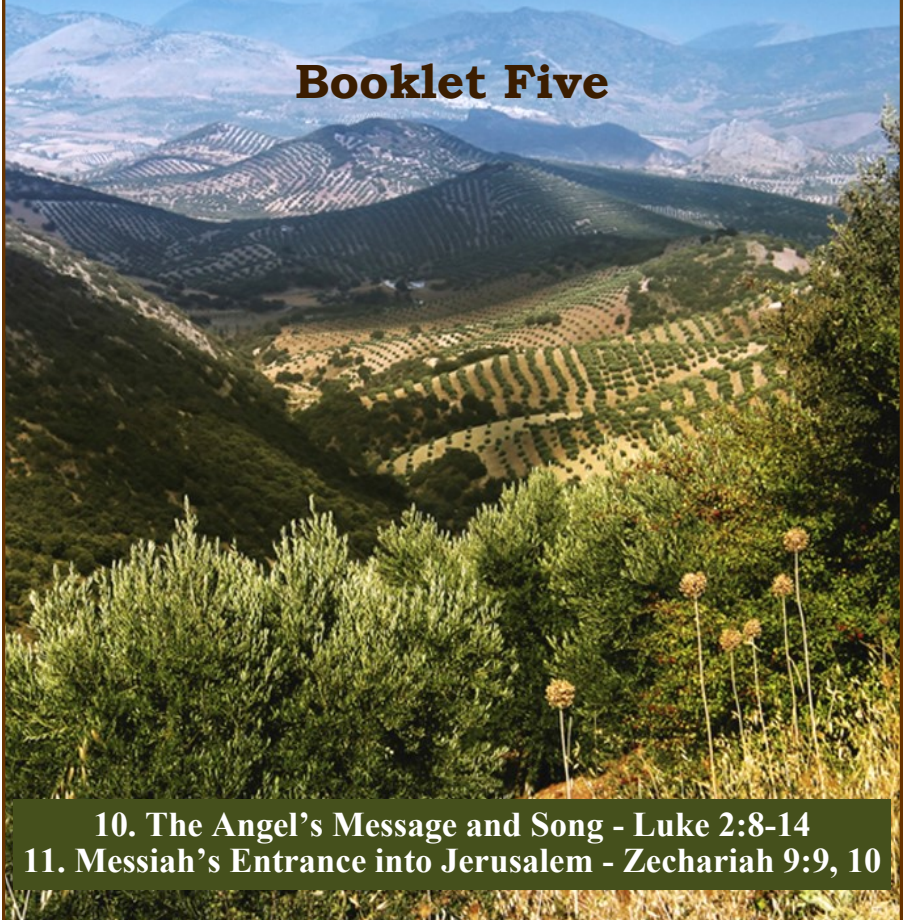


# Sermons of John Newton

Based on Scripture Passages  
Used in Handel's 'Messiah' Part 1

## Booklet Five



10. The Angel's Message and Song - Luke 2:8-14

11. Messiah's Entrance into Jerusalem - Zechariah 9:9, 10

# Sermons of John Newton

## Booklet Five

### 10. The Angel's Message and Song and 11. Messiah's Entrance into Jerusalem

#### 10. The Angel's Message and Song

*“And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the LORD came upon them, and the glory of the LORD shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the LORD. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men” Luke 2:8-14.*

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

The performers of that Oratorio, if I may be allowed the expression, were a multitude of the heavenly host. And though I do not suppose that the angel delivered his message in the cadence which we call Recitative, I have no doubt but the

chorus was a Song, sweetly melodious as from blest voices. A song which the redeemed and the angels of the Lord, are still singing before the Throne. A new song (Revelation 5:9)—a song which will always be new. We are made acquainted with the subject, yea, with the very words of this song. May our hearts be suitably affected by the consideration of them today! The melody and harmony of heaven are far above our conceptions. The music of that happy land has no dependence upon the vibrations of the air, or the admirable structure of the human ear. But we have reason to believe, there is, in the world of light and love, something analogous to what we call music, though different in kind, and vastly superior in effect, to any strains that can be produced by the most exquisite voices, or instruments upon earth; as we readily judge the glory of an angel to be unspeakably more excellent, both in kind and in degree, than anything that is deemed glorious among mortals. To consider this passage at large would require many discourses. I shall confine myself at present to a few brief reflections, on the circumstances of this heavenly vision, the message of the angel, and the concluding chorus or song.

