when the Lord gave the word. (Acts 2.1-4) From that hour, great was the company of the preachers, and great was the success of their mission. In only a few years, the light of the gospel spread from Jerusalem to the utmost parts of the earth. And he who said: “Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world” (Matthew 28.20), has continued the preaching of his Word, by the same Spirit, down to our own time, and has promised to extend the work by the same means till time shall be no more. My text, therefore, if not a direct prophecy of the publication of the gospel, is a fit motto for it.

We may consider it in two senses, both agreeable to the words of the text:

- I. That the message is the Lord's.
- II. That its messengers are called and sent forth by him.

I. The Lord gave the word that the multitude of preachers published. His merciful design was to deliver sinners from bondage, misery, and death, and to bless them with liberty, life, and peace. But because they are by nature rebellious and obstinate, they must be made willing. And in order to make them willing he uses his own appointed means, namely, the gospel, which is the power of God unto salvation. When his blessing accompanies its publication, it is successful. (Isaiah 55.10-11) The experience of ages has proved that no other power can produce this effect. Observation confirms this today. If human wisdom, learning, oratory, descriptions of the beauty of virtue and persuasions to practice it could reform, we would be a reformed people. But alas! We see that, despite all these means, wickedness prevails. Nothing will do this but the gospel, the word that the Lord has given. This alone shows evil in its true light, affords ground for a solid hope of mercy, and furnishes us with the motives that can break the force of temptation. When this word is cordially received, an immediate and wonderful change takes place. The sinner abandons his false hopes and vain pursuits, is freed from his love of the world and his fear of man, and becomes the willing servant of him who redeemed him with his own blood.

But what is the gospel? The apostle Paul tells us that he preached Christ crucified, the cross of Christ, and Christ as our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption. (Galatians 6.14; 1 Corinthians 1.30) This gospel treats all mankind as already in a state of condemnation; it declares their utter inability to save themselves; and it gives assurance of pardon and salvation to all who believe in the Son of God. To encourage and enable them to believe, it describes the dignity of his person, the greatness of his sufferings, the completeness of his atonement, the prevalence of his intercession; and his love, authority, power, and faithfulness.

These truths, applied to a guilty conscience by the Holy Spirit, produces faith. The sinner perceives the excellence of the Saviour, commits himself to him, and renounces every other hope and service. And not only is the conscience relieved; the understanding is enlightened, the judgment is formed, and the affections are regulated by it. Then, old things pass away, all things become new. The love of sin departs, and the new life is devoted to him who died and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and the living. (Romans 14.9)

There is likewise a certain energy that accompanies the gospel when it is truly preached; and this distinguishes it from all other schemes and systems. It discovers to us Christ's perfect knowledge of us, as it did in the cases of Zaccheus, Nathanael, and the woman of Samaria. (Luke 19.5; John 1.48; John 4.29) When we find the secrets of our hearts made manifest; when the preacher, who never saw us before, reminds us of what we have thought, felt, said, or done; then we know Christ is speaking to us in the gospel. It is usually in this way that we are convicted of sin, and directed in a way so suited to our case, that we think the preacher is addressing no one but ourselves. No preachers but those who speak like this in accordance with the Word have this power over the heart and conscience.

II. It is owing to the appointment and power of God in the Word that any one is enabled to preach this gospel. Many preach on other grounds; but they cannot declare his message so as to make full proof of their ministry. (2 Timothy 4.5) They may profit themselves, according to their low views, and receive such honours as the world can give; but they do not have the honour that comes from God only. They are not wise to win souls. (Proverbs 11.30) They have no witness in the consciences of their hearers. They may deliver truths that are valuable and useful in their place, but because they do not speak the truth as it is in Jesus (Ephesians 4.21), they cannot break the hard heart or heal the wounded spirit. The thoughtless are not alarmed, and the ignorant

are not instructed. The wicked go on in their evil ways, and the hungry sheep look up, but are not fed.

It will appear, to competent judges, that faithful preachers are called and prepared for their office by the Lord, and not by man, by the following considerations:

1. The gospel cannot be rightly understood except by divine teaching. The natural man, however educated or literate, cannot receive the things of the Spirit of God. (1 Corinthians 2.14) Indeed, he cannot even discern them. He may know something of the gospel system, as a science; he may know how to defend the outworks of Christianity, and master the external evidences for its truth; he may espouse orthodox opinions, and be a success in controversy. But he is as far off from the life and power of the gospel as a blind man is from the idea of light. Only experience can teach us these things.

The first lesson learned by those who are taught by God is a conviction of guilt, ignorance, and misery; then they begin to learn the importance, necessity, and design of the gospel. The man taught in this way, if called to the office of teaching others, will deliver to the people what he himself has learned; not with uncertainty, or hesitation, or indifference, not what he has acquired by hearsay or from books, but he has the witness in himself; his heart teaches his mouth. He believes; therefore he speaks. He simply and freely declares what he himself has known and seen and handled of the Word of life. And speaking from the fullness of his heart, with an earnestness inspired by the greatness and importance of his subject, he speaks to the heart of his hearers, and impresses the truth on their minds.

2. The very desire to preach this gospel is also given. If a man should attempt this service without counting the cost, or considering the consequences, he will eventually be disgusted and wearied. And if he seriously considers his work, and has a due sense of his own weakness, he will tremble at the prospect, and consider some other employment, unless his call is from on high.

The preaching of the gospel, in all ages, requires great courage, wisdom, meekness, and zeal; and is attended with much opposition, many snares and difficulties. The one who undertakes it will exclaim: 'Who is sufficient for these things?' But the Lord will constrain him by his love, by a sense of the worth of souls, and by causing him to depend on his all-sufficient strength, and will encourage those whom he calls and chooses, to serve him in the gospel. In themselves, they are utterly unequal to the tasks of their calling, but they obey his voice, trust in his promises of guidance and protection, and are not disappointed. Pray, therefore, that the Lord of the harvest would thrust forth labourers into his harvest. (Matthew 9.38)

3. Only he who sends forth his ministers can enable them to persevere. It is a service of continual exertion and expense, and requires a continual supply. The opposition of the world, and the power of temptation, acting on the weakness and depravity of the heart, would soon prevail against the ministers of the gospel if they were left to carry on the warfare at their own charges. But as they have a double honour of sharing the burden and heat of the day, they look only to the Lord as their resource, hope in his faithfulness and compassion, and continue to fight under the banner of him who has said: "Lo! I am with you always, even to the end of the world.

4. Only the Lord can give success to their labours. Paul may plant, Apollos may water, but there is no increase without the blessing of the Lord. (1 Corinthians 3.6) However, to preach salvation to others, and even to be the means of saving souls, does not prove that the preacher himself is saved. We hope it is generally so; but Judas is a warning to keep us watchful. And at the last day, some who will plead they have done great things for Christ will be disowned as workers of iniquity. (Matthew 7.22-23) Even the apostle Paul kept his body in subjection lest, after preaching the gospel to others, he himself would be a castaway. (1 Corinthians 9.27)

Sermon 31

The Gospel Message, Glad Tidings

‘How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!’ Romans 10.15

The account of Paul’s first reception by the Galatians (Galatians 4.15) exemplifies the truth of this passage. He found them ignorant, strangers to God, and enslaved by idolatry. Accompanied by the power of the Holy Spirit, his preaching had a marvellous effect. He preached to them Jesus who had been crucified in such a way that he was placarded before their eyes. (Galatians 3.1) They heard him, not with indifference, like the Athenians (in Acts 17) but applied his teaching to themselves. They received him as an angel of God, and attended to his needs as if the Lord himself were among them. And although till then he had been an entire stranger to them, his message opened a way into their hearts, and they gave him every proof of the most cordial friendship. So it was too when Philip preached in Samaria. (Acts 8.8)

But when the gospel is thus preached and received, there must be a suitable state of mind. It is sent to the poor, the broken-hearted, the captives, the blind. (Luke 4.18) And therefore those who pride themselves, who say, ‘We see’, cannot possibly judge either the truth or the importance of the gospel. The seed produces fruit only in good hearts. (Luke 8.13-15) Not that any heart is good by nature, but the Lord prepares some to receive it and bring forth fruit unto eternal life. It undeceives those who were deluded by vain hopes, and convinces them that they are poor, blind, wretched, and helpless. Then they gladly accept the gospel of peace, and its message is like life from the dead.

The passage in Isaiah from which my text is taken is very lively and descriptive. Imagine a people afraid of what their offended

conqueror might do to them, how he might treat them. Then one of his messengers comes along and tells them that instead of punishing them, he has decided to pardon them, receive them into his favour, and bestow many blessings on them. This is the manner of the great God. His act of grace towards rebel sinners is in righteousness, and displays his justice as much as his mercy; for it is founded in the mediation of the Son of his love, and procured by his blood. The messengers of this grace are welcomed by those who receive it, and are esteemed very highly in love for their works' sake. (1 Thessalonians 5.13)

We may observe:

- I. The message of the gospel: "glad tidings of peace and good things."
- II. The messengers find ample reward in their acceptance.

I. According to the Hebrew idiom, all good things are included in the term "peace." The peace of the gospel is a peace which passes all understanding. It brings a blessed assurance that MESSIAH has made peace with God for us by the blood of his cross. Those who believe it are entitled to say: "Though thou wast angry with me, thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortest me." (Isaiah 12.1) It dispels their fears, and emboldens them to come to God as children to a father, not as criminals before their judge. At peace with him, they seek peace with others, forgiving injuries and being kind, as they have opportunity.

Can the world afford us such peace as this? Can it offer us any good compared with the honour that comes from God only? Can it preserve us from trouble, or support us under it, or deliver us out of it? Can its charms soothe the troubled conscience? Can it overcome the fear of death? Can it inspire us with confidence as we approach the day when we must appear before the tribunal of our Judge? We all acknowledge that it cannot. But the gospel offers us a cordial for every care, a balm for every wound; and none who experience its power are disappointed. But men, left to themselves, will not come to the great Physician who is revealed

therein. The god of this world so works on their prejudices, pride, and passions, that though its light shines all around them, they prefer to dwell in darkness, and are unwilling to see. This is why, of the many who hear the gospel, only a few receive it, while most reject the counsel of God against themselves; so that its ministers in every age have had to complain: "Who hath believed our report?" (Isaiah 53.1) Indeed, its rejection would be universal if the Lord who has sent out his preachers had not promised that they would not labour in vain. He prepares a people to serve him, and to show forth his praise. And while some mock, and others refuse to hear, and others are content to hear again and again with indifference, there are others whose hearts are opened to receive the truth in the love of it. They hear and believe to everlasting life.

II. The messengers receive their reward. In being blessed to the salvation of a few, they are compensated for all the opposition they meet with from the many. There are two reasons for this:

1. Mainly, for the love they bear to their Lord and to souls for his sake. To see his name made precious to the hearts of sinners, to see those who were blind admiring his excellence, to see those who were afar off brought near, to see the wretched enjoying his goodness, to hear those whose lips were full of folly, falsehood, and blasphemy, proclaiming his praise, such salutary effects of their ministry fills them with joy; for they can say to their receptive hearers: "Now we live, if you stand fast in the Lord." (1 Thessalonians 3.8)

2. A second satisfaction is their share in the affections of those who are benefited by their ministry. This is the only popularity we should desire. It would be easy to hold a crowd by the ears, but to be loved by those to whom the Lord has made us useful is a high honour and a sublime pleasure. Peter and John were doubtless more affected by the gratitude of the healed man than by all the wonder of the crowds around them. (Acts 3.11) If a true servant of the Lord would attach a large congregation to himself, yet discover no attachment to the Saviour he preaches, their partiality would give him little pleasure. He would be more ready to weep over

them than rejoice. For he seeks not their applause, but their edification; and he aims not to promote his glory, but the glory of him who sent him. (John 7.18) He does not want them merely to make up a number around himself; those who promote their own interest and reputation receive their reward; but it is only the reward of a mercenary mind; and from him whose name they prostitute, they can only expect the reward he assigns to hypocrites and unbelievers.

But true Christians will set a high value on the ministers who in simplicity and godly sincerity preach the gospel of peace so as to evidence that they are influenced by a regard to the glory of God and the good of souls. And these souls prove their affection in more ways than by speaking well of them.

1. They accept a faithful ministry as a balance to the trials of life. There are many poor and afflicted people who have little comfort in this life or in their own homes; but in the house of God they are satisfied and comforted. Though the Lord gives them the bread of adversity and the water of affliction (Isaiah 30.20), they are happy to attend the ministry of one who cares for their souls, and who meets them, when weary, with a word in season, to enable them to bear their cross cheerfully. Though they know much bitterness at home, they have a peace in the house of the Lord which strangers cannot meddle with. And when they lose the servant who has been the means of so much good to them, they show their sorrow more than for the loss of many other things.

2. They take kindly his public searching sermons and his private reproofs. For they know that he watches for their souls, as one who must give an account. (Hebrews 13.17) And because they love him, they do all in their power to make his service a pleasure, and not a grief. They do not wish him to speak smooth things to them, but to hear what suits their own case and circumstances. And if the preacher discovers to them some wrong practice or some omitted duty, instead of being offended by his plain dealing, they love him the better for it.

3. They sympathise with him in all his exercises, and try to make his situation comfortable and to avoid everything that might cause him grief. They have some knowledge of what he endures for their sakes – travailing in birth for their souls, being pained by the opposition of the wicked and the inconstancy and inconsistency of many of his hearers, feeling concern for those who are seeking the way into the kingdom of God – and of the sense he has of his own weakness, ministering with fear and trembling.

Sometimes their regard for him runs to excess, so that they hold him as their favourite preacher, and will not hear another. Added to this is their tendency to yield implicitly to his will, forgetting that they are to obey him only insofar as he brings commands from the authority of the Scripture.

But a true minister will reckon it his honour if his people love and study the Bible, and like the Bereans (Acts 17.11), search the Scriptures to see if things are as he represents them. He strives not to dominate their faith, but help on their joy. (2 Corinthians 1.24) Nor does he try to command their purses.

How much, then, are they to be pitied who reckon the word of grace a burden, when to others it is the balm of life. “Take heed how you hear.” If the gospel is not made to you a savour of life, it will be a savour of death. It will aggravate your guilt, secure your condemnation, and leave you hopeless and inexcusable. If you continue impenitent and obstinate, the hour is coming when you will wish you had never heard the name of Jesus. It had been better for you never to have been born, than to have lived where the doctrine of salvation was published in your hearing, if you finally reject the counsel of God against yourselves!

Sermon 32

The Progress of the Gospel

‘Their sound went into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world.’
Romans 10.18

“The heavens declare the glory of God.” (Psalm 19.1) Sun, sky, stars, light, the regular succession of day and night and of the seasons are such proofs of infinite wisdom, power and goodness that the Scripture attributes to them a voice, intelligible to all mankind, and accommodated to every capacity. There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard. That voice proclaims: “The hand that made us is divine.” However, if it fails to elicit from us praise and admiration, it will leave us without excuse. (Romans 1.20)

The divine perfections are even more wonderfully displayed by the glorious Gospel. Truths shine like stars in the system of revelation. But principally Jesus, the Sun of truth and righteousness, the source of spiritual light and life, is the centre of all. But the promises respecting MESSIAH’s kingdom are fulfilled progressively. The truth of this prophecy will be proved by its completion, which cannot fail, for the Lord has spoken it. Besides, what he has already done is a sufficient pledge for the whole. MESSIAH is to rule in the midst of his enemies till the appointed time when they shall all be subdued beneath his feet. It is his pleasure to dispense the gospel so that, on the one hand it displays his sovereignty, wisdom, and power, and on the other hand full proof of the depravity and alienation of man’s heart is seen.

This point is not always clearly understood. For instance, when the Sun of righteousness rose upon the world it seemed probable that his influence would soon be completely felt. In a short space of time, many throughout the Roman empire and beyond came to know and adore him. But since that time, the boundaries of his

kingdom have not been much enlarged. If we were to investigate the state of the world today, perhaps we would find five out of every six of the human race have never even heard the name of Jesus. There is also reason to fear that of the many who profess to call him Lord are nevertheless strangers to his power and grace. This chapter of divine providence is a mystery. But we cannot deny it. Free thinkers might explain the fact away by saying that the gospel we claim to be so powerful has conquered so very few, and therefore it cannot be true. We retort: mankind is obstinate and ungrateful for the mercy sent to them. "Light is come into the world, but men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil." (John 3.19) This glorious gospel of the blessed God is still shunned and dreaded, and every human effort has been made to suppress it, as if it were a plague. And while the Lord has no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that he may turn from his way and live (Ezekiel 33.110, yet the reception afforded to his sent servants is well known. Powers of both church and state have tried to suppress it with the most cruel arts.

Great Britain in particular has little right to ask why the gospel has not been spread further amongst the heathen. Our arms and commerce have encircled the globe, but how little has been done to evangelize the heathen. What impression has the name of Christ had on the inhabitants of India? But I forbear; facts are too glaring to need a comment. True, we have a society for propagating the gospel in foreign parts, but so far we hear little of its good effect. Neither must we forget the labours of the Moravian Brethren. But I fear no European nation has had the propagation of Christianity less at heart than the English.

