


# Sermons of John Newton

Based on Scripture Passages  
Used in Handel's 'Messiah' Part 2

## Booklet Eleven

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24. Messiah's Innocence Vindicated - Isaiah 53:8  
25. Messiah Rising from the Dead - Psalm 16:10  
26. The Ascension of Messiah to Glory - Psalm 24:7-10

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- 24. Messiah's Innocence Vindicated,
- 25. Messiah Rising from the Dead and
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#### 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.*

Let not plain Christians be stumbled because there are difficulties in the prophetic parts of the Scriptures, and because translators and expositors sometimes explain them with some difference, as to the sense. Whatever directly relates to our faith, practice, and comfort, may be plainly collected from innumerable passages, in which all the versions, and all sober expositors agreed. That there are some differences, will not appear strange, if we consider the antiquity of the Hebrew language, and that the Old Testament is the only book extant, which was written during the time that it was the common language of the people. For this reason we meet with many words which occur but once; and others, which do not occur frequently, are evidently used in more than one sense. If we suppose that a time should come, when the English language should be no longer spoken, and no more than a single volume in it be preserved, we may well conceive that posterity might differ, as to the sense of many expressions, notwithstanding the assistances they might obtain, by comparing the English with the French, Dutch, and other languages, which were in use at the same period. Such assistance, we derive from the Chaldee, Syriac, Greek, and other ancient versions of the Old Testament, sufficient to confirm us in the true sense of the whole, and to throw light upon many passages otherwise dark and dubious; and yet, there will remain a number of places, the sense of which, the best critics have not been able to fix with certainty. Farther, the prophecies are usually expressed in the style of poetry,

which, in all languages, is remote from the common forms of speaking. The grand evidence to a humble mind, that the Holy Scripture was originally given by inspiration of God, and that the version of it, which by His good Providence we are favoured with, is authentic, is, the effect it has upon the heart and conscience, when enlightened by the Holy Spirit. And without this internal, experimental evidence, the learned are no less at a loss than the vulgar.

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

“God was manifested in the flesh” (1 Timothy 3:16) and, in the flesh, He suffered as a malefactor. Undoubtedly the divine nature is incapable of suffering; but the human nature, which did suffer, was assumed by Him “who is over all, God, blessed for ever” (Romans 9:5). But He was justified in the Spirit; and sufficient care was taken, that in His lowest humiliation, though He was condemned and reviled, His character should be vindicated. I shall, therefore, consider, at present, the testimonies given to His innocence. Though He was cut off out of the land of the living, it was only as a substitute for others. He was stricken, for the transgression of His people.

1. The first attestation, and which of itself is fully sufficient to establish this point, is that of Judas. He was one of the twelve

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

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

2. Though Pilate, likewise, condemned MESSIAH to death, to gratify the importunity of the Jews, he repeatedly declared his firm persuasion of His innocence. And he did it with great solemnity. "He took water, and washed his hands," publicly, "before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person" (Matthew 27:24). He labored for His release, though the fear of man prevailed upon him at last, as it has upon many, to act

in defiance to the light and conviction of his conscience. And from him we learn that Herod, notwithstanding he mocked Him and set Him at naught, considered the accusations of His enemies to be entirely groundless (Luke 23:15). And farther, when the Jews proposed such an alteration of the title affixed to His cross, as might imply that the claims our Lord had made were unjust and criminal, Pilate utterly refused to comply with their demand.

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

4. Though the salvation of men, and the honour of the law of God, required that when MESSIAH undertook to make an atonement for our sins, He should be thus given up to the rage and cruelty of His enemies, suffer all the infamy due to the worst and vilest transgressors, and be deserted by God and man; yet, His Heavenly Father, bore a signal and solemn testimony to His

character. The frame of nature sympathized with her suffering Lord. The heavens were clothed with sackcloth; the sun withdrew his shining; the sanctuary was laid open, by the rending of the veil of the temple from the top to the bottom; the earth trembled greatly; the rocks were rent; the graves opened; and the dead arose. These events, in connection with what had passed before, extorted an acknowledgement of His innocence from the Roman centurion, who was appointed to attend His execution.

Thus it appears, that Judas who betrayed Him; the Jewish council, which could not find sufficient ground, even though they employed false and suborned witnesses, to pass sentence upon Him; Herod, who derided Him; Pilate, who condemned Him; the malefactor, who suffered with Him; and the commander of the soldiers who crucified Him, all combined in a declaration of His innocence: God Himself confirming their word, by signs and wonders in heaven, and upon earth.