### 1. The circumstances:

(1). “Lo, an angel came upon them,” etc. Suddenly, when they had no expectation of such a visit, without any thing that might previously engage their attention, all at once, like a flash of lightning, a glory shone around them, and an angel appeared. We do not wonder that they were impressed with fear. We live near, perhaps, in the midst of, an invisible world, full of great and wonderful realities, which, yet, by too many persons, are considered and treated as nonentities, because they are not perceived by our bodily senses. But the Scripture assures us of the fact; and to reject this testimony, because it is not confirmed by our senses, is no less irrational and unphilosophical, than impious. A man born blind, can have no

more conception of light and colours, than we have of what passes in the world of spirits. And a nation of blind men, if there were such a nation, would probably treat a seeing person as a visionary madman, if he spoke to them of what he saw. But he would be sure of his own perceptions, though he could not satisfy the enquiries and cavils of the blind. Our senses are accommodated to our present state; but there may be a multitude of objects, as real in themselves, and as near to us, as any that we behold with our eyes; of which we, for want of suitable faculties, can have no idea. To deny this, and make our senses the criteria of the existence of things, which are not within their reach, is exactly such an absurdity, as a blind man would be guilty of, who should deny the possibility of a rainbow, because he never heard of it nor felt it. However, "Faith is the evidence of things not seen." And they who believe the Word of God, cannot doubt of the existence of an invisible state and invisible agents. The barrier between the inhabitants of that state and us, is too strong to be passed; for the will of the great Creator seems to be the barrier. Otherwise it is probable they could easily surprise us, since, upon special occasions, they have been permitted to discover themselves. We have a natural dread of such visitants, even though they should appear to us, as they did to the shepherds, as messengers of peace and mercy from God. Yet we must shortly mingle with them. Death will introduce us to the world of spirits; and who can say what we shall meet with then? what Beings will be ready to accost us upon our first entrance into that unknown, unchangeable state? It deserves our serious thought. We are now encompassed by the objects of sense, but we must soon be separated from them all. We live in a crowd, but we must die alone. Happy are they, who, like Stephen, shall be able to commend their parting spirits into the hands of Jesus! He is the Lord of all worlds, and has the keys of Hades, of the invisible state.

(2). The angel spoke. The Gospel was preached by an angel to Zacharias, to the virgin mother of MESSIAH, and now to the shepherds; and, perhaps to none but these. The angel who appeared to Cornelius, said nothing to him about Jesus, but only directed him to send for Peter (Acts 10:4, 5) The glorious Gospel of the blessed God, with respect to its dignity, depth, and importance, may seem a fitter theme for the tongue of an angel than of a man; but angels never sinned, and though they might proclaim its excellence, they could not, from experience, speak of its efficacy. In this respect sinful worms are better qualified to preach to others, concerning Him by whom they have, themselves, been healed and saved. Their weakness, likewise, is better suited to show that the influence and success of the Gospel is wholly owing to the power of God. It has, therefore, pleased God to “put this treasure into earthen vessels,” and to commit the ministry of His Word, not to angels, but to men. They whom He is pleased to employ in this office, however weak and unworthy in themselves, derive an honour and importance from the message entrusted to them, and are so far worthy of the same attention, as if an angel from Heaven spoke. They are sinful men, and have reason to think humbly of themselves: nor should they, as the servants of a suffering, crucified Master, either wonder or complain if they meet with unkindness from those whom they wish to serve; but they may “magnify their office” (Romans 11:13), and it is at the peril of their hearers to despise it. What the world accounts in us the foolishness of preaching, is made to those who simply receive it, “the wisdom and power of God.” To others, even angels would preach in vain. They “who hear not Moses and the prophets,” who submit not to the ordinary means of grace which God has appointed, would not be persuaded, though one “should rise from the dead.”

(3). The angel was sent with the most interesting news that could be made to mankind; not to Caesar, or to Herod, or to the

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

2. The message of the angel, though concise, was comprehensive and full. It contained,—*The fact*, “Unto you is born this day”—*The place*, “In the city of David,” that is, in Bethlehem, so called, because David likewise had been born there (Luke 2:4)—*The office of MESSIAH*, “A Saviour”—*His name, honour, and character*, “Christ or the Anointed; The LORD,” the Head and King of Israel, and of the Church, the Lord of all.