That the gospel is so little known in the world is to be ascribed, not so much to the will of God as to the wickedness of men. Undoubtedly, he to whom all things are possible could make way for its universal reception. And in his own time he will. My text is being and shall be fulfilled. Both Old and New Testament prophecies encourage us to hope for a time when the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see his salvation. The

preservation of the Jews is a standing miracle and sure pledge that all Scripture shall be fulfilled. And though sifted like corn all over the earth, and apparently forsaken by God, they are still preserved by a wonderful providence. Many ages have passed since they were left without a temple, sacrifice or priest. But at length the fullness of the Gentiles shall come in, and all Israel shall be saved. (Romans 11.25-26) The plan of human history is dark, and we see only a little of it; but the close of the age is approaching, when the manifold wisdom of God shall be admired and adored, and all the saints will acknowledge: "He has done all things well."

But the point I wish to press upon my hearers is that this word of salvation is sent to you. (Acts 13.26) How the great Judge will deal with the heathen who never heard it is not revealed to us. But he has assured us that it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon, even for Sodom and Gomorrah, than for those who reject the gospel they have heard. To them much is given, and of them much shall be required. If we ministers speak in the name of the Lord, and preach the gospel simply and purely, we demand your attention. If you are displeased with what you hear, yet return to hear more, your very consciences witness that we speak the truth.

Sermon 33

Opposition to Messiah Unreasonable

‘Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and against his Anointed; saying, Let us break his bonds asunder, and cast away his cords from us.’
Psalm 2.1-3

It is generally admitted that the Christian Faith exhibits a beautiful and salutary system of morals, and that sincere compliance with our Lord’s and his apostles’ precepts would have a good effect on society. Its Author went about doing good while he was here among us, and his gospel has the same tendency – to make men good and do good. When it was first received, many turned from idols to serve the living and true God. It taught and enabled men to renounce ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly. (Titus 2.12)

Much of the world now bears the name Christian, but it retains the same spirit as before. Many who are called Christian are no less under the power of evil habits than those who have never heard the gospel. But where the gospel of the grace of God reaches the heart, a real and observable change is wrought. The profane person becomes afraid of an oath, the drunkard becomes sober, and the miser kind. Wherever the gospel is received, instances are found of those who were once terrors to their family, but who are now exemplary members of society. And we challenge history to show that any abiding reformation was ever effected by any other doctrine.

What then shall we say of the zeal that kindled fires of persecution against believers? Its grounds are rooted in the fallen nature of man, and are not peculiar to any age or nation. The gospel always

provokes the same hostile reaction. In Britain, our constitution is favourable to liberty of conscience and the right of private judgment, so that our religious profession does not expose us to the penalties of fire and sword, imprisonment or banishment. Such trials were the lot of the Puritans, who were treated as heretics of the worst sort. But now we are bound to be thankful for the blessings of religious and civil liberty we enjoy.

But the world around us is no more inclined to accept the grace and rule of MESSIAH's kingdom than it was in the days of heathen and popish darkness. The gospel offends men's pride, by placing them all on the same level as sinners in the sight of God, and by proposing only one way of salvation, without making any difference of plea or character. It also offends by its strictness. Like Herod, some who hear it might consent to do many things (Mark 6.20), if they were left free to please themselves in other things, in which, though expressly contrary to the will of God, they will not be controlled. When Paul preached at Ephesus, Demetrius and his companions saw their craft was in danger. This was the real cause of their opposition to him, but they professed to have a great concern for the honour of Diana, their idol goddess. (Acts 19.28) Few in Ephesus would perhaps put themselves to much trouble to save the craftsmen's profits, but a regard to traditional worship made them clamour in their thousands, shouting: "Great is Diana of the Ephesians."

So today, the same secret motives are disguised by the same plausible pretexts. The deceitfulness of the human heart still opposes a free salvation by Jesus Christ allegedly in the interests of traditional morality. The doctrine of salvation through faith only is charged with opening the floodgates for licentiousness. If this doctrine is true, they say, then people may live as they please. How strange that those who make such an objection are joined by those who are licentious, so that the virtuous and the vile, the respectable and the notorious, unite in opposing the gospel. Herod and Pilate, Jewish elders and Roman soldiers, Pharisees and Sadducees, all

unite against MESSIAH and the introduction of his kingdom to the world.

I may seem to have digressed from our subject, but I will now bring it home to ourselves. There are persons present who are misled by prejudice, though they never suspect themselves, and under a cloak of zeal for a form of godliness oppose its truth and power. Had they been present at MESSIAH's death, they would certainly have concurred with those who crucified the Lord of glory.

In this Second Psalm, David by the Holy Spirit speaks of future events as if they were present. He saw the resistance that would be made to the entrance of MESSIAH's kingdom into the world, and the force and policy they would employ to withstand and suppress it. The question 'Why' implies that their opposition would be futile.

In the first place, it was entirely unreasonable. MESSIAH was indeed a king, and his kingdom would last for ever. But his kingdom is not of this world, and does not threaten human governments. Indeed, his subjects are bound to obey him before they obey men. Yet it is their duty to obey their lawful rulers whom he has placed in authority over them. The kingdom of MESSIAH has little to do with politics. His subjects are taught to render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's (Matthew 22.21) and to yield peaceful subjection to the powers that be. They are strangers and pilgrims on the earth. (1 Peter 2.11) Their citizenship and treasures are in heaven, and they have no more concern with the intrigues and parties of politicians than a traveller has with the disturbances that may happen in the country he is passing through. They are to obey God, and kings and governors in subordination to God, rendering to all their due. (Romans 13.1-7) But where they cannot comply with the laws of the government without breaking the laws of God, they are to suffer patiently, committing their cause to him whom they serve. They are to set a high value on the blessings of civil and religious liberty, but when a nation's sins

have made it ripe for judgment, “let the dead bury their dead.” (Matthew 7.22) God will never lack means to relieve the oppressed or abase the proud. For such purposes he over-rules the counsels of men, and takes the wise in their own craftiness. His subjects only have to commit their cause to him, wait on him, and admire his government. Their best interests are always safe. Even their troubles are appointed for their good. But if they conform to this world, and take an active part in its disputes, they dishonour their Christian character and obstruct their own peace.

There may be exceptions. God may sometimes place one of his servants in an important political post, as he did Joseph and Daniel, but such instances are few. But if any venture beyond the limits of their proper calling without a special call from him, they will suffer grief and loss. It was so in the early days of Christianity, and should be so now.

Secondly, opposition to MESSIAH and his kingdom is no less ineffectual than it is unreasonable. Indeed, it is ruinous to those who engage in it. What did the Jews build when they rejected the foundation stone that was laid in Zion? They thought they were acting prudently. (John 11.48) Foolish politicians! Did they preserve their city by crucifying the Son of God? No! The very evil they tried to avert came upon them. Within a few years the Romans destroyed their temple and drove them from the land. This was an emblem of the inevitable, total, irreparable ruin that awaits all who persist in opposing the rule of MESSIAH. That nation, that individual, that will not serve him, must surely perish.

Ah! If sinners only knew what the bonds and cords are that they are so determined to break. His service is perfect freedom. His yoke is easy, and his burden is light. They think that if they embrace the gospel they must bid farewell to pleasure. But what will become of their pleasure in the day of his wrath? They will be filled with horror and dismay. How blessed are those favoured few who are the willing people of this Saviour. Soon you will appear with him in glory!

Sermon 34

Opposition to Messiah in Vain

‘He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision.’
Psalm 2.4

The extent of the depravity of mankind cannot be estimated by the conduct of the heathen devoid of the gospel revelation. But the opposition of those who rebel against the proposals of his grace is striking. Sin has so hardened their hearts and blinded their minds that they neither can nor will beg for mercy. Further, they reject and blaspheme the Saviour whom God commends to them, scorn his message and persecute his messengers. This mad and ungrateful response shows a deep-rooted hatred towards God in fallen men. What must the holy angels think of such baseness and obstinacy!

But rebellion against God is not only wickedness, but also folly. “Whoever hardened himself against God and prospered?” (Job 9.4) He against whom they thought they had prevailed when they had crucified him soon entered his glory and throne. The text therefore mainly refers to the uselessness of all opposition to MESSIAH’s gospel and kingdom.

The words offer two points for consideration:

1. That he sits in the heavens.
2. That he treats their opposition with contempt.

I. MESSIAH sits in the heavens. [The text refers rather to the Father. Ed.] He has finished his great work, and has entered into his rest. Having by himself purged our sins, he now sits at the right hand of the majesty on high. (Hebrews 1.3) He is the Head of all principality and power, “God blessed for ever.” (Romans 9.5) Consequently, all who associate against him shall be dashed in pieces, like waves that break upon a rocky shore.

II. Their feebleness is indicated by the way in which he looks on their proceedings. He laughs them to scorn. He has them in derision. He has them perfectly under his control; holds them on a chain, even when they think they are most at liberty; appoints the bounds beyond which they cannot pass; and can check them as with a hook or bridle, even at the height of their career.

It is the Lord's pleasure to permit his enemies to try to prevent his designs; and for a while their attempts seem to prosper. But they always end in shame and confusion. He not only ruins their schemes, he also uses them to promote his own. Thus Pharaoh became the very means of Israel's deliverance from Egypt at a time when he thought he would slay them all. (Exodus 12.41-42) In the same way the world sought to slay MESSIAH's sheep, after he had left them to go to heaven. But the methods they employed were used to spread the gospel everywhere, and to increase the number of disciples; so that the Jewish leaders found themselves unable to resist its progress, "doubting whereunto these things would grow." (Acts 5.24) In some cases the Lord interposed personally: the haughty Herod was smitten by a loathsome disease. (Acts 12.23) Saul of Tarsus was converted. (Acts 9) Some of the Roman emperors boasted that they had stifled the work of God, but at length, in the reign of Constantine, the Christian religion was protected by law.

However, it soon appeared that the religion of the New Testament owed little to this change. Though the worship of heathen idols gradually declined, the bulk of the people remained the same. The world still lay in wickedness (1 John 5.19), and true Christianity was persecuted. The persecutions of Popery exceeded those of Paganism; and those who were Christians indeed were forced to wander and hide themselves. Yet under all these disadvantages the remnant according to the election of grace refused to wear the mark of the beast; and while the church militant weakened, the church triumphant rejoiced.

To appearance the Church of Christ was often brought low. It was very low at the time of the Reformation. But it was suddenly revived, and broke forth like the sun from behind a cloud. But Protestants were soon activated by the same spirit as Papists and Pagans before them. They protected the form, but denied the power. And to this day the truth is verified by experience that “all who will live godly in Christ Jesus will (in one way or another) suffer persecution.” (2 Timothy 3.12)

The religion of the gospel is perhaps never more despised than at present. We seem to be returning to the first ages, when there were only two sorts of people, Christians and Infidels. Yet still we have the Bible, and the gospel is preached and is spreading. The Lord will always have a people to serve him. And he who sits in the heavens laughs his opponents to scorn, and maintains his own cause in defiance of them all.

Surely, if this work were not of God, the united efforts of kings, councils, popes, philosophers, the great, the wise, the decent, and the profligate, must have overthrown it long ago. If a miracle is demanded in proof of Christianity, behold one! Though the world has been plotting and raging against it for centuries, it still flourishes; for whenever and wherever he pleases, the Lord can raise up instruments to carry on his work and show forth his praise. (Matthew 3.9)

Therefore, let us not tremble for the ark of God. Indeed, what we see should affect our hearts. It is right that we should be jealous for the Lord, for the contempt that is cast on his government and grace. But we need not fear for the outcome. His truth and honour are pledged for the success of the gospel, and they must stand or fall together. It is a cause dearer to him than it can be to us. To manifest his glory in the salvation of sinners by the doctrine of the cross is his great concern, and it shall continue. He will work, and none shall hinder it. The kingdoms of the earth shall become the kingdoms of the Lord and of his Christ. The fullness of the Gentiles shall come in, and the dispersed of Israel shall return to

the Lord their God. The Lord of hosts has purposed, and who shall disannul it? His hand is stretched out, and who shall turn it back? (Isaiah 14.27)

Do not think it strange if you are called to suffer for the sake of the truth. This is how it has been from the beginning. Do not think it hard, for our sufferings are small compared with the lot of those who suffered before us. We are not yet called to resist unto blood. Many have desired to see such days of liberty as we are favoured with, but have not seen them.

Lastly, consider seriously: “Who is on the Lord’s side?” His is the strongest side, and must prevail. If you have yielded yourself to him, and taken upon you his yoke, your best interests are safe, your final happiness is secured. Nothing can separate you from his love. You shall be kept by his power through faith, and no weapon that is formed against you shall prosper.

But if you are against him, tremble, for the day of his wrath will come; it will burn like an oven, and all the proud, and all that do wickedly shall be as stubble, and the day that comes shall burn them up, and shall leave them neither root nor branch. (Malachi 4.1) Therefore turn in time from your evil ways, submit yourselves to him, beg for his mercy while he waits to be gracious, so that iniquity may not be your ruin.

Sermon 35

Opposition to Messiah Ruinous

‘Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel.’ **Psalm 2.9**

The subjects of divine revelation have been set down in the most sublime styles of writing. One such example may be found in Isaiah 34.4, where the dissolution of the heavens is compared to the rolling up of a scroll and the falling of leaves. Revelation 6.13-14 describes the same thought almost in the same words. Such forms of expression are appropriate to the great God, before whom the difference between great and small is annihilated. To him, all the earth’s inhabitants are like a drop of water in a bucket or the dust on a weighing scale. (Isaiah 40.15) The imagery in our text is of the same kind. “He shall dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel.”

The series of passages we have recently considered is very regular and beautiful. MESSIAH’s death, resurrection, and ascension are followed by the publication of the gospel, its extensive progress, the unreasonable and impotence of opposition to it; and now, the final confusion and ruin of those who oppose it. This topic prepares us for the close of the second part of Handel’s oratorio, following the song of triumph known as the Hallelujah Chorus.

The two expressions, of breaking with a rod of iron and of dashing in pieces, suggest the same idea. In Revelation 19.15 we are told that MESSIAH *rules* his enemies with a rod of iron; here, that he will dash them in pieces with a rod of iron. Let us therefore consider:

I. How the Lord MESSIAH rules impenitent and obstinate sinners in this life. They refuse to submit to his golden sceptre; therefore he rules them with a rod of iron. In the thing in which they speak proudly, he is above them. (Exodus 18.11)

1. One branch of his iron rule is the inseparable link he has formed between sin and misery. “The fruit of righteousness is peace.” (James 3.18) On the contrary, “the way of transgressors is hard.” (Proverbs 13.15)

Could you see what passes within the heart of a man who disdains to be ruled by God’s Word, you would find violent, inconsistent clashes of lust preying on him, none of which can be fully gratified. Some are opposed to each other. Boiling anger, gnawing envy, thirsty covetousness, anxious pride and ambition, must make him miserable. “There is no peace to the wicked.” There can be none. Further, his evil temper and irregular desires produce outward proof that the service of sin is a drudgery.

Again, look into his house. Where the Lord does not dwell, peace will not. How often we hear of family discords between man and wife, unkind parents and disobedient children, tyrannical masters and treacherous servants! This is how they live, hateful, and hating one another. (Titus 3.3)

If he has worldly prosperity, his hard taskmaster, Satan, so works on his evil disposition that he can derive no comfort from it. Every day puts some new bitterness in his cup.

And in trouble he has no resource, no access to God, no promise of support, no relief from fear. He sinks down in sullen, comfortless despondency, or in a spirit of wild rebellion, blaspheming God because of his plagues. (Revelation 16.21)

In society he is dreaded and avoided by sober and serious men, and associates with only such as are like himself.

True, he can pretend to be happy, yet he is never far from quarrels, broils, and mischief. Nothing more is needed to make him miserable than to leave him to himself.

Such is a life in sin. The Lord rules him with a rod of iron.

2. He rules them with a rod of iron by his power over conscience. They may boast and laugh, but we know the gall and bitterness of their state, for we were in it until the Lord delivered us. Let them say what they will, they have seasons, like him whom they serve, when they believe and tremble. (James 2.19) They cannot always be in company; and when they are alone, they are a burden and a terror to themselves. They feel the iron rod. How awful are their dreams! What terrors seize them in sickness, or when they are forced to think of death! What a death warrant they receive under the preaching of the Word, which fills God's people with joy and peace! They will not hear it because they dare not! I am persuaded that more than a few 'brave spirits' of today would change their condition with that of a dog, and part with their reason, if only they could rid themselves of the horrors that haunt their consciences!

Is there such a person here? Let me entreat you to stop and consider, before it is too late. There is yet forgiveness with God. Your case, though dangerous, is not desperate, if you do not make it so. I would direct your thoughts to Jesus. Look to him, and beg for his mercy. His blood can cleanse from all sin. He is able to save to the uttermost.

It is possible that some may object to my portrait. They may be ready to say: "I find nothing of this. I take pleasure in my way of life. I have a healthy body, money at my command, and I sleep soundly. I feel none of the qualms of conscience you describe, and good folk care as little for me as I care for them; yet I am very well, and happy with the friends I like best. As to a future life, I never think of it, but I am determined to live now."