It may seem quite unnecessary to prove the innocence of Him, who in His human nature was absolutely perfect, and in whom, the presence and fullness of God dwelt. And it is, indeed, unnecessary to those who believe in His name. It is, however, a pleasing contemplation to them, and has an important influence upon their faith and hope. In this they triumph, “that He who knew no sin Himself, was made sin,” was treated as a sinner for them, “that they might be made the righteousness of God in Him.” “The High Priest of our profession needed not,” as those who typified His office of old, “to offer up sacrifice, first for His own sins, and then for the sins of the people,” for He was perfectly holy, harmless, and undefiled. And had He not been a lamb without spot or blemish, He could not have been accepted on our behalf. It was the perfection of His voluntary obedience to the law of our nature, under which He submitted to be made, which, conjoined with the excellence of His character as the Son of God, made Him meet [qualified], able, and worthy, to expiate our transgressions. “By the one offering”—of Himself, once offered, “He has made an end of sin, brought in an everlasting righteousness, and having appeared with His own blood within the veil, in the presence of God for us, and ever living to make intercession for all who come unto God by

Him,” He is proposed in the Gospel as “the Author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him.” “In Him, all the seed of Israel shall be justified and shall glory” (Isaiah 45:17, 25). In Him the true Israel, the partakers of the faith of Abraham shall be saved, “saved to the uttermost,” “saved with an everlasting salvation; they shall not be ashamed, nor confounded, world without end.”

But who that knows these things, can sufficiently commiserate the fatal effects of that unbelief, which blinds and hardens the hearts of multitudes! especially that more learned, and informed, and, therefore more inexcusable unbelief, which characterizes the modern patrons of scepticism. They read and admire ancient history. There is no old story so frivolous, or improbable, but it is sufficient to engage their attention, and to exercise their acumen, if it be found in \* Herodotus, or \* Livy. They spare no pains, they perplex themselves, and weary their readers, with their attempts to decipher an ancient inscription, or to fix the date, or reconcile the circumstances of a supposed event, which after all, perhaps, never took place, but in the imagination of the writer. Their implicit deference to such uncertain authorities as these, often verges upon the border of extreme credulity. The Bible is an ancient history likewise, and if it was only received upon the footing of the rest, as merely a human composition, the facts which it relates, and the manner in which they are related, the admirable simplicity of narration in some parts, the unrivalled sublimity [excellence, grandeur, beauty] of description in others; the justness and discrimination of characters; the views it unfolds, of the workings of the human heart, and the springs of action, so exactly conformable to experience and observation, might surely recommend it to their notice. And possibly, if it did claim no higher authority than a human composition, men, who have any just pretensions to taste, would admire it, no less, than they now undervalue it. But because it does not flatter their pride, nor give indulgence to their corrupt propensities, they are afraid to study it, lest the internal marks of its divine original, should force unwelcome convictions upon their minds. Therefore they remain willingly ignorant of its contents, or the knowledge they discover of it is so very superficial, that a well-instructed child of ten years

of age may smile at the mistakes of critics and philosophers. That such a book is extant, is undeniable. How can they account for its production? A view of what they have actually done, will warrant us to assert that the wisest men of antiquity, neither would have written such a book if they could; nor were they able, had they been ever so willing. And yet we have as good evidence, that the New Testament was written by plain and unlearned men, as we have for any fact recorded in history. How could such men, invent such a book! And how could they, without seeming directly to design it, but incidentally, as it were, represent that persons of such various characters, who concurred in putting Jesus to death, should all equally concur in establishing the testimony of His innocence!

\* Herodotus - Greek historian of the fifth Century.

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

True Christians, when they suffer unjustly, may learn, from the example of their Lord, to suffer patiently. The Apostle presses this argument upon servants (1 Peter 2:18-21)—who in those days were chiefly bond-servants, or slaves. He, therefore, evidently supposes that the knowledge of the Gospel was sufficient to qualify people, in the lowest situations of human life, with a fortitude and magnanimity of spirit of which philosophy could scarcely reach the conception. In effect, to be much taken up with the interests of self, to live upon the breath of others, to be full of resentment for every injury, and watchful to retaliate it, these are the properties and tokens of a little and narrow mind. It requires no energy, no sacrifice, no resolution, to acquire such a disposition; for it is natural to us, and powerful and habitual, in the weakest and least respectable characters. But to act uniformly as the servants of God, satisfied with His approbation, under the regulation of His will, and, for His sake cheerfully to bear whatever hardships a compliance with duty may expose us to, enduring grief, suffering wrongfully, and acting in the spirit of benevolence and meekness, not only to the good, but also to the froward; this indicates a true nobleness of soul. And to this, we are called, by our profession; for thus Christ suffered. He did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth; yet He was reviled, but He reviled not again. He suffered, though innocent; but He threatened not. He was crucified by