I do but recite these particulars now, as they will repeatedly offer to our consideration in the series of subjects before me. The description of the state in which they would find Him, was

such, as could only be reconciled to His titles and honours by that simple faith, which, without vain reasoning, acquiesce in the declarations of God. For how unlikely would it seem to a merely human judgment, that the Saviour of sinners, the promised MESSIAH, the Lord of all, should be “a babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, and lying in a manger.”

Yet, thus it was. “Though rich” in Himself, “He became poor for our sakes” (2 Corinthians 8:9). On this account, as the Scripture had foretold, “He was despised and rejected of men.” Though He came to His own, as a Lord or Master to His own house; yet, coming in this manner, His own professed servants, who pretended that they were longing and waiting for Him, slighted and opposed Him; preferred a notorious malefactor to Him, and put Him to death as an impostor and blasphemer. But the shepherds reasoned not through unbelief, and therefore they were not staggered; they obeyed the message, they went, they saw, they believed.

The seeming repugnance between the greatness of MESSIAH’S claims, and the state of humiliation in which He appeared when upon earth, was the great stumbling-block then, and continues to be so at this day. Because He stooped so low, and made Himself of no reputation, too many still refuse to acknowledge His divine character. But they who are willing to be taught by the Word and Spirit of God, see a beauty and propriety in His submitting to be born in a stable, and to live as a poor man, destitute of house or property. Hereby He poured contempt upon worldly pomp and vanity, sanctified the state of poverty to His followers, and set them an encouraging example to endure it with cheerfulness. They, like the shepherds and His first disciples, are delivered from their natural prejudices, and are enabled “to behold His glory,” through the veil of His outward humiliation, “as the glory of the only begotten of the Father.” And His condescension in “becoming poor for their sakes, that they through His poverty might be made rich,”

affects their hearts with admiration and gratitude. But though too many, who are governed by the spirit and maxims of this world, are far from admiring His love, in assuming our nature under those circumstances, which, from His infancy to His death, exposed Him to the contempt of His enemies, it is otherwise thought of in yonder world of light. For we read, that when the angel had declared the glad-tidings to the shepherds, a multitude of the heavenly host expressed their joy by a song, which is the next subject that offers to our consideration.

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

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



former is, if I may so speak, the essential difference of the divine operations; the latter, so far as consistent with it, is the result of a glorious and efficacious property of His consummate excellence. In the redemption of fallen man, both are displayed to the highest advantage. “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace, good-will toward man.”

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

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

The glory of His power. In making all the acts of free agents,

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

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

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

righteousness and peace have kissed each other” (Psalm 85:10); and God is glorified in the highest, for peace proclaimed upon the earth.

The expression of “good-will toward men,” seems to rise upon the former. Not only peace, but acceptance and adoption in the Beloved. Sinners, who believe in the Son of God, are not merely delivered from the condemnation they have deserved, but are united to their Saviour; considered as one with Him, His children, the members of His body, and made partakers of His life, and His glory. God is their portion, and heaven is their home. The Lord’s satisfaction in this, as the greatest of all His works, is expressed by the Prophet in such astonishing terms of condescension, as surpass our utmost conceptions: and we can only say, “Lord, what is man that Thou art thus mindful of him!” We believe, admire, and adore. “The LORD thy God in the midst of thee is mighty: He will save, He will rejoice over thee with joy: He will rest in His love, He will rejoice over thee with singing” (Zephaniah 3:17).

Assuredly this song of the heavenly hosts is not the language of our hearts by nature. We once sought our pleasure and happiness in a very different way. We were indifferent to the glory of God, and strangers to His peace. And some of us are still blind to the excellencies of the Gospel, and deaf to its gracious invitations. But we must not expect to sing with the great company of the redeemed hereafter, before the Throne of glory, unless we learn and love their song while we are here (Revelation 14:3). They who attain to the inheritance of the saints in light, are first made meet for it in the present life, and in this way. They believe the testimony of the Scripture respecting their own guilt, unworthiness, and helplessness; then they receive the record which God has given of His Son. They renounce “all confidence in the flesh” (Philippians 3:3); they rejoice in Christ Jesus, and from His fullness they derive grace to worship God in the Spirit. A sense of their obligations to the

Saviour, disposes them to praise Him now as they can; and they rejoice in hope of seeing him ere long as He is, and that then they shall praise Him as they ought. For heaven itself, as described in the Word of God, could not be a state of happiness to us, unless we are like-minded with the Apostle, to “account all things loss and dung for the excellency of the knowledge of Jesus Christ our Lord.”