In reply, I observe:

3. Such amazing blindness and hardness of heart is the most terrible effect of that rod of iron with which the Lord rules you. Pharoah could say as positively as you: "Who is the Lord, that I should obey him?" (Exodus 5.2) But after being often rebuked, and persisting in his obstinacy, he was destroyed. If you are now obstinate like him, you too must have often resisted the truth and

stifled many a conviction. You have fought against the Holy Spirit; and woe to you if he goes away for ever, and strives with you no more! To be given up by God to such a reprobate mind is the heaviest judgment a sinner can have on this side of hell.

I hope there are none such present, but I warn those who sin with a high hand, if you are not yet past feeling, lest you fall into such a state. "Take heed lest you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin." (Hebrews 3.13) If, under the light of the gospel, you can go on in wilful, wanton, deliberate wickedness, you are on the very edge of the unpardonable sin of final impenitence. If the Bible is, as you wish it may prove, a cunningly devised fable, you may trample on it with impunity. But if it is true, remember that today you have been warned of the consequence of despising it. If you will perish, I am clear of your blood.

II. I proceed to consider the final issue of the unequal contest between the worms of the earth and their Maker. "He will dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel." Such a vessel may be finely made, and beautiful to the eye; but it is fragile, and easily broken. And once broken, it is irreparable.

It is therefore a fit emblem of mortal man, even in his best state. We are fearfully and wonderfully made. (Psalm 39.14) But we are as brittle as a potter's vessel. By a small change in the brain or the nervous system, we may soon become feeble and uncontrolled. Disease may render our bodies loathsome. The robust may become as weak as infants. Some china vessels may last for ages if they are well preserved; but the seeds of decay and death are sown in our very frame. We are easily crushed, and will moulder away untouched under the weight of time. How certainly, then, shall those whom the Lord strikes with his iron rod be shattered with the blow!

Communities and collective bodies of people are no less frail than individuals. The firstborn of Egypt and the armies of Sennacherib perished in a night. The Jewish nation was dashed to pieces by the

Roman iron rod in MESSIAH's hand. Their fragments are scattered far and wide to this day, and who can gather them together? The Roman Empire was likewise dashed to pieces in turn. Such has been the end of many powers who have presumed to oppose his designs. For a while they are permitted to rage, and plot, and strive; but at last they stumbled and fell, and their memory has perished.

But let us bring this matter nearer home. I am informed that the music to which this passage is set is so well adapted to it that it is likely to startle those who hear it. Those who live in sin, regardless of the gospel, would be startled indeed, if they were aware how directly the words apply to them. If we could see all that passes on deathbeds, we would often see all the vain hopes and false peace of sinners dashed in pieces when eternity opens to their view.

We shall certainly see the great day when we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ. "Behold, he cometh in the clouds, and every eye shall see him, and they also who pierced him!" Where then shall the ungodly and sinner appear? What then will become of those who despise and abuse the gospel of the grace of God? The libertine, the infidel, the apostate, the hypocrite, the scoffer, the false professor, how will they stand, or where shall they fly, when the Judge of all the earth sits upon his awesome throne, and the books shall be opened, and every secret thing shall be revealed?

Alas! They who are full, and who laugh now, shall pine and mourn. (Luke 6.25) Then their cavils will be silenced, their guilt will be charged home on them, and no plea, no advocate, will be there to defend them. Can their hearts endure, or their hands be strong, when he shall speak to them in his wrath, and say: "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels."

But let those who love his name rejoice. You have fled for refuge to the hope set before you. To you, his appearing will be

delightful, and his voice welcome. You shall not be ashamed. This awesome God is yours. He will then own and accept you before assembled worlds, and will say: "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you." Then "the days of your mourning shall be ended, and your sun shall go down no more." (Matthew 25.34; Isaiah 60.20)

Sermon 36

The Lord Reigneth

‘Hallelujah; for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth!’

Revelation 19.6

The book of revelation will not perhaps be understood until the events it describes are accomplished. But while learned commentators are divided about its meaning, some parts of it are well adapted to instruct and refresh plain Christians. Thus a plain uneducated believer may not understand the numbers of elders and living creatures in chapters four and five; yet from the description of the Lamb upon the throne, the songs of the redeemed, and the chorus of angels, he receives such an impression of glory that he too wishes to take up the same song of praise to him who has washed him from his sins in his own blood. He is content to leave the discussion of hard questions to learned men, while he feeds by faith upon the simple truths that his spiritual taste can relish.

The subject of chapter eighteen is the destruction of mystical Babylon, the head of opposition against the kingdom of Christ. Babylon sinks like a millstone into the mighty ocean, and is found no more. So must all his enemies perish.

The destruction of Babylon furnishes the saints and servants of God with a theme for a song of triumph to his praise. This is sacred music indeed. It is commanded, inspired, and conducted by the Lord himself. The performers are all concerned in the subject; and though they may be comparatively few on earth, when brought together they shall form a very large choir. Their united voices are here compared to the voice of many waters. The text is the chorus of their song. “Hallelujah, for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.”

The impression this portion of Handel’s oratorio makes upon the audience is well known. But however great the power of music

may be, it cannot soften and change the hard heart, nor bend the obdurate will of man. If all who hear the *Messiah*, and this chorus in particular, were to realize the importance of the truth it contains, the nation would wear a new face. But do music lovers live as if they really believed that the Lord God omnipotent reigneth? Rather, do they not live as if the contrary were true, as if there were no God, or that his providence is not concerned with human affairs? I appeal to conscience. I appeal to fact.

Taken strictly, this passage refers to a future time, for Babylon is not yet fallen. The servants of God are still in conflict. Those who shall live when the kingdoms of this world shall have become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ, are yet unborn.

But even now we may rejoice that the Lord God omnipotent reigneth, and that Jesus is King of kings and Lord of lords. I must consider my text as referring to him. The Christian doctrine is that the Lord God omnipotent exercises his dominion in the person of Christ. "The Father loveth the Son, and hath committed all things into his hands." (John 3.35) After his resurrection he assured his disciples: "All power is committed unto me in heaven and earth." (Matthew 28.18) He has already taken to himself great power, and reigns. His dominion is the reward of his obedience unto death.

Happy are they who on solid ground can exult in this fact, and can make his government the subject of their praises! Happy are they who admire the kingdom of his providence, and are willing subjects of his kingdom of grace! Let us briefly survey his reigning glory in these two kingdoms.

I. Great and marvellous is the Lord God omnipotent in his kingdom of providence. His mighty arm sustains the universe. He keeps the stars in their courses. He cares for every grain of sand on earth. All earth's inhabitants exist and are supported by him. He gives the animals their instincts. He teaches the birds to build their nests, the spider to weave his web, and the bees to order their communities with such skill. He does what he pleases in the

armies of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth. He directs and over-rules the counsels and purposes of men, so that, though they act freely, they accomplish his purposes.

Still more wonderful is his control over Satan and the powers of darkness. Whatever he may permit them to do, they cannot detain one soul in bondage longer than the time when he has ordered its release. Thus they who dwell under his shadow are safe; he keeps them as the apple of his eye. And though they suffer many trials for their good, his eye is always upon them, and his ear is always open to their prayer. They are supported, supplied, relieved, delivered, and at last made more than conquerors.

II. He has a kingdom distinct from the kingdoms of this world, which in due time will assimilate them all to himself. This is the kingdom of the gospel, his church. It is founded upon a rock, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it; for he is a wall of fire round about it, and a glory in its midst. (Zechariah 2.5) Here he reigns upon a throne of grace. He has unlimited sovereign authority to save whom he pleases, to pardon all kinds of sins, and to admit rebels into the number of his friends, when they submit to his golden sceptre. His mercy is infinite, and he knows how to change their hearts when he pardons their sins.

It will be a useful digression to point out the various senses in which in Scripture the word *church* is to be understood.

1. It denotes the whole body of that spiritual kingdom of which the Redeemer is the living and life-giving head. (Colossians 1.18) It has existed from the days of righteous Abel, and its members will be assembled together before the throne on the great day of his final appearance. This is the church which God has bought with his own blood. (Acts 20.28) Happy are they who belong to it.

2. The visible church contains all who call themselves Christian, and who enjoy the gospel revelation. It includes many nations. But it is a small thing to belong to the visible church, for it is compared to a corn floor on which chaff is mingled with the wheat (Matthew

3.12), to a field in which tares grow alongside the good seed; and to a fisherman's net which contains both good and bad fish. (Matthew 13.24; 47) But a time of separation will come. Then the chaff and tares will be consumed. My heart is pained to think that some of you, who join in public worship with true believers, shall be shut out, when they shall be received into the kingdom.

3. The universal church, in any one period, is that part of the visible church that is united to the Lord by a living faith. They profess the fundamental truths of the gospel, and regulate their lives by its precepts; or, they love the Lord in sincerity. (Ephesians 6.24)

But through the policy of Satan it is too much divided against itself. Prejudice, bigotry, and ignorance greatly prevent that desirable union among true Christians that would promote their peace, comfort, and increase, and would silence their enemies in shame. That shameful contention for denominations, parties, and favourite preachers, for which the apostle reproveth the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 3.4), is still greatly to be lamented.

Thankfully, the Lord bears with them all. And as they grow in grace, and drink more into his spirit, they approach nearer to his example of longsuffering, patience, and tenderness.

4. The word church is applied to particular societies of Christians who share the same gospel ordinances, and who maintain a Scriptural separation from the sinful spirit and customs of the world. By whatever name they are known among men, they are branches of the true vine, have their fruit unto holiness, and their end is everlasting life.

But to return:

In this church MESSIAH rules by wise and gracious laws and ordinances. He releases his subjects from all authority, in point of conscience, but his own, and commands them to call no man master but himself. If they stand fast in the liberty with which he

has made them free (Galatians 5.1), they will not follow any man except insofar as he follows their Lord. And if they obey his royal law to do to others what they would have others do to them, they will not attempt to usurp his authority, or wish to be called masters themselves, or assume an overbearing manner, or expect universal and absolute submission from others.

But it must be admitted that, under the present state of things, there is hardly a man who does not arrogate too much to himself, or allow too much to others. One or the other of these faults is the principal cause of the evils and lack of peace in the church.

Yet the design of the gospel is to set his people free from the yoke of men, the fetters of custom and tradition, superstition and will-worship, so that they may enjoy in his service a state of perfect freedom.

The principal glory of his kingdom is that he reigns in their hearts. There he writes his precepts, impresses his image, erects his throne, ruling them both by an outward law and by an inward secret influence, breathing his own life and spirit into them, so that their obedience becomes as it were natural, pleasurable, and its own reward. By revealing to them his love, he wins their affections, captivates their wills, and enlightens their understandings. They derive from him the spirit of power, of love, and of a sound mind. (2 Timothy 1.7), and run in the way of his commandments.

It is impossible, therefore, to make this song our own unless we are willing to be his subjects, are pleased with his way of salvation, approve of his precepts, and cheerfully submit to the rulings of his providence.

In all these respects we are by nature at variance with him. We are too proud to be indebted to his grace, too wise in our own eyes to desire his instruction, too obstinately attached to our sin to relish the beauty of holiness; and our love to this world is too strong for

us to be satisfied with our lot. We would love to be our own carvers. We are unthankful when he gives, impatient if he withholds, and rebel against his will.

This enmity must be subdued if we are to accept his government. In short, we must become new creatures. To produce this change the gospel is the only means; and when revealed and applied by the Holy Spirit, the miracle is wrought. Then we willingly yield to his administration. We are no longer our own, and live no longer to ourselves, but to him who loved us, and gave himself for us. And what was before our dread is now our delight: the Lord reigns, and he does all things well.

Are there any among us who will not have him to rule over them? The thought is no less vain than wicked. Remember, he *must* reign, till he has subdued all enemies under his feet. You must either bend or break before him.

Sermon 37

The Extent of Messiah's Spiritual Kingdom

'The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever.'
Revelation 11.15

The kingdom of our Lord, both in the heart and in the world, is frequently compared to a house, of which he himself is the foundation and the architect. (Isaiah 28.16; 54.11-12) While it remains unfinished, a stranger cannot tell what it will be like when completed. This is how it is with the Lord's work in this present life. He has begun a good work in his people, but as yet it is incomplete.

The steps by which he carries on the work cannot be seen by the men of this world, and therefore they seldom engage their attention. Only detached parts are visible, and any beauty in the design is obscured by defects in the building. Sometimes, however, he employs them in his work, as he did Cyrus in delivering Israel from captivity. (Isaiah 45.1-5) Similarly, the Roman Empire was employed to destroy the Jewish dispensation and further the spread of the gospel. And posterity will see that he is now using Asia and America to bring forward his work, all leading to one grand point, the establishment of his church and kingdom throughout the world. His plan is unalterably fixed. He has said it, and it shall be done. Things will not always remain in their present disordered state. The word of the Lord shall prevail over all opposition.

Unfulfilled prophecies are necessarily obscure, and I do not pretend to determine the precise sense of the text as it stands connected with the rest of the chapter. Nor would I have tried to

preach on it except that it appears in Handel's *Messiah* to close the Second Part. My business is to lead you to some pleasing and profitable reflections on it.

There are many Old Testament prophecies that speak in magnificent strains of the kingdom that God would establish on the earth in his appointed time. What we read in the twentieth chapter of Revelation regarding the reign of the saints for a thousand years has given rise to almost a thousand guesses concerning a millennial state. But we must allow for the metaphorical language of prophecy. We read, for example, that the streets of the New Jerusalem are to be paved with gold, and that the twelve gates are made of pearls. (Revelation 21.15,21) But no person of sound judgment would suppose this description to be literal. The personal presence of MESSIAH is not necessary on the earth to his people's happiness. It is enough that he has promised to dwell with them by his Spirit. Let us, then, consult the Scriptures to guide us in these matters. I will select some passages sufficient to lead us aright by the rules of sober interpretation.

The glory of MESSIAH's kingdom is described in beautiful pastoral images in Isaiah 2.2-4, 11.6-9, 60.18-22; Ezekiel 34.23-26, 36.25-27,34-35; and Zechariah 2.10-11; 14.9. These promises and prophecies were not fulfilled to the nation of Israel. They suffered much from the kings of Israel and Judah, saw their city and temple destroyed by the Chaldeans, and went into exile. Even after their captivity had ended, they were tributary to Persia, Greece and Rome. Their obstinate rejection of MESSIAH filled up the measure of their sins and brought on them wrath to the uttermost. Soon they were banished from their land, their constitution was subverted, and they were dispersed throughout the earth.

It seems equally plain that these prophecies have not been fulfilled to the Christian church. To this day the greater part of the earth is unacquainted with the name of Jesus. And the face of Christendom, whether Popish or Protestant, shows little more of

the spirit and character of the gospel than is found among the heathen. If Christianity is compatible with pride, baseness, avarice, malice, envy, scepticism, licentiousness, then Christians abound. But if humility, integrity, benevolence, and a spiritual mind are essential to a Christian, it is to be feared that there are few true Christians, even in places most favoured with the light of the gospel.

But can the Scriptures be broken? Can his promise fail? By no means. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but not one jot or tittle of his Word shall fail to be accomplished.

We need not suppose that every individual of mankind shall be saved in this future day of his power. But the language of the prophecies warrants us to hope that the prayers and desires of the church shall be signally answered at some future period, in the following respects:

1. The gospel shall visit nations that are at present in spiritual darkness. The uttermost parts of the earth were given to MESSIAH for his possession. Much of the inhabited world is still in darkness.

But the time is approaching when the Redeemer's glory shall usher in the fullness of the Gentiles.

2. The gospel shall prevail, not in word only, but in power. Even where the name of Christ is known, there is little of its power present.

But the time will come when Christians shall again be known by their integrity, spiritual-mindedness, benevolence, and the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God. The fall of mystical Babylon, and of antichrist in its various forms, and the calling of the Jews, are positively foretold. Zion shall be built again.

3. The disputes that prevail among Christians shall cease. A recent writer remarked that we have just enough religion to make us hate

one another. The spirit of party, prejudice, bigotry, and self-interest; a zeal for forms, systems, modes, and denominations, furnish men with plausible pretexts for indulging in the most unholy passions, and deceive them into an opinion that (while they are gratifying their pride and self-will) they are labouring only to promote the cause of God and truth. This explains why the feuds between religious people are more violent, and have more mischievous consequences, than those of drunkards. The lovers of peace, who refuse to take part in these brawls, but rather weep over them in secret, are censured and despised by the angry combatants on both sides as neutrals and cowards.

But the hour is coming when believers shall be united in love, shall agree in all that is essential to faith and holiness, and shall live in forbearance and tenderness towards each other. Then, "Ephraim shall no more envy Judah, nor Judah vex Ephraim." (Isaiah 11.13)

4. It will be a time of general peace. At present, the kingdoms that profess to be subject to the Prince of Peace are always disturbing, invading, and destroying each other. They live in mutual fear and jealousy, and maintain armies ready to strike the first blow if necessary. War is followed as a trade and cultivated as a science, and those who spread devastation and ruin, and deluge the earth with blood, are styled heroes and conquerors. Can there be stronger proof of the depravity of man?

