

Sermons of John Newton

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

Booklet Four

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8. The Sun Rising upon a Dark World - Isaiah 9:2
9. Characters and Names of Messiah - Isaiah 9:6

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8. The Sun Rising upon a Dark World and 9. Characters and Names of Messiah

8. The Sun Rising upon a Dark World

“The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined” Isaiah 9:2.

Contrasts are suited to illustrate and strengthen the impression of each other. The happiness of those, who by faith in MESSIAH, are brought into a state of peace, liberty, and comfort, is greatly enhanced and heightened by the consideration of that previous state of misery in which they once lived, and of the greater misery to which they were justly exposed. They are not only made “meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light” (Colossians 1:12, 13), but they have been delivered from the powers of darkness. Thus while they have communion with God as a Father, they contemplate their privilege with a greater pleasure, than they probably could do if they had never known a difference. They remember a time when they were “afar off, without hope and without God in the world;” and they remember how carelessly they then trifled upon the brink of destruction. In this deplorable and dangerous situation they were “found of the LORD, when they sought Him not” (Isaiah 65:1). He convinced, humbled, and pardoned them, brought them near to Himself, into a state of adoption and communion by the blood of Jesus. The admiration, gratitude, and love which they feel for this undeserved grace, gives them a more lively sense of the blessings they enjoy. Yea, the thought of what they have been redeemed from (of which they will then have a much clearer perception than at present) will add to their joys in Heaven, and inspire such a song of praise as will be

peculiar to themselves, and in which the holy angels, who never felt the stings of guilt, nor tasted the sweetness of pardoning mercy, will not be able to join them. They are accordingly represented, in the prophetic vision, as standing nearest to the Throne, and uniting in the noblest strains of praise to Him who sitteth upon it (Revelation 5:9-12), while the surrounding angels can only take part in the chorus, and admire and adore, when they behold the brightest displays of the glory of the wonder-working God, manifested in His love to worthless, helpless sinners. These opposite ideas are joined in my text. The people who are spoken of as rejoicing in a great light, were, till this light arose and shone upon them, in darkness; walking, sitting, living in darkness, and in the land of the shadow or death. That this passage refers to MESSIAH, we have direct proof. The evangelist refers it expressly to Him (Matthew 4:15, 16), and points out the time and manner of its literal accomplishment. I shall first consider the literal sense and completion of the prophecy, and then show how fitly it applies to the state of mankind at large, and to the happy effects of the Gospel of Salvation; which, by the blessing of God, has been the instrument of bringing multitudes of many nations, peoples, and languages, out of a state of gross “darkness, into marvellous light” (1 Peter 2:9).

1. Hebrew words (like many in our own language) have often more than one signification. But only one sense can be expressed in a version. And therefore interpreters and translators frequently differ. Which of the different words, used to express the meaning of the same original term, is most happily chosen, may be sometimes decided by the context. The two words, in the first verse of this chapter, rendered “lightly afflicted” and “grievously afflicted,” signify likewise, the one to think lightly of, to account vile; and the other, to honour, to render honourable and glorious. Both these words occur in one verse, and are used in these senses, in the LORD’s message to Eli, “Them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly

esteemed” (1 Samuel 2:30). Had the same words been thus rendered in the passage before us, the sense of both verses would, I think, have been more plain, connected, and consistent, to the following purport, agreeable to the translation given by * Vitringa, and the present Bishop of London. “Nevertheless there shall not be dimness [misunderstanding - vagueness] as in the time of her vexation or distress. He formerly debased [made light or vile] the land of Zebulon and Naphtali, but in the latter time He made it glorious, even the land by the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles. For the people that walked in darkness have seen a great light, etc.”—Such was the afflicted and low state of Galilee, previous to the coming of MESSIAH; such was the exaltation and honour it derived from His appearance.