wicked men; but He prayed for them, while they were nailing Him to the cross. This was an eminent branch of the mind that was in Christ, and it ought to be a distinguishing feature in the character of His people. For, is the disciple above his Lord? or should the conduct of the disciple contradict that of his Lord? Undoubtedly, so far as we are partakers in the doctrine of His sufferings, and have real fellowship with Him in His death, we shall resemble Him. "If we say, we abide in Him, we ought to walk even as He walked" (1 John 2:6). But they, who, calling themselves Christians, are full of the spirit of self-justification, contention, and complaint; while they profess to believe in Him, deny Him by their works. The Apostles, Peter and John, deeply affected by their obligations to Him, and by the exquisite pattern of meekness and tenderness which He had set before them, departed from the presence of the council, not swelling with anger, nor hanging down their heads with grief, "but rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His sake" (Acts 5:41). And He deserves no less from us, than He did from them. It was for us, no less than for them, that He endured reproach, and was content to die as a malefactor, though He was innocent.

## **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 summarily proved from the character of its Author. If an infidel was so far divested of prejudice and prepossession, as to read the history of Jesus Christ, recorded by the Evangelists, with attention, and in order to form his judgment of it, simply and candidly, as evidence should appear; I think he must observe many particulars in his spirit and conduct, so very different from the prevailing sentiments of mankind, as to convince him, that man, in his present state, could not possibly have conceived the idea of such a character. Poets, and historians, have often employed their powers in delineating, what appeared to them, the great, and the excellent, in human conduct. But how different are the pictures of their admired heroes, sages and

legislators, from the portrait of the Saviour, as it is drawn, with the utmost simplicity, by plain, unlettered men, who, without art or affectation, only describe what they profess to have seen and heard. I fix, at present, upon a single consideration, which, perhaps, cannot be expressed more properly, or forcibly, than in the words of an ingenious \* writer, now living:—"He [Jesus Christ] is the only founder of a religion, in the history of mankind, which is totally unconnected with all human policy and government, and, therefore, totally uncondusive to any worldly purpose whatever. All others, Mahomet, Numa, and even Moses himself, blended their religious institutions with their civil, and by them, obtained dominion over their respective people; but Christ neither aimed at, nor would accept of any such power. He rejected every object (John 18:36) which all other men pursue, and made choice of those which others fly from and are afraid of. He refused power, riches, honours, and pleasure; and courted poverty, ignominy, tortures, and death. Many have been the enthusiasts and impostors, who have endeavoured to impose on the world, pretended revelations; and some of them from pride, obstinacy, or principle, have gone so far, as to lay down their lives, rather than retract: but I defy history to show one, who ever made his own sufferings and death (John 12:24, 32, 33), a necessary part of his original plan, and essential to his mission. This Christ actually did, He foresaw, foretold, declared their necessity, and voluntarily endured them (John 12:33, 34)."

\* Soame Jenyns (1704-1787) - "Internal Evidence of the Christian Religion p33, 34. Edit. 3."

The death of our Lord was, indeed, essential to His plan; as such, it was constantly in His view, and He often spoke of it. Probably it was the whole of His enemies' plan, and when they saw Him dead, buried, and the sepulchre sealed, they triumphed in their success, and expected to hear of Him no more. But the Scriptures, which were read in their synagogues every Sabbath day, foretold His resurrection from the dead. The text before us, if there were no other, is a sufficient proof of this, to those who acknowledge the authority of the New Testament, since it is expressly applied to Him by the Apostles, Peter and Paul.

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

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

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

likewise, to resume the life He had laid down for His sheep; and He arose the third day, to exercise all power and authority in heaven and in earth.

His resurrection, therefore, is the grand principal fact, upon which the truth and importance of Christianity rests. For though Christ died, if He had not risen again, “your faith, and our preaching, would be in vain.” We should be “yet in our sins” (1 Corinthians 15:17). And though it was not necessary that His resurrection should have been so publicly known, at the time, as His crucifixion, the evidence for it is strong and decisive. No one point of ancient history is capable of such clear, accumulated proof. The apostles frequently saw Him, conversed with Him, ate and drank with Him, and were assured, that it was He, by many infallible proofs. They could not be deceived themselves, nor could they have any temptation to deceive others. They declared His resurrection to the very people who put Him to death; and they confirmed it by many indisputable miracles, which they performed in His name. They persevered in this testimony, in defiance of the malice of the Jews, and the scorn of the heathens. And by this doctrine of a crucified risen Saviour, though unsupported by the patronage of human power, yea, though opposed by it, in every place, they effected that change in the moral world wherever they went, which the philosophers had not been able to produce, by all their instructions, in a single instance; turning men, whom they found under the strongest prejudices of education and habit, “from darkness to light, and from the worship of dumb idols to serve the living and true God” (1 Thessalonians 1:9).