## 11. Messiah’s Entrance 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 peace unto the heathen” Zechariah 9:9, 10.*

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

child still, only he has changed his play-things, and now acts upon a larger scale, but with the same trifling and contracted views.

How different was MESSIAH'S entry into Jerusalem foretold in this prophecy; the accomplishment of which, we read in the Evangelists! And how differently was He affected by the object around Him! He poured contempt upon the phantom of human glory. This "King of kings, and Lord of lords, was meek and lowly, riding upon an asses' colt" (Luke 19:35-38). And though a secret divine influence constrained the multitude to acknowledge His character, and, with some accommodation to the customs of those times, to strew their garments in the way, as they proclaimed the King who came in the name of Jehovah; yet He appeared unmoved by their applause. Had the history of Jesus, like those which we have seen of Socrates or Cyrus, been merely the work of a human writer, ambitious to adorn a favourite character with the most splendid qualities of a philosopher or hero, we should never have known how His mind was engaged in this situation. The Saviour must be divine, His historian must be inspired, the fact must be true; for man could not have invented such a circumstance, that this meek and lowly Saviour took no notice of the zeal and homage of His friends, because His heart was filled with compassion for His enemies, who were thirsting for His blood. For it was then, amidst the acclamation of His disciple, that He beheld the city and wept over it, while He foretold the evils which the rejection of Him would bring upon it. "Oh that thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things belonging to thy peace! But now they are hidden from thine eyes" (Luke 19:42).

An angel proclaimed His birth to the shepherds; and wise men from the East paid such attention to the new-born Saviour, that the jealousy of Herod was excited, and attempts were made to destroy Him. But this wonderful infant was brought up in a

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

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

We may notice,

1. The prophet’s address. “To the daughter of Zion and Jerusalem.”
2. The exhortation to joy. “Rejoice and shout.”
3. The cause assigned for this joy. “Thy King cometh.”
4. The characters of the King. “A righteous Saviour.”
5. His great design. “To speak peace to the heathen.”

1. “Zion” and “Jerusalem,” are indifferently used as emblems of the Church, or professing people of God. When they occur together, as here, contradistinguished from each other, Zion,

the city of David, the seat of government, and of the temple-worship, may denote the principal persons of the ecclesiastical and civil state; and Jerusalem may be expressive of the people at large, the daughters of a place, signifying, according to the Hebrew idiom, the inhabitants. They boasted that they were the Lord's peculiar people, they had the prophecies and promises concerning MESSIAH in their hands, and were professedly expecting and waiting for His appearance. They are therefore called upon to rejoice in it. But when He actually came, though "He came to His own," to His own nation, city, and temple; His own people, to whose affection and allegiance He had the most justest claim, "received Him not" (John 1:11). But there were a few who truly waited for Him, as the hope and consolation of Israel, at the time of His birth; and many more were afterwards convinced by His gracious words and works, that "He only had the Words of eternal life," and became His followers.

By their acknowledged principles, they were all bound to acknowledge that Prophet whom Moses had foretold, "God would raise up among them like unto Himself" (Deuteronomy 18:15-19; Acts 7:37); that is, to be, as he had been, a lawgiver, to institute a new dispensation of the true religion; and their refusal involved them, as a nation, in the punishment, which, Moses had likewise denounced against those who should refuse to hearken to Him. Thus their peculiar advantage in possessing a divine revelation, while the rest of mankind were left ignorant of the will of God, proved an aggravation to their guilt, and rendered their obstinacy more inexcusable, and their condemnation more severe. I am bound to take every opportunity of noticing the striking parallel in this respect, between the Jewish nation in our Saviour's time, and the nations, who, since that period, have admitted the New Testament as a revelation from God. By assuming the Christian name, and so far calling the Saviour Lord, while they reject the spirit and design of the Gospel, and treat the ministers of it with

neglect or contempt, they tread in the steps, and share in the guilt of those who pretended to expect MESSIAH, and yet crucified Him when He appeared among them. In person, He could be crucified but once, but the Scripture speaks of those who “crucify the Son of God afresh, and put Him to open shame.” How far this is the case of the persons who can bear to hear of His Passion and His Kingdom, when made the subject of a musical entertainment, but upon no other occasion, deserves their serious consideration.