But one day the merciful spirit of the gospel shall prevail, and then "nations shall learn war no more." (Isaiah 2.4)

How elevating the thought that a time shall arrive when the love of God and man, of truth and righteousness, shall prevail throughout the earth! The evils that men bring upon themselves and others shall cease, and such tokens of God's displeasure against sin as hurricanes, earthquakes, plagues, and famines shall no longer prevail. Even if some natural evils remain, compassion and tenderness will render them tolerable.

Let this prospect be the object of our prayers. The Lord will do great things, but he will be enquired of for them.

To many, however, extended dominion and commerce are much more desirable. The glory and extent of the British government continue to be eagerly pursued, while the conversion of the heathen and the extension of the Redeemer's kingdom are neglected.

But remember, "the nation and kingdom that will not serve thee shall perish." (Isaiah 60.12) The Word of God may be slighted, but it cannot be annulled. We should not wonder, but lament, that our national prosperity is declining, when we are indifferent, even adverse, to the prospects of MESSIAH's kingdom.

Sermon 38

King of kings, and Lord of lords

‘[And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh written] KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.’ Revelation 19.16

The description of the glory of the Redeemer’s kingdom, in spite of all opposition, concludes the Second Part of Handel’s *Messiah*. Three passages are selected from the Book of Revelation to form a grand chorus, of which the title in this verse is the close. This title has sometimes been usurped by proud worms of the earth, eastern monarchs in particular. Thus sovereignty, majesty, holiness, grace, and other attributes, which properly belong to God alone, have been parcelled out amongst the *great*. But let them know that MESSIAH is above them.

The verse offers two points for our meditation:

I. How he is represented as wearing his title. It is inscribed on his vesture dipped in blood, and on his thigh, or that part of his vesture that covers the thigh.

II. The title itself: “King of kings, and Lord of lords.”

I. 1. Being written on his vesture, this title is to be read and acknowledged by all who read it. And it is on his vesture stained with his own blood, and the blood of his enemies, which indicates that his rule is based on the success of his mission. In the passage from which this verse is taken, MESSIAH is given three names: a “name which no one knows but himself”; “the Word of God”; and “King of kings and Lord of lords.” (Revelation 19.12,13,16) The latter denotes his glory as Mediator between God and man, when he took his seat with all power and authority. It was given him as a reward for his obedience unto death. With the eye of faith, his people read this title as they pass through the troubles of this present life, and it inspires them with confidence and joy.

2. Being written on his thigh, an emblem of power, and that part of the body on which the sword is girded, it assures us that he will certainly maintain the right he has acquired. Many titles among men are merely titular; but this title of MESSIAH is active and full of influence. He actually rules over all, and does according to his good pleasure among them all. (Daniel 4.35)

II. The title itself. Many kings of the earth imagine themselves powerful, and so set themselves against the Lord and his Anointed, saying: "Let us break their bonds asunder." (Psalm 2.3) But he has his hook in their nose, and his bridle in their mouth; as a result, they do no more nor less than accomplish his will.

1. Their rage and resistance serves only to make his absolute Kingship more evident, as was proved in the case of Pharaoh. So it is with the hearts of all fallen men. Whether they harden themselves against him, or become pliable to his touch, they all serve his purpose.

2. The kings of this world are continually disturbing the world with their ambitious schemes. They expect to carry all before them, and seldom have any higher end in view than to gratify their own ambitions. But in all they do they merely fulfil his purposes, as instruments he employs with which to punish transgressors or open ways for the gospel. The successes of Sennacherib and Nebuchadnezzar, and the exalting of Cyrus, were of this kind. They acted under his secret and limited commission, beyond which they could not go. Modern history too furnishes many instances of this fact. In the Reformation from Popery, many who contributed to reform did so out of personal ambition, and hated reform itself; yet they lived to see effects they neither desired nor dreamed of. In the recent American War, the relative sizes of the contending armies suggested only one outcome; yet superintending providence produced results wholly unforeseen by them.

3. That he is King of kings, and governor among the nations, is further proved by the preservation of his people; for the world is

against them, and they have no protector but him. Like the waves of the sea, the wrath of man is given bounds beyond which it cannot pass. So far as he is pleased to over-rule it to his own praise, he will permit it to operate; but whatever the remainder of it does not serve his purpose, he restrains. (Psalm 76.10) But he works so secretly that only those who are enlightened by his Word and Spirit can perceive his influence. He permitted Ahithopel to give what appeared to be politically wise counsel to Absalom; but it merely served to abort the rebellious son's plans to overthrow his father David. (2 Samuel 15.31; 17.14) Likewise, he used the disagreement between the Pharisees and Sadducees, who had united to destroy Paul, to allow the apostle to escape. (Acts 23.7)

Sometimes kings and statesmen have acted so contrary to their own avowed aims as to produce exactly the opposite effect they had intended. A very small compliance seemed likely secure the affection of the twelve tribes to Rehoboam. We wonder that he could not be persuaded to speak mildly to the people so as to gain their service. But the cause was from the Lord (1 Kings 12.15); as a result, Israel and Judah were separated, rather than united. Similarly, the Lord used Haman's murderous plot to preserve the Jews. Had the king only slept that night, as usual (Esther 6.1), or if his attendants had not read him the part of the chronicles that recorded Mordecai's service, the plot would have succeeded. This concurrence of several trivial circumstances shows how the Lord pours contempt upon princes, and defeats their deepest laid schemes, just when they promise themselves success.

Many valuable lessons may be drawn from this subject, some of which I have already mentioned.

1. It should inspire us with confidence. If the King of kings and Lord of lords is with us, what weapon or counsel can prosper against us? However dark appearances may be, we should not tremble for the ark of God. His church is safe in his hands. There is a hedge of protection around you, which none can break through without his permission. Nor will he allow any to touch you, except to turn their evil into your real and lasting good.

2. We should admire and be thankful for his condescension. “Lord, what is man, that thou art so mindful of him?” His eye is always upon his people, and his ear open to their prayers. Not a sigh or tear escapes his notice.

3. How great is the dignity and privilege of true believers! Believers are more frequently despised in this world than envied. But they may encourage one another that the King of kings is their Friend. They have honours and pleasures that the world knows nothing of. They are sons and daughters of the Almighty. (2 Corinthians 6.18) All things are theirs. (1 Corinthians 3.21) They are assured of what is best for them in this life, and of eternal life hereafter. They are related to the King of kings, and soon he will acknowledge them before assembled worlds. Those who now account the proud happy will be confounded when they see the righteous shine forth like the sun in the kingdom of their Father.

4. We see the extreme folly and danger of all who persist in their rebellion against this King of kings and Lord of lords. Though he is patient with them for a season, the hour is coming when his wrath will burn like fire. “The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God.” (Psalm 9.17) Oh, how solemn will be that day, when nature shall be dissolved, the Judge shall appear, the books be opened, and all mankind shall be summoned before his tribunal! O you who are careless, will you not bow before him while he is still seated on a throne of grace, and while the door of mercy stands open? Once more I call, I warn, I charge you, to repent, and believe the gospel. If today you will hear his voice, it is not too late. But who can answer for you tomorrow? Perhaps even this night your soul shall be required of you. (Luke 12.20) Are you prepared? If not, seize the present opportunity. Attend to the one thing needful. Seek his face, that your soul may live. Remember, you have been warned; your blood will be upon your own head. I have delivered my message, and if you finally reject it, you must answer to him whose message it is.

PART THREE

Sermon 39 Job's Faith and Expectation

'I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand in the latter day upon the earth. And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God.'

Job 19.25,26

Christianity, the religion of MESSIAH, is nearly as old as creation. It is coeval with the first promise of mercy to fallen man. (Genesis 3.15) When Adam by sin had violated the law of his creation, his religion, or right relationship to God, was at an end. At one stroke sin deprived him of faith, hope, love, and joy. He no longer desired or could bear the presence of his offended Maker. He tried in vain to avoid it, and when asked about his guilt, instead of frankly confessing it, he blamed the woman, or rather the Lord who had given her to him. But mercy, undeserved and undesired, relieved him, by the promise of the seed of the woman, which contained the substance of all future promises that were fulfilled by the Son of God as Mediator. This is why all the Old Testament servants of God all died in faith. (Hebrews 11.13) They died, not trusting in their own righteousness, but rested their hope on him who is the end of the law for righteousness to every one who believes. (Romans 10.4) True, we have more light and liberty than they had; but Abraham rejoiced to see Christ's day, and Jacob died waiting for his salvation. And here in our text we have a strong testimony to the faith of Job.

Learned men are by no means agreed on either the translation or the explanation of the text. We need not dispute whether Job professes his assurance of the incarnation, or the resurrection, or the final appearance as Judge, of MESSIAH. But if we approach

the words as they stand, we cannot greatly mistake their general meaning.

Four things are observable:

- I. The title of 'Redeemer.'
- II. The appropriating word 'my.'
- III. His standing 'on the earth.'
- IV. Job's hope of seeing him 'in the flesh.'

I. The Title.

No title of MESSIAH is more significant or dear than that of Redeemer. The name Saviour expresses what he does for sinners. He saves them from sin, guilt, wrath, this present evil world, the powers of darkness, and all their enemies. But the word Redeemer indicates how he saves them. For it is not merely the word of his power, but it is also the word of the price he paid as a ransom for them, by pouring out his blood for them as an atonement for sin.

The Hebrew word for Redeemer is *Goel*, a near kinsman or relation who has the right to redeem. (Numbers 35.19-21; Ruth 4.1-3) Thus, by taking our nature on himself, MESSIAH became our Kinsman, that he might redeem our forfeited inheritance, restore us to liberty, and avenge our cause against Satan, the enemy and murderer of our souls. Making himself responsible for us, he paid our debts, and met the demands of the justice and law of God on our behalf. On this account he suffered and died. But he who was once dead is now alive for evermore. (Revelation 1.18)

And this is he of whom Job said: "I know that my Redeemer liveth." He is the Living One, the same yesterday, today, and for ever. (Hebrews 13.8) He is the One who said to the Jews: "Before Abraham was, I AM." (John 8.58) His power to redeem is founded in a covenant that was ratified by his own blood, and by the oath of the unchangeable God. (Psalm 110.4)

II. The appropriating word 'my.'

Job says: "My Redeemer." And all we know or hear of him will avail us nothing unless we can call him *Our* Redeemer. A cold, head knowledge of him, such as a lawyer has of a will or deed, will neither save nor comfort the soul. But the believer reads it as the will is read by the heir, who finds his own name in it, and is warranted to call the estate and all its particulars his own. He appropriates its privileges to himself, saying: 'The promises I read are mine; the pardon, the peace, the heaven, are all mine. This is the will and testament of my Redeemer. The great Testator remembered me in his will, which is now made effectual by his death (Hebrews 9.16); and therefore I humbly claim, and certainly expect, the benefit he has promised.'

But how shall we obtain this right, and assure ourselves that it is ours? True, such assurance is not essential to true faith; but even if our faith is as small as a grain of mustard seed, the inheritance is still ours.

I would go even further. This assurance is the fruit of both faith and ignorance: faith gives us an interest in the gospel salvation, but ignorance of our interest has to be removed little by little.

Solid assurance may be estimated by its effects. It will make us humble, spiritual, peaceful, and patient. I pity those who talk so confidently of their hope that they believe themselves out of the reach of doubts and fears, while their tempers are unsanctified and their hearts love this present evil world. I fear they know not what they say. I am more hopeful of those who complain of doubts and fears.

But to give a direct answer to the inquiry: I will know that he is *my* Redeemer if I follow on to know him. (Hosea 6.3) Our names are not written in the Bible, but our characters are. He is the Redeemer of all who put their trust in him. You will not trust him unless you feel your need of him; you cannot trust him unless you know him as revealed in his Word; you do not trust him unless you love and

serve him. If you know yourself as a sinner deserving to die, and see no hope nor help except in Jesus, and venture yourself on his gracious invitation to come to him, believing that he is both willing and able to save you, then he is *your* Redeemer.

Were an act of grace to be proclaimed, inviting all criminals to give themselves up, with a promise of mercy to those who did, yet no one was named in the act, still every one who complied with the act would receive mercy. So it is with us sinners. Yield yourselves to God's proclamation of mercy, and you shall be saved.

III. Job adds that his Redeemer shall stand 'on the earth.'

The term "latter day" or 'days' usually refers to the times of the gospel. To this day Job looked forward. He saw MESSIAH as the One who was to come. And it should be our comfort to know that he *is* come. His standing on the earth may refer to his whole life in the flesh: his birth, life, suffering, death, and resurrection. Job could not have expected this unless it had been revealed to him from heaven. It was the object of his faith. MESSIAH was to stand on the earth as the one Mediator between God and men. In the same office, he now sits on the throne of glory, and will be admired by his believing people to the end of time.

IV. Job's hope of seeing him 'in the flesh.'

This refers to the resurrection of his own body. His trials had been great, but out of them all the Lord had delivered him. Yet he knew that he must go the way of all flesh, that his body must lie in the grave, and return to dust. But he expected to see God, and with his own eyes. Notice the strength of his expressions. He is not hesitant, but confident and certain. Thus he placed his ultimate happiness in seeing God. His words are very similar to those of the apostle: "When he shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is." (1 John 3.2) To behold the glory of our Redeemer, to be conformed to him in holiness and love, is that blessedness which God has promised his people, and to which they aspire. Under the many trials of this life, they look forward to that

day when they shall behold his face in righteousness. (Psalm 17.15) Then they shall be completely satisfied.

Job's expectation proves that there is an immortal state, and a resurrection to life, and that both were revealed by God to his people in the earliest times. The religion of the Old and New Testaments is substantially the same.

The question for us is: are we of the same mind as Job? What do *you* think, my dear friends, of Christ? Have you accepted him as *your* Redeemer? Have you a good hope that you shall see him to your comfort when he returns to judge the world? If so, you may rejoice. True, you must expect changes. You must die, and your flesh must be food for worms. But he has promised to change our vile bodies, that they may be fashioned like his glorious body, according to the mighty power by which he is able to subdue all things to himself. (Philippians 3.21)

Sermon 40

The Lord is Risen Indeed

‘But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first fruits of them that slept.’
1 Corinthians 15.20

As the functions of the heart and lungs are essential to maintain life in the body, so certain truths of revelation are fundamental to the salvation of a sinner.

Such, for instance, is the doctrine of the depravity of human nature: for unless we know our state in the sight of God, and our hearts are changed by the power of his grace, we cannot understand a single sentence in the Bible.

Such too is the doctrine of the atonement: for if we could know we are lost, without knowing also God’s method of recovering us, we must sink into hopeless despair.

So also, if we trusted in Christ, yet remained ignorant of his resurrection, our faith would be in vain. The resurrection of Christ, therefore, is a doctrine absolutely essential to our hope and comfort. It is also a sure pledge that those who believe in him shall themselves rise from the dead, by virtue of their union with him, and according to his pattern. Let us, then, consider his resurrection.

The resurrection of Christ is the great pillar on which Christianity rests, and it has pleased the Lord to put its proof within our reach. It may seem to some unnecessary to prove it, yet I think we should take some notice of it, not least to silence both infidels and those tempted to doubt it. Not only is unbelief deeply rooted in every heart, but also Satan will do all he can to beat us off from believing it by working on our evil disposition. Besides, many who believe have found themselves at a loss how to answer the enemy concerning it.

Let us then examine some proofs of the resurrection.

I. That the eyewitnesses of it were competent judges of what they asserted is evident from their numbers. Paul mentions Peter, the twelve, then five hundred, then James, then all the apostles, and lastly himself. (1 Corinthians 15.5-8) If he was declaring an untruth, there were many living at the time who would have contradicted him. Just as I am sure there are cities named Paris and Rome, though I never saw them, so I am sure that the testimony of all these witnesses to the resurrection is true.

Besides, it is impossible that so many could be mistaken or deceived. Some of them saw him, not once, but frequently. His disciples did not expect to see him, and Thomas even refused to believe the report of those who had seen him.

II. They were not only competent judges, they were also upright and faithful witnesses. Their conduct was uniform with their profession, and is it probable that those who speak so honourably of God should be imposters? Is it possible that they should concoct a plan that would overcome all objections?

Further, they could not possibly see any personal advantage in seeking to spread the Christian religion had they not been sure that they had actually seen the crucified Jesus after his death. Knowing that their doctrine would be an offence to the Jews and foolishness to the Gentiles, and that they would be persecuted for their testimony, they would never have gone forth into the world with it unless it were true.

Moreover, even if we could suppose them capable of such a wicked undertaking, and of an enterprise that would bring them so much suffering, by spreading a falsehood, how can we account for the success their message met with, unless it were true? As one in the Sanhedrin said, if their cause had not been from God, it would have come to nothing. (Acts 5.38) As it was, it overturned the pillars of paganism and the superstitions of idolatry wherever it went.

III. The proof of the resurrection, however, does not depend on arguments, but on the witness of those who have found the Gospel to be the power of God unto salvation in themselves. They know that the Lord is risen indeed, for they are made partakers of the power of his resurrection. And many believers, though not qualified to dispute with philosophers and sceptics on their own learned ground, can put them to shame by their pure and upright conduct, especially when they welcome the approach of death.