But there are proofs of this point which depend not upon arguments or history, which require neither learning, genius, nor study to comprehend; but are equally adapted to persons of all capacities, and in all circumstances. These are the effects which this doctrine produces on the hearts of those who truly receive it upon the authority of Scripture, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, whose office it is to open the eyes of the mind, to take of the things of Jesus, (what the Scripture reveals of His person, offices, and glory) and to present them, with infallible light and evidence, to those who humbly yield themselves to His teaching. These are

made partakers “of the power of His resurrection” (Philippians 3:10). It delivers them from guilt and fear, animates them with confidence towards God, weans them from the love and spirit of this evil world, inspires them with great and glorious hopes, and delivers them from the fear of death. They “are risen with Christ,” by faith, “and seek the things which are above” (Colossians 3:1). where they know their Lord and Saviour is seated in glory.

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

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

1. As MESSIAH was “delivered,” that is delivered up, as a hostage to the demands of justice, “for our offences,” so they know that “He was raised again for our justification” (Romans 4:25). By

virtue of that union, which subsists between MESSIAH, as the Head of His Body the Church, and all His members; that is, all in the successive ages of the world, who believe in Him by a faith of divine operation: He is their legal representative; He and they are considered as one. His sufferings, His whole humiliation and obedience unto death, is so imputed to them, that they, thereby, are exempted from condemnation; and though not from all sufferings, yet, from all that is properly penal, or, strictly, a punishment. What they suffer, is only in a way of discipline or chastisement; and to them a token, not of wrath, but of love. On the other hand, as He by His resurrection, was vindicated, justified from the reproaches of His enemies, declared to be the Son of God with power, and raised to glory; they have fellowship with Him herein. God exalted Him to glory, “and gave Him a name above every name, that their faith and hope might be in God” (1 Peter 1:21). They are not only pardoned, but accepted in the Beloved. And after this state of discipline is ended, they shall be treated as if they had never sinned. For if sins are sought for, in that day they shall not be found. If any charge should be brought against them, it shall be overruled—by this comprehensive unanswerable plea—“Christ that died, yea, rather, that is risen again; appears in the presence of God,” acknowledges them as His own, and “makes intercession for them” (Romans 8:33, 34). Among men, a criminal may obtain a pardon, may escape the sentence he has deserved, and yet be left in a destitute and miserable condition. But justification is God’s manner of pardoning sinners, according to the sovereignty and riches of His grace in the Son of His love. Those whom He pardons, he also justifies; and whom He justifies, He also glorifies. And even now in this life, though it doth not yet appear what they shall be, though their present privileges are far short of what they hope for, “and though eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of man, to conceive what God hath prepared for them” (1 Corinthians 2:9); yet even now are they “the children of God” (1 John 3:2)—and in the midst of their trials and infirmities, though conscious of much defect, and many defilements, in their best hours and services; and though they have not forgotten their iniquities and provocations, when they lived

without God in the world, yet, according to the measure of their faith, exercised upon their Saviour, who was raised for their justification, they can rejoice in the knowledge of their acceptance, and rely upon Him for their perseverance; and they dare approach the great, holy, heart-searching God, as to a Father, and pour out their hearts before Him with greater freedom than they can use to their dearest earthly friends. And while they feel and confess themselves unworthy of the smallest of His mercies, they are not afraid to ask for the greatest blessings His bounty can bestow, even to be set as a seal upon His heart, and upon His arm, to be filled with all His communicable fullness, and to claim Him as their everlasting portion.