2. The exhortation can only be complied with by those who are sensible of their need of a Saviour, and His authority and ability to save. To these the Prophet brings a joyful message, and they will “rejoice and shout.” The joy of harvest (Isaiah 9:3), and of the victors in war, when dividing the spoil of the vanquished, is celebrated with shouting. But sinners, who, by the knowledge of MESSIAH, are delivered from going down into the pit, from the dominion of the powers of darkness, and are translated into the Kingdom of God, experience a joy far superior, in kind and degree, to any satisfaction that temporal things can afford. It is “a joy unspeakable, and full of glory” (1 Peter 1:8). Jesus, when known and received by faith, is, in the highest sense, light to those who sit in darkness, health to the sick, food to the hungry, and rest to the weary soul. Thus many rejoiced in His goodness when He was upon earth, and He still has a people, and will have to the end of time, who do and shall rejoice in Him upon these accounts, though every spring of temporal joy should be dried up. They who know His name, and put their trust in Him are warranted to appropriate those strong expressions of another Prophet, “Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vine, the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat, the flocks shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation” (Habakkuk 3:17, 18).



3. The ground and cause of this joy is assigned. “Thy King cometh.” MESSIAH is a King. This title He avowed to Pilate (Mark 15:2), by whose order it was fixed over Him upon His cross. That this was not a slight and arbitrary circumstance, but providential and important, we may, I think, infer by the care taken by the Evangelists [Matthew, Mark, Luke, John], to preserve the remembrance of it, for it is recorded by them all. He is, indeed, King of kings; King and Lord of nations; King of worlds; but He is here spoken of as King of Zion. The Kingdom He came to establish upon earth is not of this world, nor like the kingdoms of the world. The maxims, language, interests, and aims of it, are peculiar to itself. His power and Providence rule over all, but He is only known, admired, and willingly obeyed by the subjects of His spiritual Kingdom, who, though they are in the world, are not of it, but “strangers and pilgrims upon earth.” Their true citizenship is in heaven (Philippians 3:20). These are His peculiar people. And though they partake with others in the changes and trials incident to this mortal life, and have their several departments and duties assigned to them according to His will, as members of society, it does not yet appear what they shall be (1 John 3:2). They are even now the children and servants of the Lord, and He manifests Himself to them as He does not to others. Happy are these His subjects who dwell under His shadow. He rules them not with that rod of iron by which He bruises and breaks the power of His enemies, but with His golden sceptre of love. He reigns by His own right, and by their full and free consent, in their hearts. He reigns upon a throne of grace, to which they have, at all times, access; and from whence they receive in answer to their prayers, mercy and peace, the pardon of all their sins, grace to help in every time of need, and a renewed supply answerable to all their wants, cares, services, and conflicts. So that though they are surrounded with snares, and fiercely opposed by many enemies, they cannot be overpowered, for the

Lord Himself is their King and Saviour. We have,

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

(1). “He is righteous.” His Kingdom is founded in righteousness. It is the effect and reward of His obedience unto death, by which He made an end of sin, and brought in an everlasting righteousness. As His people receive and expect all from His hand, so likewise for His sake. Such is His command, and such is His promise. “If ye shall ask anything in my name, I will do it” (John 14:14). In pleading their cause, and managing their concerns, He is their righteous Advocate. And, therefore, because His intercession is founded upon a righteous stipulation, which He has completely fulfilled, He does not say, “Father, I ask, but, I will, that those whom Thou hast given me, be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory” (John 17:24).

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

5. His great design was not confined to Israel after the flesh. He shall speak peace to the heathen, also. His Kingdom comprises, besides the believing posterity of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, a great multitude gathered from amidst all nations, people, and languages, “from the East and the West, from the

North and the South” (Luke 13:28, 29). Though the heathen were universally alienated from God, by evil works and an evil conscience, He has undertaken to reconcile them, and to bring those near who were once afar off. By their knowledge of Him, their prisons shall be opened, their chains broken (Isaiah 45:14), their condemnation reversed, and they shall be renewed and accepted in the Beloved, as the true children of Abraham.

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

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

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

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

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

conformity to the pattern and will of their great Exemplar. Thus He speaks peace to them, and hushes all their angry, tumultuous passions into a calm.

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

And if any of you should be convinced, that, hitherto, you have been a Christian only in name and in form, but destitute of that which constitutes the life and power of real godliness, this will be a good beginning. For though it be high time that you should in good earnest attend to these things, blessed be God it is not yet too late. He is a righteous and a gracious Saviour; seek Him as such, and He will speak peace to you also. His sure promise is recorded for your encouragement—"Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out" (John 6:37).

The fifth of twenty booklets.