This is the evidence I would principally recommend to my hearers. If the resurrection of Christ is a fact, much depends on the right belief of it. I say right belief, for only this can overcome our native depravity, and convince us also that since he rose from the dead, then he is Lord of both living and dead, then he has the keys of death and hell, then he will return to judge the world, and you must see him for yourself, and appear at his tribunal, for it is he with whom you have to do. And then, finally, unless you really love, trust, and serve him, as the beloved and Lord of your heart, your present state is awfully dangerous and miserable.

But let those who love his name be joyful in him. Your Lord was dead, but is alive; and because he lives, you shall live also. If you are risen with him, seek those things that are above, where he sits on the right hand of God. And when he, who is our life, shall appear, then shall you appear with him in glory.

Sermon 41

Death by Adam, Life by Christ

‘For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.’ 1 Corinthians 15.21-22

From what I have heard of Mr. Handel’s abilities and success in setting his music to this subject, I judge that the most solemn strains must be employed to accord with the awesome words, “by man came death” and “in Adam all die.” Nor can the heavenly harpers suit the joy of the words, “by man came also the resurrection” and “in Christ shall all be made alive.”

By one man came death. “By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin.” (Romans 5.12) Sin opened the door to death. At the creation, all was full of order, life, and beauty. Adam bore the image of his Maker, and both moral and natural evils were unknown. How different things are now! Would you account for the change? Charge it on man. He sinned against his Creator, Lawgiver, and Benefactor; and so by him came death. Doubtless God could have prevented it, but he permitted it, and he can overrule it to his own glory. But now we see, we feel sin in the world. Death reigns.

But God has revealed the way of life by the gospel. If we believe it, instead of reasoning, we shall overcome every evil and gain a happiness far greater than Adam lost. Those who refuse the gospel must be left to their perplexities until the day when the great Judge shall arise to plead his own cause and vindicate his proceedings. Then “every mouth shall be stopped.” (Romans 3.19) Meanwhile we are infected with sin, and are subject to death, which the first man brought into the world. But we are also invited to participate in the blessings procured by the second Man, who by his atonement has overcome death.

Let us survey first the malady, then the remedy.

I. The Malady.

The malady is death, the wages of sin. Many ideas are included in this word.

1. The sentence annexed to Adam's breaking of God's commandment. (Genesis 2.17) But man was not to die by a stroke of apoplexy or flash of lightning. The sentence includes all the evils that sin has brought into the world, until death brings man down with sorrow to the grave. Thorns and thistles, hurricanes, floods, and earthquakes were unknown in a state of innocence. But having sinned, man must become miserable and suffer such calamities. His heart is now the seat of passions, rage, envy, malice, lust, and avarice. And even if the earth had remained a paradise, it would be filled with violence, cruelty, and misery, and stained with blood. Both outward afflictions and inward passions continually gnaw at man's heart like vultures, and all accelerate the execution of the sentence of death.

2. Death, in a spiritual sense, entered immediately with sin. Man was made in the image of God, in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness. He was capable of communion with God, rejoicing in his favour, obeying his will, and bringing him glory. In a word, the life of God dwelt in him as in a temple. But sin defaced his temple, and God forsook it. In this sense, Adam died on the very day that he sinned. He lost his spiritual life, along with all communion with God and love for his Maker. He even dreaded his presence, and tried to hide from him. And thus we inherit what may be called a living death. We are dead while we live, "dead in trespasses and sins" (Ephesians 2.1) until we are made alive again by his Spirit. What the poet Milton says of Beelzebub – 'majestic though in ruins' – is true of man. Our faculties and powers are proof of our original greatness, but our dreadful abuse of them equally proves that we are fallen and ruined creatures. We have lost our true life; we are dead in sin. And unless we are made alive again, we shall only be fit company for the fallen angels.

3. Death extends still further. There is the 'second death,' the final and eternal misery of soul and body in hell. This is the dreadful lot of the impenitent. It was included in the original sentence; and because the soul is immortal, and there is to be a resurrection of the just and the unjust, and there is no other sacrifice for sin in favour of those who reject the gospel, to be banished from God's favourable presence, and abandoned to the unrestrained rage of sinful passions and hopeless despair, to be incessantly tormented by the stings of a guilty conscience, must be the unavoidable consequences of being cut off by death, in an unhumbled, unpardoned, unsanctified state.

II. The Remedy.

Blessed be God, for the gospel reveals a remedy fully adapted to the state to which sin has brought us. "As by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead." MESSIAH has made an end of sin, and destroyed the power of death. Those who believe on him, though they were dead, shall live. (John 11.25) For he is the Resurrection of the dead, and the Life of the living.

1. He raises the soul from its death in sin to a life of righteousness. By his blood he procures a right and freedom, and by his Spirit he communicates a power, bringing near to God those who were afar off. Even now, believers are "risen with him." (Colossians 3.1) Their spiritual life is renewed, and their happiness has already begun.

Yet, though sin has no more dominion over them, it still strives within and against them. And while they cry out with the apostle: "O wretched man that I am," they also say: "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord." (Romans 7.12-23) They know God is on their side, and that they are more than conquerors through him who loved them.

They are also subject to the various calamities and distresses of this mortal life; and they have troubles peculiar to themselves as believers, as long as they live in a world that lies in wickedness.

But the curse is taken out of their afflictions, which are so sanctified to them that in the end they work for their good. Even as they yield the peaceable fruits of righteousness, they find themselves not joyous, but grievous. (Hebrews 12.11)

Moreover, they still must suffer the stroke of death, the separation of soul and body. But this death has lost its sting for them; therefore they are said not to die, but to sleep in Jesus. Death is not their enemy, but their friend. Instead of being an evil, it proves to be a deliverance from all evil, and an entrance into everlasting life.

2. That new life to which they are raised is connected with eternal life: the life of grace with the life of glory. For Christ lives in them, and being united to him by faith, they shall live while he lives. They shut their eyes on the sorrows of this world only to open them in his immediate presence, and so “they shall be for ever with the Lord.” How wonderful and happy is this transition! Yet such honour have all his saints. However afflicted or neglected, despised or oppressed on earth, they now shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. So it is with Lazarus. (Luke 16.22) Though slighted in this world, he is both happy and exalted in the next.

3. Their dead bodies shall be raised at the great day, not in weakness and corruption, but in power and immortality, made like their Lord’s glorified body. His resurrection is both the pledge and the pattern of theirs.

I only need to observe that as Adam is the root and head of all mankind, from whom we all derive our sinful and mortal nature, so Jesus, the second Adam, is the root and head of his people. And though there will be a resurrection of the wicked, it will be to shame and everlasting contempt. (Daniel 12.2) But to all in Christ, the resurrection will be an inestimable blessing.

May we be prepared for that great event, that when he shall appear we may have confidence in him, and not be ashamed before him.

(1 John 2.28) Happy are they who shall welcome him in the language of the prophet: "Lo, this is our God, we have waited for him, and he will save us; this is the Lord, we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation." (Isaiah 25.9)

But how awful shall be the state of those who shall see him with horror, and who in anguish will call (in vain) to the rocks and mountains to fall on them, and hide them from his presence, saying, The great day of his wrath is come, and who shall be able to stand? (Revelation 6.16,17)

Sermon 42

The General Resurrection

‘Behold, I show you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed incorruptible. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.’

1 Corinthians 15.51-52

An object that we know to be great will appear small to us if we view it from a distance. So the day that will end the present state of things and usher in an eternal and unchangeable state appears small to us now, though it is very great. For then the Lord will descend with a shout, with the voice of an archangel and the trumpet of God; and the earth and all its works shall be burnt up. The great Judge will appear, the books shall be opened, and every one in the human race must give an account of himself to God; and according to his righteous award, be happy or miserable for ever.

If we were sure this tremendous scene would open on us tomorrow, or even now while I am speaking, we would be startled, confused and alarmed. But because it is distant from us we hear of it with a coolness almost equal to indifference. May the Lord give us faith that is the evidence of things not seen, while I lead you to meditate on my text. Its principal subject is the resurrection of the dead who are in Christ, and it may be divided into four parts:

I. The introduction: “Behold, I show you a mystery.”

II. What we are to expect: “We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed.”

III. The suddenness of the event: “In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye.”

IV. The preceding signal: “The trumpet shall sound.”

I. The apostle tells the Corinthians that he is about to show them a mystery. A *mystery*, according to the Greek word, signifies a secret. All the truths of the gospel may be called mysteries, because:

(i) they could not have been known by fallen man without a revelation from God. This is eminently true of the resurrection. The light of nature gives us no indication of a general resurrection. Accordingly, the wise men of Athens, the Stoics and Epicureans, called the apostle Paul a babbler for preaching it. (Acts 17.18) But this secret is made known to us; and the Lord will raise our dust and conform our bodies to his own glorious body.

(ii) our notions are so gross, and our prejudices so great, that these truths would remain unintelligible to us without further enlightenment by the Holy Spirit. Some may think that we do not need such illumination, but the fact is, we cannot reason ourselves into it. Indeed, we need this divine teaching to deliver us from the vain reasonings, perplexities and imaginations that will always bewilder our thoughts on it.

II. We are taught to expect that we shall not all sleep, but that we shall all be changed. The whole human race will not die before the resurrection. Some will still be living at the time, and among them will be the Lord's people. The living will not be raised from the dead, but they shall be changed. This change will put them in exactly the same state as those who are raised. Their mortality shall be swallowed up by life, as it was with Enoch and Elijah. Think of the change that turns a caterpillar into a butterfly. Who would thin it was the same creature? Yet who can deny it? So shall we be changed, for the Lord has spoken it.

III. These tremendous events shall take place suddenly, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye. A part of mankind will be employed as they are now, and as they were in the days of Noah and Lot (Luke 17.26-30) – eating, drinking, buying, selling, building, planting – having nothing less in their thoughts than the calamity that will suddenly overtake them. For while they are promising themselves peace, the day of the Lord shall come on

them, their lofty looks shall be brought down, and the Lord alone shall be exalted. (Isaiah 2.11)

So much of prophecy remains unfulfilled that I do not think it probable that we shall be alive when this great day comes. But are not some of you liable to be similarly surprised? If you die in your sins the consequences will be no less deplorable than if you saw all nature dissolve. What will you do? Where will you fly for help? Where will you leave your glory, if, while you are engrossed by the pleasures or cares of this world, death should suddenly summon you to judgment? The rich farmer in the gospel is not charged with any enormous crime: he only rejoiced in his wealth; but God said to him: "Thou fool, this night shall thy soul be required of thee." (Luke 13.25) Thus will it be with all whose portions are in this world, but who are not rich towards God! Consider this, you who are like-minded with him! Tremble at the thought of being among those who have to leave all behind them. Now is the acceptable time, now is the day of salvation. Now, if you will seek the Lord, he will be found by you. But once the door of mercy is shut, it will then be too late to cry, Lord, Lord, open to us! (Luke 13.25)

IV. The great scene will be introduced by a signal: "The trumpet shall sound." In this way the approach of a king (in a royal procession) or judge (at the time of assize) is announced. Who can describe the terror by which the trumpet is heard by the criminal! So shall it be with the whole race outside Christ when the Sovereign Judge shall take his seat on his great white throne to judge both living and dead! (Revelation 20.11)

But it will be a day of joy to believers. When the Lord shall come, attended by his holy angels, his redeemed people shall re-assume their bodies, now freed from all corruption, and the living shall be changed to meet the Lord in the air.

He will then acknowledge, approve and crown them before the assembled world. Every charge that could be brought against them

shall be overruled, and their plea – that they trusted in him alone for salvation – shall be received and ratified. They will be accepted and justified. They will shine like the sun, and even attend (as assessors with him) when he shall pass final judgment on his and their enemies. Then he will be admired in and by all those who believe. Their tears shall be wiped away, and he shall say to them: “Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.” (Matthew 25.34)

Beloved, seeing these things are so, what manner of persons ought we to be in all holy conversation and godliness? (2 Peter 3.11) Should we not give all diligence to make our calling and election sure, that we may be found of him in peace? He who will then be seated on a throne of judgment is already known to us as seated on a throne of grace. It is high time, and blessed be God it is not yet too late, to seek his mercy. The gospel still invites us to hear his voice, and to humble ourselves before him. Once more you are invited, some of you, perhaps, for the last time. How do you know that sickness or death is not already at your door? Consider, Are you prepared? Examine the foundation of your hope – quickly, impartially, earnestly – lest you should be cut off in an hour when you are not aware, and perish with a lie in your right hand.

Sermon 43

Death swallowed up in Victory

‘Then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory!’ **1 Corinthians 15.54**

Death is the cessation of life; that which was once living, lives no longer. It has been a custom among men to personify it; in this view it becomes a great devourer; with his iron tongue he eats thousands at every meal. He has already swallowed all former generations; all who now live are marked as his prey; yet he is still unsatisfied, and will go on devouring till the Lord comes.

This is how Scripture represents death. Just as the earth opened her mouth and swallowed Korah and his fellow rebels (Numbers 16.32) so death swallows its prey. And just as a millstone or even a mountain that is cast into the ocean disappears and is lost, so are men swallowed up and lost as if they had never been. (Revelation 18.21)

Such shall be the triumph of MESSIAH in the day that death itself shall be swallowed up in His victory. Death, in its cause and effects, shall be destroyed.

Man was created upright, and was alive until sin brought death into the world. But from that time death has reigned by sin. But MESSIAH came to make an end of sin, to destroy death and him who had the power of death, to repair every disorder and remove every misery. He will do all this till everything contrary to holiness and happiness shall be swallowed up and buried like a stone cast into the sea. Thus where sin has abounded, grace will much more abound.

The benefits of this victory, however, are limited to the subjects of His church and kingdom. “In Adam all die.” But in Christ “all are

made alive.” The “all” are those who by faith in Him are delivered from sin, which is the sting of death, and are made partakers of a new nature. There is a “second death” (Revelation 2.11) which, though it shall not hurt believers in the Lord Jesus, will finally swallow up the impenitent and ungodly.

We live in an age where the error of a universal restoration to a state of happiness of all who have rebelled against the will and government of God. This sentiment contradicts the doctrine of Scripture, which asserts the everlasting misery of the finally impenitent in as strong terms as it does the eternal happiness of the righteous. (Matthew 25.46) It is pernicious, poisonous and false. It tends to reduce the sense of the evil of sin, of the inflexible justice of God, and the truth of His threats. Let us abide by the plain declarations of His Word. There is no relief for those who refuse the Gospel. But those who receive it shall be saved with an everlasting salvation, and shall one day sing: “Death is swallowed up in victory.”

The prophecy in Isaiah from which the apostle quotes (Isaiah 25.8) refers to those happy days when both Jews and Gentiles shall be brought in, and the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdom of our Lord, and of His Christ. Then, death shall be swallowed up in victory.

Let us consider the great scene before us, and contemplate the redeemed of the Lord when they shall return with Him to be given life in their glorified bodies. They are clothed with white robes, and they came out of great tribulation. (Revelation 7.13) They were once under the power of death, but now death is swallowed up in victory. In every sense in which death ruled them, they are now completely delivered.

I. They were once dead in law. They had violated the law of His government, and were exposed to His righteous displeasure and the penalty annexed to the breaking of His commandments. But mercy interposed. God so loved them that He gave His only

begotten Son to atone for their sins, and to be their wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption. (1 Corinthians 1.30) They received grace to believe in this Saviour, and are now delivered from condemnation. They are accepted in the Beloved. They are children of God, and heirs of His kingdom. Though they were far off, they have been brought near to God. Their former guilt is cancelled, blotted out, and swallowed up. All their sins are covered, sunk in His precious blood as in a deep sea, so that, even if they were sought for, they could no more be found. That they had sinned, this very fact will only heighten their gratitude and praise to Him who washed them from their sins in His own blood. (Revelation 1.5) Their happiness consists in the deep sense of His love to them and their return of grateful love to Him. And they love Him much, for much has been forgiven them. (Luke 7.47)

II. Once they were dead in sin.

They did not know or love God. They were foolish, deceived and disobedient; enslaved to their lusts; living in malice and envy; they were hateful, and they hated one another. (Titus 3.3) In a word, they were dead while they lived. (1 Timothy 5.6)

But by the power of grace they were raised from this spiritual death and made alive. Yet because some sin remained in them, their life was a continual war. They had many a battle and were often distressed. They sowed in tears, but now they reap in joy. (Psalm 126.5) Now their death is swallowed up in victory. They are free from every defect and defilement. By seeing their Lord as He is, they are made perfectly like Him. They are absolutely spotless. Neither will they ever lose their holiness and happiness, because He has promised to keep them by His almighty power.

III. They were once under the power of Satan. For a time he ruled their hearts; and while they were blinded by his influence, they were not aware of their slavery. Hard as his service was, they never complained of it. They were led by him at his will. Even after they were freed from his tyranny, he still continued to vex them.

But now they are out of his reach. Satan can never touch them again for ever. They are now where the wicked cease from troubling, and where the weary are at rest.