2. The resurrection of Christ from the dead, is a pledge and specimen of that almighty power which is engaged on their behalf, to overcome all the obstacles, difficulties and enemies they are liable to meet with in their pilgrimage, which threaten to disappoint their hopes, and to prevent them from obtaining their heavenly inheritance. The first communication of a principle of faith and spiritual life to their hearts, whereby they are delivered from the dominion of sin, and from the spirit and love of the world, is attributed to “the exceeding greatness of that might power,” which raised the dead body of their Lord from the grave, and set Him at His own right hand, “far above all principality and might, and every name that is named” (Ephesians 1:19-21). And often the Church, collectively, in its militant state, and the individuals which compose it, in their personal concerns, have been brought, to outward appearance, exceeding low. Their enemies have seemed upon the point of triumphing, and saying, Down with them, even to the ground. Such was the boast of the Jewish rulers, when they had slain the Shepherd, and dispersed His flock. But it was a short-lived boast. He arose, He ascended, He took possession of His Kingdom for Himself, and for them. He poured out His Holy Spirit upon them, and they went forth preaching His Word, which spread like the light of advancing day, from Judea to Samaria, and to the distant parts of the earth. The united force of the powers of hell and earth, endeavoured to

suppress it, but in vain. Many nations and kingdoms laboured to extirpate the very name of Christianity from among men, but they successively perished in the attempt; and the cause, against which they raged, is still preserved. “It is founded upon a Rock, and the gates of hell cannot prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18). Nor can any weapon prosper that is formed against the weakest and meanest of those who sincerely espouse this cause. He, to whom they have devoted and entrusted themselves, has promised “that none shall pluck them out of His hands” (John 10:28). And while He remains faithful to His Word, and able to fulfil it, they shall be safe. Yet they are often pressed above measure, beyond strength, insomuch that they, perhaps, despair even of life. But when they are at the lowest, the Lord is their helper; and they are taught, by the exigencies they pass through, to trust, not in themselves, “but in God who raiseth the dead” (2 Corinthians 1:9). It is, indeed, the Lord’s usual method of training up His people, to an habitual dependence upon Himself. When He has raised their expectations by His promises, He permits, as it were, a temporary death to overcloud their prospect; and that which He has said He will surely do for them, appears for a season, to the judgment of sense, impracticable and hopeless. We might illustrate this point at large from the history of Abraham, of Israel in Egypt, of David, and of the rebuilding of the second temple. And I doubt not, but it might be illustrated from the history of many in this assembly. If you have been walking with God for any considerable time, you have met with turns and changes, which have almost put you to a stand. You have been, and perhaps now are, in such circumstances that you feel you have no resource in yourself, and you are sure that the help of man cannot relieve you; “but while your help is in the name of the LORD who made heaven and earth” (Psalm 124:8), and while you are warranted to trust in Him, who raiseth the dead, you have no just reason to despond. It was a dark season with the disciples, when their Lord, whom they loved and in whom they trusted, that it had “been He who should have redeemed Israel” (Luke 24:21), was condemned, and put to death. But the appointed third day relieved their fears, and turned their mourning into joy.



3. His resurrection is the pledge and pattern of ours. As certainly as Christ the firstfruits is risen, so certainly shall they that are Christ's arise at His coming. And each of His people shall arise, "aliusque & idem"—another, and yet the same. Their bodies, though properly their own, shall be changed, "and fashioned like unto His glorious body" (Philippians 3:21). This corruptible must put on incorruption; and the body, which is sown in dishonour and weakness, be raised in power and glory. Flesh and blood, in its present state, cannot inherit the Kingdom of God. The body, in this life, is a clog and a burden to those who place their chief happiness in the service of God, and in communion with Him. It is a vile body, defiled by sin, and it defiles their best desires and noblest efforts. Even the grace of the Holy Spirit, by which they live, though perfectly pure in itself, is debased when communicated to them, and exercised under the disadvantages of a sinful nature, as the best wine, will receive a taint, if poured into a foul vessel. The body, in another view, is a prison in which the soul, confined and pent up, is limited in its operations, and impeded in its perceptions of divine things. Though we are probably surrounded by the glorious realities of the spiritual world, only short and transient glances of them are discoverable by us; we see but by reflection, and darkly (1 Corinthians 13:12); we know but in part, and should know nothing of them, but for the good report of the Word of God. Farther, the body, as it is the seat of innumerable infirmities, and the medium which connects us with the calamities incident to this mortal state, is often a great hindrance to our most desirable enjoyments. Pain and sickness call off the attention, and indispose our faculties, when we wish to be most engaged in prayer, detain us from the ordinances, or prevent the pleasure we hope for in waiting upon the Lord in them. But our new, spiritual, and glorified bodies, will be free from all defilement, or defect. They will be completely qualified to answer the best wishes, and most enlarged activity of the soul. Then, but not till then, we hope to be all eye, all ear, always upon the wing of His service, and perfectly conformed to His image, in light, holiness, and love; for then we "shall see Him as He is," without any interposing veil or cloud (1 John 3:2).