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

(1). The land allotted to the tribes of Issachar, Zebulon, and Naphtali, was chiefly included in the province, which, upon a subsequent division of the country, obtained the name of Galilee. The northern part of it, the inheritance of Naphtali, was the boundary or frontier towards Syria, and had been frequently vexed and afflicted, when the sins of Israel brought the armies of their enemies upon them, as frontier countries usually suffer most in times of invasion and war. Particularly this part of the land, called Galilee of the Gentiles, was the first, and most immediately exposed to the ravages of Tiglath-Pileser and Sennacherib. And as the people there were more mixed with foreigners, and at the greatest distance from the capital, Jerusalem, on these accounts, Galilee was lightly esteemed by the Jews themselves. They thought “no prophet could arise in Galilee” (John 7:52). It even prejudiced Nathanael against the first report he received of Jesus as MESSIAH, that He lived, and was generally supposed (by those who were content to be governed by popular rumour, without enquiring attentively for themselves) to have been born in Galilee. He asked, with an

appearance of surprise, “Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?” (John 1:46). They [The Galileans] were accounted a rude, unpolished, provincial people. And therefore, when Peter would have denied any acquaintance with his Lord, he was discovered to be a Galilean (Mark 14:70) by his dialect and manner of speech.

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

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

but habitations of cruelty, infatuation, and misery!

(4). Though Galilee was favoured with the Scripture, and with synagogue worship; and the inhabitants were a people who professed to know the God of Israel, it was a land of darkness at the time of MESSIAH'S appearance. Though they were not idolaters, ignorance prevailed among them. The Law and the Prophets were read in the synagogues; but we may believe to little good purpose, while they were under the direction of perverse teachers, who substituted the traditions of men for the commands of God. The single circumstance of keeping herds of swine, as the Gadarenes did, seems a proof, that the law of Moses was but little regarded by them. They, as well as the people of Judea, were under the guidance of the Scribes and Pharisees in their religious concerns, who were, if I may use a modern phrase, the clergy of that time; and these, we are assured by Him who knew their hearts, were generally corrupted; blind, leaders of the blind. Yet they were held in ignorant admiration, and implicitly submitted to. From the character of the public ministers of religion, we may, without great danger of mistake, infer the character of the people who are pleased and satisfied with their ministrations. "As the disciple cannot," ordinarily, "be expected to be superior to his Master" (Luke 6:40); the religion of the Scribes may be taken as a standard of that of the Galileans, who were instructed by them. Yet these were the people among whom MESSIAH chiefly conversed; so that His enemies styled Him a Galilean and a Nazarene, as a mark of reproach and contempt. Many of His apostles, perhaps most of them were Galileans likewise. "He seeth not as men seeth" (1 Samuel 16:7). The most of His immediate followers while upon earth, were such as men despised, on account of their situation, rank, or callings; publicans and sinners, fishermen and Galileans. This was, among other reasons, for the encouragement of the poor, the destitute, the despised, the miserable, and the guilty, in succeeding ages, who should desire to put their trust in His name, and to implore His mercy. To

those who received Him, He was the light, the true light; He relieved them from the ignorance, wickedness, and distress in which He found them. They, on their parts, bore testimony to Him. They saw and acknowledged His glory. They felt His power, and devoted themselves to His service. Thus much for the literal sense.

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

employ their power and influence to discountenance, and if possible, to suppress it. They have their choice. The great and the gay will not receive His message; it is therefore sent to the poor, and to the wretched, and they will hear it. Yet as He visited Jerusalem in person, and taught there, so London likewise is favoured with the light of His Gospel. But alas, “How few believe the report?” They who do, experience the change described in my text. Their darkness is changed into marvellous light.

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

And if we suppose a person awakened to a conviction of the evil of sin, and to understand that nothing less than the favour of God can make a rational and immortal creature happy, still without the Gospel he “would be in darkness and the shadow of death.” His case may be compared to that of a person shipwrecked upon some desert, inhospitable coast, suffering great horrors and anxiety, from his exposedness to perish by hunger, by enemies, or wild beasts—who, if he saw, at no very great distance, an island, and was, by some means, informed and assured that island was the seat of safety, plenty, and pleasure;

and that if he was once there, his dangers would all cease, and his utmost wishes be satisfied; still, if there were neither bridge, nor boat, nor any means by which he might arrive thither, to know that happiness was so near him, yet inaccessible to him, would but aggravate his misery, and make his despair more emphatically pungent. Miserable, indeed, must we be, if we clearly perceived that only He, whose creatures we are, can make us happy; and that as sinners we have forfeited His favour, and are utterly incapable of regaining it, if we were left under these views without any hope of relief. Such must have been our situation sooner or later, if “God, who is rich in mercy,” had not Himself provided the means of reconciliation. For though a hope of pardon is easily taken up by those who are ignorant of the holiness of God and the malignity of sin, yet nothing but a declaration from Himself, that there is forgiveness with Him, can give peace to a truly awakened conscience. But Jesus dispels this darkness, and “brings life and immortality to light by the Gospel.” For,