IV. One they had a share of the world's troubles and sorrows. As these are the fruits of sin, these troubles and sorrows hurried their lives to the grave. None of Adam's race are exempt from them. Even after they were no longer condemned for their sin, they still suffered these troubles. (John 16.33) Then trouble for Jesus' sake was a mark of their belonging to Him. (Hebrews 12.6-8) It was also God's way of refining, strengthening and revealing their graces. Moreover, they suffered scorn and mocking for Jesus' sake, and some were imprisoned and put to death.

Yet now they reckon all these sufferings light and short-lived, compared with the eternal weight of glory they now enjoy. (2 Corinthians 4.11) Now the days of their mourning are ended. (Isaiah 60.20) Sorrow and sighing have fled away, and joy and gladness will stay with them for ever. (Isaiah 51.11)

V. The seeds of sin often produced bitter fruits in their lives here. Through ignorance and prejudice, they mistook one another. They lost much good that they might have enjoyed with others. They brought on themselves many evils by their unholy zeal. Children of the same family, members of the same church were too often cold and distant from each other. And Satan stirred up discord and jealousy among them.

But now all is harmony, and love, and joy. They have one heart and one song, which will never jar again with discord.

O may this prospect awaken in us the desire to share their happiness! Those who have their portion only in this world will have an awful destiny. (Luke 6.24-25) The rich man is now tormented to have lost all his good things. (Luke 16.25) Dreadful will be the state of all who die in their sins. We cannot describe their torments as they really are; but the portraits of them in

Scripture give us some idea of their terrible nature. All the evils they did here on earth will have some link to the punishments they suffer in hell. (Matthew 13.30) Remorse, rage, despair, total and final exclusion from God's comforting presence, a lasting sense of His anger – all this cannot be expressed in human language. No longer can they mock sin. No longer will they make light of the Gospel. No longer shall they trust in uncertain riches.

O do not waste your time and talents in pursuing sinful pleasure! In the end it will bit like a snake! For all these things God will bring you into judgment, unless in this day of grace you humble yourself and beg for mercy. This is still proposed to you, if only you will seek it with your whole heart. I charge and entreat you, by the great name of MESSIAH, the Saviour, to seek it. For one day He shall subdue all things to Himself.

Sermon 44

Triumph Over Death And The Grave

‘O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ.’ **1 Corinthians 15.55-57**

The Christian soldier may be said to war a good warfare. (1 Timothy 1.18) He fights in a good cause; he fights under the eye of the Captain of his salvation. His great Commander fights for him and assures him of victory, even while the battle rages. And though he feels his weakness, and knows the power of the enemy, when he looks to his Saviour he is strengthened and comforted. Thus out of weakness he is made strong. Indeed, both he and all his fellow soldiers can exult: “We are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.” (Romans 8.37)

The whole power of the enemy is summed up in the words ‘sin’ and ‘death.’ It was sin that furnished death with its sting. But Jesus, by His obedience unto death, has made an end of sin, and so deprived death of its sting that it can no longer hurt them. They may therefore meet it with confidence and say: “Blessed be God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

We have here two different views of the same subject: death armed with his sting, and death rendered harmless by the removal of its sting.

I. Death armed with its sting.

This is a very awful subject. It is a personal concern. For we must all die. But should you feel not only the stroke, but also the sting of death when you leave this world, it were better for you that you had never been born.

The love of life, and the reluctance to have the union of body and soul dissolved, seem natural to us. But if there were no sense of judgment, no conscience of guilt, no foreboding of punishment, death might be emptied of its terrors. But death has its sting, though many never see it till they feel it; then they are stung past recovery.

But usually, men are unwilling and afraid to die. They have some sense of the sting before it penetrates them. Often this fear of death embitters people's comforts. Some fly from it to business, company and amusements. But death's sting is best known when conscience is alarmed in time of sickness. Then the things of this world no longer amuse, and death's sting can no longer be suppressed. Whether they feel it beforehand or not, the Scripture assures us that when they have breathed their last, they open their eyes in the world of torments. For the sting of death, unless timely removed by faith in Jesus, will fill the soul with anguish forever.

1. This sting of death derives its strength from the law. For the law gives strength to sin, and sharpens its sting. That is, it makes us feel the penalty that God has annexed to the breaking of the law. Our rebelling against Him, and living to ourselves in opposition to His will, will sooner or later make us aware that He will set our sins in order before us, and reprove us according to the demands of His law. (Psalm 50.21)

Now the law is placed over us by our Creator. It is holy, wise and good. It is unchangeable. To love God with all our hearts was man's duty from the moment of his creation. It was written on man's heart from the beginning. Had we stayed in a state of innocence, we would not have needed to see it written in the Bible. But it became necessary after the Fall, to restrain us from evil and convince us of sin.

2. We are bound to keep this law by the highest authority. It is the law of God, our Maker, Preserver and Benefactor, who has every right to rule us. His eye is always on us, and we are surrounded by

His power; so that we can neither avoid His gaze nor escape His hand. How then shall lawbreakers tremble to appear before Him, to answer for their contempt of His authority? We ought to obey God rather than man. (Acts 5.29) For sovereignty, majesty, authority and power belong to Him. Sin, therefore, is the sting of death when His authority is felt in the conscience.

3. The extent of the law adds strength to sin acting as the sting of death. Human laws can reach only to words and actions. But the law of God reaches the thoughts and intents of the heart. It condemns us not only for sin committed, but also for every sinful purpose formed in the heart, which was aborted only for lack of opportunity. (Matthew 5.28) It also takes note of every aggravation of sin, arising from circumstances, the abuse of Biblical light and our place in society as examples to others.

4. The sanction of the law is the very point of death's sting. It makes the sinner feel God's displeasure and the misery that follows on the loss of His favour. How miserable he must be who hears the sentence: "Depart from me, ye accursed, into devouring fire." We cannot conceive what it will be to lose the only good that can satisfy the soul, to be shut out from God, in whose favour is life, and to be shut up to eternal despair and remorse. This is the second death; this is eternal death; for the wicked who forget God, when thrust into hell, will forever desire to die, but shall never be able. (Revelation 9.6)

II. Death rendered harmless by the removal of its sting.

Jesus died. His death was penal; He died for sin, though not for His own, and therefore suffered the penalty due to sin. Death stung Him to the heart, but as it is said of an enraged bee, it lost its sting. Death has no longer power to sting those who believe in Him. They do not properly 'die;' they 'fall asleep' in Jesus. (Acts 7.60; 1 Thessalonians 4.15) To them, the last enemy serves only to put an end to all their sorrows, and to introduce them to a state of endless life and joy.

1. Dying believers can sing this song before they leave this world. Many faithful servants of God have done so: they have not only been supported, but also comforted and enabled to rejoice, under the severest tortures and amidst the flames. God, who is all-sufficient, has promised to give His people strength according to their day, and in the time of trouble they are not disappointed. The gloom that would otherwise have hung over their deathbed is dispelled, and a new world opens up to them. And often, the comforts they feel, along with their lively hopes of approaching glory, give them a dignity beyond what is normal. In a few hours, they learn more of the certainty of divine things than they could over a period of many years. For death has lost its sting for them, and while they are able to speak, they continue to praise Him who has given them the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Every word in this doxology (word of praise) is emphatic: First, “thanks be to God.” This blessedness is all His work. The means are graciously appointed by Him. Their application is by His gracious power. He gave His Son for them; He sent His Gospel to them. His Spirit made them a willing people. He provided the word of promise on which their faith was enabled to hang.

Second, “who giveth us the victory.” This is victory indeed, for it is over the last enemy. After he is vanquished there are no more conflicts. Believers are more than conquerors. Before, they conquered, but now they have conquered in the last great decisive battle. And when to the eye of sense they seem to fall, they are translated into the presence of their Commander, who gives them the crown of life.

Third, this victory is “through our Lord Jesus Christ.” They gained it not by their own works or merit, but by His. He taught their hands to war and their fingers to fight, and He covered their heads in the day of battle. Therefore they gladly say: “Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy name be the glory.” (Psalm 115.1)

2. This triumphant song will be sung when the whole body of the redeemed are gathered to sing it with one heart and voice at the great resurrection. At present, we have only a faint idea of the misery from which we have been delivered, or of the happiness that is reserved for us in heaven. But if we attain to the heavenly Zion, and see from its height the smoke of the bottomless pit, which might have been our eternal home, then we shall understand something of the riches of the inheritance of the saints in light. Then we shall sing in more exalted strains than we can at present imagine: "Thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Sermon 45

Divine Support and Protection

**['What shall we then say to these things?] If God be for us,
who can be against us?' Romans 8.31**

When feelings of joy or grief rise very high, language is too poor to express them; and we are lost in silence. The apostle Paul struggled under this difficulty when he tried to express the glories and blessings of the Gospel. Small-minded verbal critics are thus unable to enter into the spirit of his writings. They coldly examine them by the rules of grammar, and think themselves warranted to charge him with grammatical errors. True, he sometimes departs from accepted forms of speech, but there is a grand energy in his manner that is far superior to the frigid criticisms of mere grammarians.

When, for example, he is stating the advantage of being with Christ, he is not content with saying: "It is far better." In the Greek, it reads: "It is far more better" or "much more better." And when he would describe his low opinion of himself, he is not satisfied to say: "least of all saints." He says: "less than the least(est)." (Ephesians 3.8) Such phrases do not imply that he was ignorant of good style; they show us the largeness of his heart.

In the chapter before us, having surveyed God's work of grace, Paul seems to reach a full stop, as though the strongest words were too weak. So he quickly changes from describing to admiring. He has said much, but not enough, so he asks: "What shall we say to these things?" Though this lively phrase does not appear in the text of Handel's *Messiah*, I am unwilling to omit it. It makes a good sequel to our consideration of the sting of death being removed by Christ, and death being swallowed up in victory. It also stands well as an introduction to the following question: "If God be for us, who can be against us?"

Let us consider:

- I. What the phrase implies.
- II. What the inference means.

I. The form of the question is hypothetical. If the assumption is that God is for us, then the conclusion is none can be effectively against us. Many accept this, but hesitate at the word 'if,' and ask: "How shall I know that God is for me?" I offer a few solutions to this question.

Sin has made an awful breach between God and man. We are alienated from Him, and He is justly displeased with us. But God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself. (2 Corinthians 5.19) Therefore He can now receive and pardon the returning sinner. And He accompanies the word of His grace with the power of the Holy Spirit, to make sinners willing to be reconciled to Him. So then, if we are for God, He is for us. If we seek Him, it is because He first sought us. If we love Him, it is because He first loved us. True believers walk with God, but two cannot walk together unless they are agreed. (Amos 3.3)

God and His people therefore agree:

1. That MESSIAH is the Mediator between them. Those who are enlightened to behold His glory accept Him as their beloved Saviour. Without this acceptance there can be no agreement. Jesus is the only door of access into the favour of God. Reason suggests that we amend our ways. But repentance to life is the gift of God, and Jesus, who is exalted to be a Prince and a Saviour, bestows it on those who come to Him. In this respect all who are taught by God agree. However they may differ in some respects, they cordially agree in receiving the Lord Jesus Christ as Lord. (Colossians 2.6)
2. That the great design of the Gospel is that God will purify to Himself a people who shall serve Him in unreserved and persevering obedience. (Luke 1.74-75) Deliverance from the power of sin and Satan, devotion to God, and conformity to His

dear Son, are all included in salvation. The believer knows that he can be happy in no other way. The grace of God that brings salvation teaches us to renounce all ungodliness, and to give ourselves to Him who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and enable us to walk worthy of Him who has called us to His kingdom and glory. (1 Thessalonians 2.12) And this is the desire of His people, to be sanctified wholly.

3. That the ultimate end of their redemption is the praise of His glorious grace (Ephesians 1.6), and that he who glories may glory only in the Lord. (1 Corinthians 1.31) Salvation is of the Lord in every sense: the plan, the price, the power, the application, the consummation. He is its Alpha and Omega, its beginning and end. The praise, therefore, is wholly due to Him. To this claim they willingly consent. With one heart and voice they say: "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thee be all the glory and all the praise." (Psalm 115.1)

If we understand and approve these points, we are engaged for God, and He is engaged for us.

II. "Who can be against us?" We are not to understand this as teaching that those who have God on their side will meet with no opposition, but that all opposition will be in vain.

1. Those whom God is for will have many opponents.

First, they will have the men of this world. Our Lord teaches this expressly: "If you were of the world, the world would love its own. But because you are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hates you." (John 15.19) So does His apostle: "Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you." (1 John 3.13) Till we profess Him, the world will bear with us, but no longer. But when we yield to Him and profess Him before men, they will hate us. They may say no more than that we are good sorts of men, but we have some peculiarities. But some would bribe and intimidate us to forsake Christ and our duty to Him. It is difficult to stem the torrent or avoid the infection of men of this

world, but we must live above both, and know whose we are and whom we serve. And this is the victory that overcomes, even our faith. (1 John 5.1)

Second, the powers of darkness will oppose us. Satan does not usually trouble us while he bears rule over us. But when Christ has freed us from his bondage, he pursues us like a lion pursuing its prey. This is one cause of the world's hatred, for Satan is the god of this world (2 Corinthians 4.4), and he sets all that he can influence – tongues, pens, swords – against those who are on the Lord's side. Therefore the people of God may be known by two marks: Satan fights them, and they fight him. Is your heart really set against sin, the strength of Satan's kingdom? Are you against his will and interest in the world? Have you renounced his service? If so, fear not. God is for you, and none can harm you.

2. No opposition can prevail if God is for us. Who can injure those who are under the protection of omnipotence? Yet it is not always easy to believe this. Even Job's confidence was shaken; but he was upheld and eventually delivered. Scripture is full of instances of God preserving His people against their enemies.

Thus, when Sennacherib invaded Jerusalem, thinking he could easily prevail, he was not allowed to come near it. (Isaiah 37. 29, 33)

Also, when Daniel was cast into the lions' den, he received no more harm than if he were among a flock of sheep. (Daniel 6.23)

The most our enemies can do is kill the body. (Luke 12.4) And of God allows this, still He does not forsake them. Their death is precious in His sight. (Psalm 116.15) They who die in the Lord are blessed. If He is pleased to take us from this world to enjoy His immediate presence, we could desire no more. Stephen, though stoned to death, was no less happy than those who die quietly in their beds. (Acts 7.56-60)

In brief, whatever men or devils may attempt against us, there are three things they cannot do. They may help to wean us from this world, they may make us more earnest in prayer, they may make us more watchful and dependent on God, they may prove our sincerity, the goodness of our cause and the power of Him who is for us – but they can never deprive us of the love with which He favours us, or the grace that He has given us, or the glory that He has prepared for us. Now, what shall we say to these things?

Sadly, there are too many who say: “We care for none of these things.” As to the word spoken to them in the name of the Lord, they will not listen to it, but will do only what goes out of their own mouth. (Jeremiah 44.16-17)

Others say: “Let us continue in sin, that grace may abound.” They do not expressly reject the Gospel, but they take courage from it to go on in their wickedness. Their case is worse than that of the former.

But grace, so often abused, is once more proclaimed in your hearing. The Lord forbid that you should perish with the sound of salvation in your ears!

At present, while you persist in your impenitence and unbelief, I may reverse the words of my text: “If God be against you, who can be for you?” O consider this, before it is too late.

Will your friends comfort you in your dying hour? Will riches profit you in the day of wrath? Will the memory of your sinful ways give you confidence to stand before that great and glorious Lord when you are summoned to appear at His tribunal? May you be wise in time, and flee for refuge to the hope set before you!

Sermon 46

Accusers Challenged

‘Who shall lay anything to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifieth.’ **Romans 8.33**

The whole Scripture is given by inspiration of God; and those who thankfully receive it as His book will not trifle with it by substituting bold conjectural alterations, which seem to some to be amendments. Let the learned men amend the texts of Horace or Virgil [Latin pagan authors], for it is of little importance whether their amendments are correct or not; but let them treat the pages of divine revelation with reverence.

I have already considered the death, resurrection and ascension of Christ. I shall speak only to two points from this verse:

- I. The title here given to believers: “God’s elect.”
- II. Their great privilege: they are justified. “It is God who justifies them.”

I. The persons who will be finally justified by God are styled His ‘elect.’

The connection between peace and truth is very strong. But a mistaken zeal for truth has produced many controversies that have hurt the peace of the people of God. At the same time it has exposed them to the scorn of worldly men.

On the other hand, a pretended regard for peace has prejudiced the truth. But the peace that is procured at the expense of truth is too dearly bought.

Every branch of doctrine belonging to the faith once delivered to the saints is not equally plain to every believer. Some of these doctrines are compared to milk, others to meat. (Hebrews 5.13-14)

The Lord, our great Teacher, leads His children on gradually, from the plainer to the more difficult truths, as they are able to bear them.

Now those who hold the doctrine of an election of grace are called Calvinists. This is used by some as a term of reproach. They insist that Calvin invented it, or that he borrowed it from Augustine. It is enough for me that I find it in the New Testament. And as it is plainly taught, both by our Lord and His apostles, when rightly understood it promotes humility, gratitude and comfort to believers.

My view of it is summarized as follows:

1. All mankind are sinners by nature and practice. (Romans 3.23) Their lives are stained with sin, their hearts are depraved, their minds are blind, they are alienated from God. They are not aware of their guilt or misery. Nor do they desire to return to God.