## 26. The Ascension of Messiah to Glory

*“Lift up your head, 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 institutions of the Levitical law were a “shadow” or “sketch” of good things to come. They exhibited a faint and general outline of the mediation and glory of MESSIAH. They may be compared to the delicate engravings on a seal, the beauty and proportions of which cannot be plainly discerned without the assistance of a magnifying glass. The Gospel answers to such a glass. Beheld through this medium, the miniature delineations of the law, which to the eye of unassisted un-humbled reason, appear confused and insignificant; display a precision of arrangement in the parts, and an importance of design in the whole, worthy the wisdom of their great Author.

From the similarity of the subject of this twenty fourth Psalm and the sixty eighth, it is at least probable that they were both composed upon the same occasion—the removal of the Ark of the Lord from its last stationary residence, to its fixed abode in Zion, when the king, the priests, the singers and the harpers all assisted in the procession; attended by a great concourse of the people. The language of the latter part of the Psalm is evidently alternate. And we may conceive that when the Ark approached the Tabernacle, the priests and Levites who accompanied it demanded admittance for it in these words, “Lift up you heads, O ye gates,” etc., and were answered by those who were waiting within to receive it, “Who is the King of glory?” To which question the proper reply is made, “The LORD of hosts, He is the King of glory.”

This, if taken according to the letter of history, was a grand and solemn transaction. But at the same time it was a type [prophetic symbol] of an event unspeakably more glorious. They who know that the Scriptures of the Old Testament testify of Christ, that it is

He of whom Moses in the Law, David in the Psalms, and all the succeeding prophets wrote, will I think, agree in considering this passage as referring to His ascension, in the nature in which He suffered, into the true holy place in the heavens, as the representative and High Priest of His people; when, after having by His own self purged our sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high. Then having spoiled principalities and powers, He triumphed over them openly, though not in the view of mortal eyes. He lifted up His hands, and blessed His apostles, and while in this attitude He was parted from them (Luke 24:51). He ascended gently and gradually, and they, admiring and adoring, beheld Him with fixed attention, till a cloud concealed them from their sight (Acts 1:9). The pomp and triumph of His ascension were displayed in the invisible world. But this description, accommodated to our apprehensions, is given to assist the faith of His people; that their hearts may be comforted, their meditations enlarged, and that in the exercise of grateful love, they may follow Him in their thoughts, ascend with Him into the heavenly places, and rejoice in His glory.

We conceive of Him, therefore, from this sublime passage, as ascending to His Father and our Father; to His God and our God; accompanied with a train of worshipping angels, who demand admittance for MESSIAH the Saviour and friend of sinners, as the King of glory. The question is asked, who is He that claims this honour? An answer is given, asserting His character, His victories, and the justice of His claims—The LORD of Hosts, the LORD strong in battle, He is the King of glory!

The principal points which offer to our consideration, are,

1. His title, “the LORD of Hosts.”
2. His victories, implied in the expression “The LORD strong and mighty in battle.”
3. His mediatorial title, “the King of glory.”
4. His authoritative entrance into the holy place

1. MESSIAH , who humbled Himself to the death of the cross, “is the LORD of Hosts.” He is so, if the Scripture be true; I attempt no other proof. This is a point not referred to in the discussion of

our fallen reason, but proposed by the authority of God in His Word, as the foundation of our faith and hope. He is the husband of the Church; and the husband of the Church is the LORD of Hosts (Isaiah 54:5). It was the LORD of Hosts whom Isaiah saw seated upon a throne, His train filling the temple (Isaiah 6:1). The vision filled him with astonishment, and he cried out, “Woe is me, I am undone; for mine eyes have seen the LORD of Hosts.” But the Apostle John assures us, that when Isaiah said these things he saw His glory and spake of Him (John 12:41). This is the title of God in the Old Testament; or, as some choose to speak, of the Supreme Being. And it is ascribed to MESSIAH in many places. Therefore if He were not the LORD of Hosts, the Scripture would be chargeable with authorizing, yea, with enjoining idolatry. But He is “the true God and eternal life” (1 John 5:20): and they who give Him the true honour due to His name, have everything to hope for, and nothing to fear.

2. He is “the LORD, strong and mighty in battle.” It was in His human nature that by Himself He engaged with His enemies and ours, and the victory was the LORD’s. Therefore, tho’ He “trod the winepress alone, and of the people there was none with Him” (Isaiah 63:3), His own arm brought Him salvation. He is the Conqueror of Satan, sin, and death. We were under the domination of these, therefore for our sakes He engaged in conflict with their united force. He fought, He bled, He died; but in dying He conquered. The strength of sin is the law. He subdued this strength by obeying the precepts of the Law, and by sustaining the penalty due to our transgressions. He defeated death, and disarmed it of its sting. He destroyed him that had the power of death, Satan. He shook, He overturned the dominions of his kingdom, broke open the prison-doors, released his prisoners, delivered the prey out of the hand of the mighty, “and having spoiled principalities and powers, He made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it” (Colossians 2:15) that is, His cross. The Apostle alludes to the manner of a Roman triumph, in which the conqueror was drawn in a chariot of state, attended by his officers and soldiers; the principal prisoners followed in chains, and all the treasures and

trophies, gained from the vanquished enemy, were displayed to adorn the procession. Thus MESSIAH subdued the strength and policy of the powers of darkness, in the hour of His lowest humiliation, when He hung and expired upon the cross; and, when He ascended on high He triumphed over them, gloriously leading captivity captive (Psalm 68:18). Satan, though still an enemy to His Church and Cause, is despoiled of his dominion; his power is only permissive, and in his fiercest assaults, he is limited by bounds which he cannot pass; by a chain which he cannot break. And all his attempts are controlled and overruled, to the furtherance of the Cause he would suppress, and to the good of the persons whom he would worry and destroy. They are made acquainted with his devices, furnished with armour sufficient to repel him; and they fight under encouragement of a sure promise, that the God of peace will shortly and finally bruise Satan under their feet. As MESSIAH their King has conquered for them, so they in due time shall be made more than conquerors, by faith in His blood, and by the word of His testimony.

3. The title of “King of glory,” I understand as being peculiarly applicable to Him in the character of Mediator. The glory of His divine nature is essential to Him. But in consequence of His obedience unto death, He obtained in the human nature, “a name that is above every name” (Philippians 2:9). He suffered as a man, yea, as a malefactor; there was no appearance of glory in that form of a servant which He assumed for our sakes. Though without sin, He was made in the likeness of sinful flesh, subject to poverty, disgrace, and death; but the same man who was crucified, dead, and buried, received glory and authority at His resurrection, and was highly exalted to the administration of all dominion and government. Perhaps the world glory is not easily defined. We conceive it as expressing brightness and splendour. The glory of Solomon was the combined effect of his wisdom, power, and riches; which distinguished him, from other men, in his character, conduct, and appearance. The glory of the sun, is its effulgence and influence. The word glory, when applied to the blessed God, seems to denote that manifestation of Himself by which His

intelligent creatures are capable of knowing Him; for in Himself, He is infinite, inaccessible, and incomprehensible, and dwells in that light which no man, which no creature, can approach unto (1 Timothy 6:16). Of this manifestation there are various degrees.—is glory shines in the creation. Not only do the heavens declare it by their immensity (Psalm 19:1), and furnish us with an idea of His unspeakable greatness, who has sent forth ten thousand worlds to tell us, that He resides above them all; but the smallest of His works, the grass and flowers of the field, the insects which creep upon the ground (Psalm 104:24, 25), bear an impression of His wisdom and goodness, an inimitable criterion of His wonder-working hand, which so far displays His glory.—To an attentive and discerning mind, His glory shines in His Providence; in His preserving the world which He has made; in supplying the various wants of His creatures, and particularly in His moral government of mankind. Here, besides His wisdom, power, and general goodness, we discover some traces of His character as the righteous Judge of the earth. But to our limited capacities and views, this glory is obscured by many difficulties. Though “righteousness and judgment are the habitation of His throne, yet clouds and darkness are round about Him” (Psalm 97:2).—By His holy Word, His revealed will, we are favoured with a still brighter display of His glory, in the perfections of holiness, justice, truth, and mercy, which fallen man is unable clearly to discover in His works of creation and providence.—But chiefly His Son is “the brightness of His glory, and the express image of His Person” (Hebrews 1:3). No one hath seen God at any time, but “the only-begotten Son who is in the bosom of the “Father” (John 1:1), intimately acquainted with His counsels, “He hath declared Him.” This was the great design of His Advent, to make God known to man: for it is life eternal to know the only true God, so He is only to be known in and by Jesus Christ, whom He has sent (John 17:3), and who is the Way and the Door, and there is no entrance to the knowledge of God but by Him. In the Person and Work of MESSIAH, the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, the brightness and harmony of all His attributes, is transcendently revealed. In this sense He is the LORD, the King of glory. When

we are enlightened by the Holy Spirit, to conceive of Him according to the testimony given of Him in the Scripture, we see the glory of God. Other discoveries of it are but scattered rays and emanations of light; but, in Jesus, the glory of God resides in its source and fullness, as light in the sun. He is therefore the King of glory.