2. God has given mankind a Saviour, to atone for sin, and to mediate between Himself and men. (John 3.16) By this gift a way was opened for mercy to flow down to sinners without prejudice to God's honour and government. The gift was the fruit of His own rich grace and love. (Romans 5.6,8) It was neither thought of, nor desired, nor deserved, by fallen man.

3. Wherever this love of God to man is made known by the Gospel, God encourages and commands all men everywhere to repent. (Acts 17.30-31) The eternal Word, manifest in human nature and dying on the cross, is spoken of as the highest display of the wisdom and goodness of God. It is designed to give us the strongest sense of the evil of sin, along with the assurance that there is forgiveness with God. (Romans 3.24-25)

4. While blinded by pride and prejudice, enslaved to sinful passions, and under the influence of this present evil world, men neither can nor will receive the truth. (2 Corinthians 4.4; John

6.44; 5.40) Such was the case when it was first preached (Luke 4.28-29; Acts 17.18) and such is the case today.

5. As all mankind spring from one stock, there are not two different kinds of men by nature; those who receive the Gospel are no better than those who reject it. (Ephesians 2.3)

6. Therefore all men, if left to themselves, would reject and despise it. But some, like Saul of Tarsus, even when they oppose it in rage, are changed by a supernatural agency. (Acts 9.1ff)

7. If all men had heard the Gospel in vain, then Christ would have died in vain. But this is prevented by the covenanted office and work of the Holy Spirit, who accompanies His Word with power that saves. He prepares sinners' minds and opens their hearts, as He did in the case of Lydia, so that they understand, receive and love the truth. (Acts 16.14)

8. God was not bound to save any, but He interposed in favour of some as an act of free mercy, to which they had no claim; for if we had a claim, the benefit would be an act of justice, not mercy. And may not the Sovereign of the world do what He will with His own? He has mercy on whom He will have mercy. (Romans 9.18) And He leaves whom He will to harden themselves in impenitence and unbelief. We all deserve to be left; and He, as the potter over the clay, has power and right to make a difference, just as He pleases. And who will say to Him: "What doest Thou?"

9. When sinners are effectually called by the Gospel, then they are visibly chosen out of the world that lies in wickedness. With them, old things pass away, and all things become new. (2 Corinthians 5.17) Their hopes and fears, their companions and pleasures, their pursuits and aims, are all changed. This change is soon noticed by those who know them best. And those who experience it will willingly ascribe it to the grace of God.

10. If they are chosen in time, it follows that they were chosen from eternity. For to the infinite and eternal God there is no past, present or future. If it is His good pleasure to convert a sinner today, He had the same gracious design towards that sinner from eternity.

With regard to those who reject His mercy, even though they are called and invited by the Gospel, He leaves them to their own ruin, which is just. And though they speak against Him for so doing, their mouths will be stopped when He appears and meets them face to face. Then their cobweb excuses will fail them, and they will be condemned because they chose darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. (John 3.19)

II. The great privilege of the elect is that they are justified from all that can be laid to their charge; for it is God Himself who justifies them.

The justification of a sinner by faith in Christ is considered obsolete by many in these 'refined' days. At the Reformation it was the turning point between Protestants and Papists. Luther viewed it as the criterion of a standing or falling church. How important it was to our English Reformers may be known by the writings of Cranmer, Latimer, Philpot and the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England. But we do not need the testimony of men. Judge it by the text before us. The apostle speaks of it as enough to silence every charge, to free believers from all condemnation and to give them eternal life. (Romans 8.30)

Though volumes have been written on the subject, it may be explained in a few words. By the law no flesh can be justified, for all have sinned, or broken the law, but those who believe the Gospel are justified from all things, while those who believe not are condemned already. (Romans 3.19-20; Acts 13.39; John 3.18) Believers are already justified by faith, and have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. (Romans 5.1) They plead guilty to the charge of the law, but they also plead that on the warrant of

God's word of promise they put their whole trust in Jesus as the end of the law for righteousness to every one who believes. (Romans 10.4) And this plea is accepted. "To him that worketh not, but believeth on Him who justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness, and his sins are no more remembered against him. (Romans 4.5; Hebrews 8.12)

This justification is authoritative, complete and final. It is an act of God's mercy that with no less truth can be termed an act of His justice, because it is founded on the mediation of Jesus, which satisfied divine justice. It includes the pardon of sin and admission into the family of God. It is a passing from death to life. (Colossians 1.13) By faith of the operation of God the believing sinner, once far off from God, is brought nigh, accepted in the Beloved, and becomes one with Him.

The sanctification of a believer is imperfect and gradual, but his justification is perfect and instant. He grows in grace and the knowledge of his privileges, but he already has a right to them by the relation in which he stands to God who justifies him. Even the weakest believer is a child of God, and true faith may claim all the promises of God. For God has already justified him.

But especially at the great day the Lord as Judge will ratify publicly before the whole world His sentence of justification of believers. Then every tongue that rises against them shall be silenced. Then Satan shall be confounded.

The right knowledge of this doctrine is a source of abiding joy; it also animates love, zeal, gratitude and cheerful obedience. But it is often misunderstood. Yet if you receive it by divine teaching, it will fill you with those fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God. (Philippians 1.11) But if you learn it only from books, as a notion in your head, instead of having a powerful influence on your heart, it will make you heady, censorious, trifling and unsettled. Oh, be afraid of resembling the foolish virgins! (Matthew 25.1-12)

Sermon 47

The Intercession of Christ

‘Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.’ **Romans 8.34**

The redemption of the soul is precious. The death of the Son of God would have been in vain if it had not redeemed us from sin. There are many ready to accuse, and the charge may be true, but it is over-ruled. Who shall dare to condemn if God has justified? Who dare impeach the hope of every believer that Christ rose again and was admitted into the presence of God on his behalf?

The death and resurrection, ascension and High Priestly intercession can scarcely be considered too often. These old truths are ever new to those who love Him; they are the food by which their souls live. I will not repeat what I have said from previous passages, but will confine myself to the subject of Christ’s intercession. From Hebrews 7.25 we take the word ‘intercession’ in its large sense. He pleads our cause, manages our concerns, answers our enemies. He is our Advocate. (1 John 2.1) He pleads as a priest, and manages as a king, for those who come to God by Him.

I. He pleads as a priest.

His intercession refers back to the Levitical high priest, who typified Him. According to God’s appointment, he entered the holy of holies to present the blood of sacrifice before the mercy seat. (Leviticus 16.2) The design of this instituted priesthood is explained for us in Hebrews 9.6-12. Thus Jesus has passed into the heavens, and entered the holy of holies with His own blood. His presence there in our nature is a ceaseless intercession on our behalf. As our representative He encourages us to approach God, as our Advocate and High Priest, able to save us to the uttermost.

1. When the mind is burdened with guilt our awakened conscience brings us great distress. The sinner is now aware of needs that only God can supply. But when he thinks of the majesty and holiness of God, he is troubled, and dare not draw near to God. But when he is enabled to see Jesus as his Intercessor, what light and comfort he receives! Then let not the weary and heavy laden be afraid to approach God. Your peace is made in the court above, and your Advocate waits to introduce you to His Father. Lift up your heart to Him, and consider Him mentioning your case before the Judge: "Father, I will that he may be delivered from going down into the pit, for I am the ransom Thou hast provided."

2. When we are deeply conscious of our defects in duty, we have great reason to confess that to us belongs shame and confusion. (Daniel 9.7) If we compare our best efforts with the demands of the law, if we consider our sins of omission, if we remember that the little we can do is polluted and defiled by evil thoughts and selfish principles and motives, we are ashamed. But when we recall that Jesus, our Great High Priest, bears the iniquity of our holy things, perfumes our prayers with the incense of His mediation, and washes our tears in His own blood, we are encouraged. Though we are unworthy of the least of His mercies, we humbly hope for a share in the blessings He bestows. Thus the wisdom of God has provided relief for our needy souls.

3. This prevalent intercession abundantly compensates for the poverty of our prayers. We cannot order our own cause before God, or specify our various needs, or fill our mouth with reasons why He should bless us. We know not how to pray as we ought. Indeed, we often forget what we ought to ask, and our prayers are often cold, distracted and formal. How prone we are to rush into the Lord's presence without thought or reverence! But it is well for us that God can do more than we can ask or think. MESSIAH knows our needs, and pleads and provides accordingly. He is not negligent, though too often we are. He prayed for Peter's safety even before Peter himself was aware of his danger. (Luke 22.31-32) And have we not sometimes been surprised and shamed by the

Lord's goodness when He has showered us with mercies before we thought of asking for them? These are proofs of our Intercessor's attention and care.

II. Jesus our High Priest is also a King upon His throne.

He is both king of saints and King of nations. He is not only a righteous Advocate; He is also a powerful monarch. And He rules on behalf of all for whom He intercedes.

1. He is the source of all their supplies. All their springs are in Him: wisdom, grace and consolation. Therefore He says: "If ye ask anything in my name, I will do it." (John 14.14) He therefore invites us to come to Him and drink from His fountain. (John 7.37; Revelation 22.17) On Him the eyes of all who know Him wait from age to age, and are not disappointed. He opens His hand, and satisfies their desires. Nor is His store diminished by His bounty. It is inexhaustible.

2. He appoints unerringly all their circumstances for their good. In His kingdom of grace, He trains up His people as a gardener trains up his plants, giving them rain and sunshine by turns. He delights in their prosperity, but also shows them their need of afflictions. He appoints the bounds of their homes, numbers the very hairs on their heads, and is their guide and guard even unto death. Here they meet with many changes, but none go unnoticed by Him, and none of them can separate them from His love. All their circumstances concur for their endless and unchangeable joy. (2 Corinthians 4.17)

3. He is the Captain of their salvation. (Hebrews 2.10) They are His soldiers, and fight under His leadership; but the battle is not theirs, but His. Against the spirit of the world, flesh and blood, and Satan himself, they fight, but He upholds them and enables them to overcome. Their enemies are too many and too strong for them to overcome in their own strength, but He rebukes them, and gives them victory over them. Thus David acknowledged the Lord's goodness in laying for him a table in the midst of his enemies.

(Psalm 23.5) The powers of darkness surround us, but the Good Shepherd defends us. They rage, but in vain. For He both restrains them and preserves us. Who then can make trouble? (Job 24.29)

We close this part of our subject with three reflections.

1. How precious is this Saviour! How justly is He entitled to the chief place in our hearts! In the work of salvation, from first to last, He is all in all. If He had not died and risen again, we would have died for ever. If He had not ascended into heaven, there to appear in the presence of God for us, we must have been thrust down into hell. If He was not on our side, our enemies would be too hard for us. May we, then, give Him all the glory, cling to Him, and trust in Him alone.

2. How safe are those for whom He cares! While His eyes are on them, and His ears are open to their prayer, and His arm of power stretched forth for their protection, no weapon formed against them can prosper. It is true, many are against them; but God is for them, and will be a very present help in trouble.

3. How much we should pity those who hear of His intercession for sinners without being influenced by it! Will you always be content with only hearing? Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good, and that who trust in Him is blessed. (Psalm 34.8) Should you at last be separated from those with whom you now worship; should you see them admitted into the kingdom of heaven, and yourselves thrust out, your present advantages will only aggravate your sin and misery! Consider who will condemn you! It is God Himself! (Psalm 50.6) From His sentence there is no appeal. His condemnation is final. Dare you exclude yourself from His favour, enter a state of eternal horror and despair without the smallest ray of hope? May the Lord prevent it! But observe, you are warned once more, and invited once more. If you will honestly and earnestly seek Him, He will be found of you. But if you persist in your obstinacy, your condemnation will be inevitable and sure.

Sermon 48

The Song of the Redeemed

‘Thou hast redeemed us to God by thy blood [out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation.] Revelation 5.9

The extent, variety and order of the creation proclaim the glory of God. Even the smallest of His works, such as the human eye or the wing of an insect, are stamped with His wisdom and power. So it is also in His written Word, in which the beauty and accuracy of the smaller parts contribute to the greatness of the whole. A single verse or clause, viewed under the microscope of close meditation, is often found to contain a world of wonders. And though a connected and comprehensive knowledge of the whole of Scripture is desirable, whatever is immediately necessary to confirm our faith, or animate and regulate our practice, is often condensed into a few verses, or even a single sentence. Such is the sentence I have now read before you. In Handel’s *Messiah* it is inserted in the grand chorus taken from verses 12 and 13 of this chapter. And as it may lead us to a summary review of the whole subject, it may also prepare us to join in the song of the redeemed in praise of Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.

The redemption spoken of is suited to sinners of every nation and language. And many of them will by it be gathered into one. (John 11.52) They will form one family, united in one great Head. (Ephesians 3.14-15) When they shall fully realize their hope, as they encircle the throne, they will eternally acknowledge their deliverance and exaltation. They were lost, and could do nothing to recover themselves. Therefore they ascribe all glory to their Saviour. And they sing in strains both loud and sweet: “Thou art worthy, for Thou hast redeemed us to God by Thy blood, out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation.”

But though both their song and their joy will only be consummated in heaven, it begins on earth. Believers are taught to sing it, and they are now learning it in preparation for their performance on high.

The words suggest three main points for us to consider:

I. The benefit – redemption to God.

II. The redemption price – thy blood.

III. The beneficiaries – people from every kindred, tongue, people and nation.

I. The benefit – redemption to God.

Redemption or ransom applies to someone imprisoned for debt or in a state of slavery. These ideas show us something of our fallen state. The law and justice of God make demands on us which we can never meet. We are therefore shut up in unbelief, helpless and hopeless, till someone becomes surety for us. When grace first awakens us to this state, we begin to feel the horrors of our dungeon, and long to be freed from them. But grace proceeds to reveal the Saviour and Friend of sinners who has paid our debt. And when grace further enables us to apply to Him, our chains fall off, the prison doors are opened, and we obtain our liberty.

Satan too, by righteous permission from God, has become our task-master; and he tyrannises over us till Christ sets us free from his tyranny. (John 8.34, 36) Under Satan, a burdened conscience, a wasted constitution, a ruined fortune and character, all follow a life of intemperance and lewdness. Those who try to escape unlawfully are soon recaptured, and their bonds become stronger than before. At most, they only exchange one sinful habit for another. The strong man armed will not let us go until a stronger than he overcomes him, and commands: "Loose him, and let him go, for I have found a ransom." Then, by virtue of the ransom price paid, the prey is taken from the mighty, and the captive is delivered. (Isaiah 49.24-25) Then the enslaved sinner sits at the feet of Jesus in peace, clothed, and in his right mind. (Mark 5.15) He becomes the Lord's freedman.

He has now been redeemed, not only from guilt and slavery; he is redeemed “to God.” He is restored to a state of communion with his Maker, and begins to conform to His will and image. Before, madness was in his heart, but now by grace he is renewed to sound judgment, his mind receives a right direction, and he is turned from darkness to light, from the power of Satan to God. (Acts 26.18)

II. What enhances this deliverance beyond expression is the fact that it is a “redemption.” It is not merely an act of mercy or pardon, but of mercy harmonizing with justice. It is not merely an act of power only, but also of unexampled and expensive love. “Thou hast redeemed us by Thy blood.”

The sentence pronounced on us as lawbreakers was death. Therefore, when MESSIAH became our surety to satisfy the law for us, He must die. The term “His blood” is another way of saying: “He died a bloody death.” Without the shedding of blood there could be no remission of sin. Nor could any other blood answer the demand of the law. Not all the bloody sacrifices ordained through Moses could take away sin, quieten the conscience, and afford a plea with which a sinner could come before the holy God. But MESSIAH’s blood cleanses from all sin. It is effective forever on behalf of all who believe in Jesus. (Romans 3.25-26) Such was the redemption price He paid for sinners.

If we understood these things, would it be thought wonderful that this Saviour is very precious to those who believe on Him? They have obtained redemption by His blood. Grace like this must captivate the heart! Not only does He save, but He died, and that for His enemies! Such costly love, to such unworthy creatures, demands our love in return. Do you think the apostle was too severe when he denounced all who do not love the Lord Jesus Christ? (1 Corinthians 16.22) Oh no; after all Jesus has done and suffered for sinners, they deserve to remain under God’s wrath if they refuse to love Him. And when we declare the terrors of the

Lord to you, we assure you that there is only one door of hope; for unless you love the Lord Jesus, you must perish. If you could see their hearts, you might discover how faithful ministers mourn over those who reject their message, how their disobedience cuts them to the heart, and reduces the comfort they receive from their hearers. If you were to believe us when we tell you that we are ready to give you not only the Gospel, but our own souls also, because you are dear to us, and we long for your salvation, then you would think more favourably of us. But after all, we cannot, we dare not, soften our message to please men. What we find in the Word of God we must declare. It would be at the peril of our own souls to speak smooth things and prophecy deceits to you. (Isaiah 30.10) Insofar as we preach the truth, it will be at the peril of *your* souls, if you disregard us.

III. The beneficiaries.

The redeemed come from out of every kindred, tongue, people and nation. In Sermon 16 I offered you my thoughts on the extent of the virtue of that blood which takes away the sin of the world; but the clause before us invited me to make as few more observations on it.