4. He ascended, in the nature of man, as the acknowledged King of glory. The everlasting gates unfolded wide, 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 properly His own, the benefit redounds to His people. Sin had excluded them from the Kingdom, but He claimed and took possession, in their name (Hebrews 6:20). Hence He is styled their Forerunner, because by virtue of their relation to Him, and their interest in Him, they shall surely follow Him. This is the encouragement of Believers. He is the Head of His Body the Church; and though the Church, while in this world, is in a suffering perilous state, yet as the body of a man is not in danger of drowning, while his head is out of the water, so our Forerunner and Head being in heaven on their (our) behalf, He will assuredly draw all His living members to Himself. He has said, "Because I live ye shall live also" (John 14:19). And He has stipulated for them, that each in his appointed time, they shall be with Him where He is to behold His glory (John 17:24).

(2). As their HIGH PRIEST and INTERCESSOR. He presents their persons and their prayers acceptable to God. He bears the iniquity of their holy things. With this encouragement, weak and unworthy as they are in themselves, and though their best services are polluted, they find a liberty of access; and because He ever lives, thus to make intercession for all who come to God by Him (Hebrews 7:25), they know that He is able to save them to the uttermost.

(3). Though the heavens must receive and contain the holy human nature, till the restitution of all things, He is not unmindful of them in their present circumstances. He is seated upon the

Throne of universal dominion, and He exercises His authority and rule, with an especial view to their welfare. While He pleads for them on high, He is present with them below by the power of His Spirit. He comforts their hearts, enlivens their assemblies, and manages their concerns. He is their Shepherd, who gives them food, controls their enemies, revives their fainting spirits, and restores their wanderings (Psalm 23). His ear is open to their prayers, His eye is upon them in every situation, and His arm stretched forth for their relief. Therefore, though persecuted, they are not forsaken; though cast down, they are not destroyed. And He has promised that He will not leave them, until He has done all that for them, which His Word has taught them to hope for; until He has made them victorious over all their enemies, and put the conqueror's song in their mouths, and a crown of life upon their heads.

This High and Holy One, this King of glory, who is seated on the throne of heaven, dwells also in the humble and lowly spirit. He thus solemnly claims the throne of the heart of each of His people, which in a state of nature is usurped by self and Satan; and He is thus willingly acknowledged and admitted in the day of His power. "Behold! He stands at the door and knocks" (Revelation 3:20); and because He is as yet unknown, He is for a while rejected. 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 He has an appointed hour, when He reveals His great name, and makes the soul sensible to who He is! Then the gates of brass and bars of iron are broken before Him. His greatness and His goodness, what He is in Himself, and what He has done and suffered for sinners, are motives which cannot be resisted when they are truly understood. Satan, who as the strong one armed, long laboured to hinder Him from His rightful possession, is himself dispossessed. The soul laments its former obstinacy, throws down its arms, throws wide open its doors, and bids the King of glory welcome. Then old things pass away, and all things become new. Such was the change the poor man experienced, out of whom Jesus cast a legion of evil spirits. At first, if he could, he would have prevented His kind



purpose; he was afraid of his Deliverer and said, “I beseech Thee torment me not” (Mark 5:7). How wretched was his state then, miserable in himself, and a terror to others! But what a wonderful and happy alteration, when he sat quietly at his Saviour’s feet, clothed and in his right mind!

I close the subject with the Apostle’s inference, “Seeing then that we have so great a 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 attachment to Him. You will not repent in a dying hour, that you once thought too highly of Him, or devoted yourself with too much earnestness to His service. Nor yield to unbelief and fear. Though your enemies are many and 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 be for you, who can be against you, so as eventually to harm you? Continue instant in prayer, persevere in well-doing. Our ascended Lord will one day return; and then they who have lived for, and served and trusted Him here, “shall appear with Him in glory” (Colossians 3:4).

Others, if they can, must prepare to meet Him. But alas! How shall they stand before Him? Or whither shall they flee from Him whose presence fills heaven and earth? (Jeremiah 23:24). Have they an arm like God? Or can they thunder with a voice like His? As yet He is proclaimed by the Gospel, as a Saviour, seated upon a throne of grace, stretching forth the golden sceptre of His love, and inviting sinners to be reconciled. Now is the accepted time. Hereafter He will be seen upon a Throne of Judgment, to take vengeance of His enemies.

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