The redeemed of the Lord are those who actually experience the power of His redemption. They are delivered from the dominion of sin and Satan, and brought into a state of liberty, peace and holiness. That every individual from every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation are not redeemed in this sense is as certain as the express statements of Scripture and the evidence of facts can make it. Millions will be found trembling on the great day at the Lord's left hand. But a remnant will be saved according to the election of grace. Yet those who differ from the ungodly do not make themselves to differ. (1 Corinthians 4.7) We ascribe their difference to the glory of His sovereignty, and acknowledge that it pleased Him to make them His people when before they were not His people.

There is a way of thinking of God's right to do what He will with His own that renders people narrow and selfish and partial. They imagine that they themselves are of the elect, yet they are little concerned what may become of others. It is strange that their notions of divine sovereignty do not keep them from murmuring at the smallest irritations of providence, while raising them above all doubts about their eternal destiny. But what they seem to find plain and easy, the apostle considers unsearchable. (Romans 11.33) Sufficient for us to submit to the will of God as it is plainly revealed in His Word, and to acknowledge that the Judge of all the earth will always do right. Let us not wish His appointments to be other than they actually are. Yet it is a comfort to think that He delights in mercy, and that mercy's bounds exceed all that we may imagine. We must not guess beyond what Scripture warrants.

I have repeatedly expressed my belief that many prophecies of the kingdom of MESSIAH have not yet been perfectly fulfilled. There is a time coming when many of all nations (perhaps the greater part of mankind) from all nations shall know the joyful sound of the Gospel and walk in the light of the Redeemer's face. The vision in Revelation 7.9 ff seems to support this view. While I admit my incompetence to decide positively, I believe the 144,000 sealed in their foreheads (a definite for an indefinite number, frequent in Scripture language) are those who are known to whom they belong by their open and visible separation from the spirit and customs of the world that lies in wickedness. And the great multitude distinguished from these are perhaps 'hidden ones,' such as elect infants and people hidden among the most degenerate communities, as in the Roman and Greek churches. Many nations are engrossed in spiritual darkness, but they are not wholly without Scripture knowledge. Some portions of it are interwoven with their authorized forms of worship, and we trust that some among them have become acquainted with the life and power of godliness. There are likewise among Protestants schemes of doctrine that are no more Scriptural than the grossest errors of Popery; yet here and there we may meet those who, by the work of the Holy Spirit, have been made wiser than their teachers. While still fettered with

ignorance and prejudices, they give proof that their hopes are fixed on the only atonement that satisfied God, and that they are among the redeemed of the Lord.

On the other hand, I cannot approve of those who, on the basis of Acts 10.34-35 (Cornelius), conclude that it is unimportant what people believe, provided that they are sincere in their way. Heathen morality is not that holiness, without which no man can see the Lord. (Hebrews 12.14) Yet there may be some who, under a sense of guilt and a desire for mercy, without the express knowledge of the Saviour, may cry for mercy to the Father of beings, and obtain it. I have no express warrant of Scripture for this conjecture, though I trust it may help to keep us from the narrow, harsh and dogmatic spirit I have mentioned. [We believe Newton would have been well advised to omit this last statement. Editor] At least, my thoughts on this subject may confirm our views of the goodness, power and compassion of our great Redeemer.

Sermon 49

The Chorus of Angels

‘Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing!’
Revelation 5.12

The Queen of Sheba heard a good report of the wisdom and glory of Solomon. It prompted her to take a long journey to visit him, and she was not disappointed. Yet, when she was admitted into his presence, it fell far short of what she saw and heard for herself. Good, too, is the report of the Gospel. It convinces those who believe it of the insignificance of all that they most admired in this world. On receiving it, they set out in hope of seeing Him who is greater than Solomon. While on their journey, this report is their subject, song and joy. But as yet, they are not capable of conceiving His wisdom, glory and grace. What will it be when they see Him as He is?

The scene of Revelation 5 is enough to take our thoughts away from the little concerns of time, and give us some idea of the joys of heaven. The Lamb is on the throne of God, surrounded by countless redeemed people. They were once like yourselves, but now they have a song specially their own. The angels cannot sing their song, for they were never redeemed; but they can enter into its subject; and so they join in the chorus: “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain.”

The number of angels is expressed indefinitely, but the object of their worship is one: God manifest in the flesh. Whether others are pleased or not, we must worship the Lamb that was slain. Let us thankfully consider why He was slain, and how He was slain.

I. Why He was slain.

The redeemed say: FOR US. "He loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood." (Revelation 1.5) They were sinners and slaves, yet He loved them, and died to redeem them. It is by virtue of His blood that they are now before the throne. The magnetism of His love drew their hearts to Him in the hour of grace. (John 12.32) This was both the design and the effect of His death. A crucified Saviour, though a stumbling block to the self-righteous, and foolishness to mere reasoners, was to them the power and wisdom of God to salvation. They looked to Him, and were enlightened; they trusted in Him, and were not ashamed. By faith in His name, they obtained peace with God, renounced the ways of sin, warred a good warfare, overcame the world, and were made more than conquerors. While here, their characters were misrepresented, but now their reproach is removed, and they shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. (Matthew 13.43) And they ascribe all their victories and honours to Him, and unite in one song of endless praise to the Lamb that was slain.

II. How He was slain.

Their praises are heightened when they consider how He was slain. He did not die a natural death. He was slain. Nor did He fall like a hero in battle. He died the death of a criminal. Cruelty, malice and contempt combined to aggravate His sufferings. And after He was slain, few laid it to heart. The world went on as before, just as if nothing had happened. But on this dark background, God in Christ displayed His perfections to their fullest lustre: power, wisdom, riches, strength, honour, glory and blessing. Though each one of these words has a distinct meaning, to feel the combined effect of them all is the best way to promote our reverence, confidence and love. Every kind of excellence belongs to the Lamb that was slain. He is worthy to have them all attributed to Him.

1. Power. Power belongs to God. (Psalm 62.11) And power belongs to the Lamb. He is the Almighty. (Revelation 1.8,10) He exercises His power through His human nature. (Matthew 28.18) He has, therefore, all authority to discharge His office as Mediator

and Head of His Church. The power that can preserve and govern the world belongs to Him.

2. Wisdom. He is the only wise God, and our Saviour. (Jude 25) He is both the wisdom of God and our wisdom. (Proverbs 8.22; 1 Corinthians 1.30) By Him are opened to us the wisdom of the divine counsels, particularly in the great work of redemption. No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has revealed Him. (John 1.18; 15.15) It is by wisdom communicated through Him that His people are made wise to salvation. Though there are few scholars among them, and they are despised for their ignorance, yet they all have a good understanding, for they know the Lord and His will. They are instructed how to please Him, how to bear afflictions, and how to meet death calmly. This wisdom is far superior to that of the universities. And He bestows it. Therefore, both in time and eternity, they admire and adore His wisdom.

3. Riches. All stores of mercy, grace and comfort are in Him, as light in the sun, or water in the ocean. Paul speaks of the unsearchable riches of Christ. (Ephesians 3.8) This gives us an idea of their inexhaustible fullness. And none are sent away empty; when all have been supplied, they are as full as at first.

4. Strength. This is the energy by which He accomplishes His holy purposes. Who can conceive of this? O, how strong is He from whom all created strength is derived, and before whom the strength of creatures is as chaff before the wind! He speaks, and it is done; He commands, and it stands fast. He sets bounds to the waves. (Job 38.10-11) He equally controls moral agents. In a moment He can make men happy in a dungeon and miserable on a throne. And the hedge of His promised protection surrounds all who trust in Him. With His arm He upholds all who fall, and raises up those who are bowed down. (Psalm 145.14) He is a very present help in trouble to all who call on Him. (Psalm 46.1) Therefore those who abide under His shadow are safe, for their Redeemer is strong. And when, in defiance of all their enemies,

they are brought together in His heavenly kingdom, they will with one consent ascribe to Him glory and strength.

5. Honour. All the honour of His people is from Him. Because they are precious in His sight, they are honourable. He clothes them with the garments of salvation, covers them with a robe of righteousness. (Isaiah 66.10) But who can speak of *His* honour, as God-Man and Mediator! We must wait till we see Him receiving the homage of angels and men. For as yet the half has not been told us. Then it will be known by all that He who possesses all wisdom and power, riches and strength, is worthy to receive all honour. Ah, how different He will then appear to that humble form He once assumed when for our sakes He became a man of sorrows, despised, rejected and nailed to the cross!

6. Glory. This is the combined brightness of His holiness, grace, wisdom, truth and love, all revealed in MESSIAH. He is glorious in His works of creation and providence, but as the Lamb in the midst of the throne He is far more glorious. Who is like Him, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders? (Exodus 15.11) Great and marvellous are Thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are Thy ways, Thou King of saints! (Revelation 15.3)

7. Blessing. He is the Author of all the blessings that His people receive, and He is the deserving object of their praise. He blesses them with the light of His face, with liberty, grace and peace. He blesses them daily. He will bless them eternally. Blessed are the people who have Him for their Lord. And although they can make no suitable returns, yet in their way they bless Him. They admire, adore and praise Him. They call on all the powers of their souls to bless Him. They proclaim that He is worthy to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing. Even on earth they stand before Him continually in this delightful exercise of worship; but to bless Him as they ought, without growing weary or being interrupted, is what they mean when they speak of the blessedness of heaven. They see His face,

drink of the pleasures that are at His right hand, and cast down their crowns before Him, saying: Thou art worthy.

The Scriptures declare that He is worthy of all this honour and glory. Then surely they teach that He is true God, the proper object of men's worship. Let us, then, lament the case of those who slight this glorious Redeemer, and refuse to give Him the honour He deserves. Their failure should move us, not to anger or scorn, but to pity and prayer. Are there any among us? Alas, you neither know Him nor yourselves. I am well aware that a thousand arguments of mine will never persuade you; but I can tell you what should make you desire to adopt my view of Him. If He were pleased to give you this moment a sense of the holiness and authority of God, and of your conduct towards Him, your strongest reasons for refusing to honour Him would fall to the ground. Then you would be convinced that He is the true God and eternal life, or you would perish. You would see the need for His atonement, and the uselessness of every atonement except His. (Hebrews 9.26)

The Scriptural doctrines of the depravity of man, the evil of sin, the eternal power and Godhead of the Saviour, the efficacy of His mediation, and the endless misery of all who reject Him, are so closely connected that if the first be received, the mind would open to the rest. And although these truths are generally rejected, it is impossible to prove them false. Therefore trifle with yourselves no longer. They are the truths of God. On the same authority that they stand, stand also the truth that He will give His Holy Spirit to those who ask Him. Let me beg you to prove this by experience. This is where to begin. Instead of speculating and reasoning, humble yourselves before the Lord, pray for His light and influence, read the Scriptures, break off your sinful habits, and follow Him. Then shall you know, if you sincerely follow on to know Him. (Hosea 6.3) But if not, should you perish at last in your obstinacy and unbelief, your ruin will be from yourselves. You have been faithfully warned; I am clear of your blood.

Sermon 50

The Universal Chorus

['And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying:] Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb, for ever and ever.' **Revelation 5.13**

Men have generally agreed to call their thoughts on the ways and works of God 'wisdom.' But the principles they begin with, and the conclusions they reach, are clear proofs of their depravity and folly. A variety of hypotheses have been invented to account for the origin of the universe; and although they all differ from each other, their authors pronounce them with a tone of absolute certainty, as if they had stood by when God spoke everything into being. But if their speculations on creation and the flood have been no better than spiders' webs, their reasoning on morals has been much worse. Here their labours have been not only false, but mischievous. But as long as they refuse the guidance of revelation, they will always wander in the mazes of scepticism and weaken the sense of moral obligation. One insoluble difficulty to them is concerning the origin of evil. That evil is in the world they admit; the Gospel points out its remedy. But they neglect this, and so weary themselves with vain inquiries. The more they reason, the more they entangle themselves in error, till at last they take refuge in axioms that both dishonour God and contradict truth.

By contrast, angels and the redeemed find His works full of the glory of His wisdom and love; and so we find them joining in this sublime song. The redeemed are described in verses 8-10, the angels in verses 11 and 12. Our text represents their universal chorus as they unite with one heart, aim and voice in the praises of God and the Lamb. And O for a coal of fire from the heavenly altar to warm our hearts with love, joy and gratitude, as we close

our meditations on Handel's *Messiah*! May they leave us with the hope of meeting before long around that very throne, there to join them in their praise!

I. The Lord Jesus is not only Head of His redeemed Church, but also of all creation. God's great design from the beginning was to reduce under one Head all things in heaven and on earth. (Ephesians 1.10) He is the Lord and Life of angels and men. The elect angels (1 Timothy 5.21) constitute a branch of that great family named by Him. After reconciling God and sinners by the blood of His cross, He thereby reconciled the redeemed and the holy angels. The latter view the former with kindness, and rejoice over every one of them who repents. They esteem believers in Jesus as their fellow servants. (Revelation 22.9) They are present in our worshipping assemblies, and shall be with us in heaven. Thus they have fellowship with us in worship and service. When sinners are enabled to renounce this world, they are admitted into a better.

II. From this we may form a judgment of the honourable nature of that spiritual worship which is the privilege of the Church of God under the Gospel. When we meet in the name of Jesus, we come to the innumerable company of angels, and to the general assembly and church of the first-born ones. (The Greek of Hebrews 12,23 is plural) By faith we draw nigh to the very gates of heaven, the holiest of all. Here there is none of that pomp and pageantry that obscures the beauty and simplicity of Gospel worship. Some Protestants pride themselves in not being Papists, but if they think Protestantism is nothing more than a putting away of popish ceremonies, they are no better than Papists themselves. To enlightened Protestants, nothing but the Gospel will retain people in a proper observance of the Lord's Day and pure worship, because they account a day in His courts better than a thousand elsewhere. (Psalm 84.10) They know by His promise that He is present in their midst, and so their worship is not a lifeless form, a round of ceremonies, but a glorious spiritual exercise. They behold His glory in the glass of the Gospel, feel His presence, taste His

goodness, and savour His good ointments poured forth into their hearts and characters.

III. Though the Lamb is worthy of all praise, there is a distinct praising of Him who sits on the throne. Only the Scripture can give us right views of God so as to worship Him aright. Too many speak of Him without being aware of their need of a Mediator. Others acknowledge the Deity of Christ but fail to attend to the distinct persons of the Godhead. These three are one God. (1 John 5.7) Those who proudly reject this truth resort to strange interpretations, the claims of criticism, and the appeal to various readings and ancient versions. But these do not relieve them of the fact that the Holy Spirit leads all who are willing to be taught into the true knowledge of the Triune God.

1. They come to God by Christ. Their access is through Him. (Ephesians 2.18) Unworthy to speak for themselves, they pray in His name (Philippians 2.10) and come to God by Him. (Hebrews 7.25) They cannot live without Him, yet they dare not approach the Father without an assurance that He is their Advocate with the Father. (1 John 2.1)

2. They come to God in Christ. He is the great Temple in which they bring their worship to God. Sometimes they pray directly to Him as the second person of the Godhead. But being in Christ by grace, they are accepted only as they come to God in Him.

IV. This solemn worship terminates on Him who sits on the throne. The mediatorial kingdom of Christ will come to an end when God has placed all His enemies under His feet. Then He will deliver it up to the Father, that God may be all in all. (1 Corinthians 15.28) At present, as Man, He is subject to the Father; but then He will hand over all government to the Father. And He who is called MESSIAH will forever be the Head of the new creation, the medium of communion between God and His people, and God in Him will be the object of their eternal adoration and praise. Then the grand end of all God's counsels will be

completely attained. The glory of the Creator and Lawgiver, and the splendour of all His perfections will forever shine with a brightness that could never be known on earth.

Thus I have tried to point out the meaning and importance of the texts of Handel's oratorio *Messiah*. Great is the Lord MESSIAH, and greatly to be praised! Imperfect as my attempt has been, I cannot doubt that the topics I have insisted on are the very truths of God. For what is my own, with all its defects and weaknesses, I entreat His forgiveness, and request your candour.

It is probable that those of you who admire this oratorio, and are often present when it is performed, will think my opinion – that its words are the most improper for public entertainment – harsh. But I can rate it no better, whether performed in a church or a theatre, than any other fashionable amusement that marks this age of dissipation. For the very reason that its subject is serious and solemn, and though the music is strikingly adapted to its subject, if you are unaffected by the Redeemer's love, or uninfluenced by His commands, I am afraid it is no better than a profaning of God's name and a crucifying of the Son of God afresh. You must judge for yourselves. If you think differently from me, at least I pray that the next time you hear it performed, God may bring something I have said in these sermons to bear on your eternal welfare.

I trust too that some who were strangers to the power and grace of MESSIAH when I began the series are now willing to seek Him with their whole hearts.

Yet I fear that some of you remain unchanged in your thoughts of the Saviour. I beg you to consider, if you die in this frame of mind, and unless you repent, you will be excluded from the worship just described. If the Scribes and Pharisees were envious when the children sang Hosanna to the Son of David (Matthew 21.15), what must their anguish and remorse, their rage and despair be, when the whole creation shall join in His praise, and they left out? O tremble at your danger, lest your lot be with them forever!