(1). The office and agency of the Holy Spirit, so absolutely necessary to make us duly sensible, either of our danger, or of the possibility of escaping it, is entirely the effect of His mediation. The soul of man, originally formed to be the temple of the living God, when defiled by sin, was justly forsaken by its great Inhabitant; and since the Fall, answers the prophetic description given of Babylon. It “is become the habitation of devils, the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird” (Revelation 18:2). If we ask, as with good reason we may, How can the wise and holy God, “who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity,” and with whom evil cannot dwell, return to His sanctuary thus polluted and profaned? an answer is afforded in that gracious promise, “I will sprinkle clean water upon you and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you; and I will take away the stony heart, and will give you an heart of flesh, and” in order to this “I will put My Spirit within you” (Ezekiel

36: 25, 26). But the source of this mercy is His sovereign love and purpose, to give the seed of the woman, His only Son, to be the Mediator of sinners. By His atonement to be manifested in due time, but which had a virtual influence from the beginning, the Holy Spirit returned to dwell with men.

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

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

their conduct, are corrected by their knowledge of the cross; from thence they derive a solid hope, a humble spirit, just views of their duty and obligations, and motives and prospects which animate them in a course of cheerful, persevering obedience to the will of God.

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

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

He will not meet you as a man. You must either bend or break. The Lord forbid that He should say to any of you, “Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire!”

9. Characters and Names of Messiah

“For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace” Isaiah 9:6.

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

This ancient song is still new. It has been, and will be taken up from age to age, by the New Testament Church, with superior advantage. I trust many of you understand it well, and rejoice in it daily. Men naturally look for something wherein to rejoice and glory. Little reason have the wise (Jeremiah 9:23) to glory in their supposed wisdom, or the strong in their fading strength, or

the rich in their transitory wealth; but this is a just and unfailing ground of glory to true Christians, that “Unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given, etc.”

When a sinner is enlightened by the Holy Spirit, to understand the character and offices of MESSIAH, to understand His ability to save those who are ready to perish, and the happiness of all who are brought into subjection to His gracious government; and when he begins to feel the cheering effects of faith in His name, then this song becomes his own, and exactly suits the emotions and gratitude of his heart. But many persons will despise and pity him as a weak enthusiast [fanatic]. And yet, perhaps, they do not think so unfavourably of the rapture of Archimedes, of whom it is related, that having suddenly discovered the solution of a difficult problem while he was bathing, he was so transported with joy, that he forgot his situation, sprung instantly from the bath, and ran through the city crying, “I have found it! I have found it!” He is not usually charged with madness on this account, though the expression of his joy was certainly over-proportioned to the cause. The truth is, the world will allow of a vehemence approaching ecstasy on almost any occasion, but on that alone, which, above all others, will justify it. A person who would be thought destitute of taste, if he was unaffected by the music to which this passage is set, would, at the same time hazard his reputation for good sense, with some judges, if he owned himself affected by the plain meaning of the words. Incompetent judges surely! who are pleased to approve of warmth and emotion of spirit, provided the object be trivial, and only condemn it in concerns of the greatest importance! But, I trust, the character of my audience is very different, and that the most of you desire to enter into the spirit of this passage, and to have a more lively sense of your own interests in it. May the Lord grant your desire, and accompany our meditations upon it with His power and blessing!

Every clause in this passage might furnish subject for a long

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

1. His incarnation. “Unto us a child is born;” in our nature, born of a woman: “Unto us a son is given,” not merely a man-child, but, emphatically, a Son, the Son of God. This was the most precious gift, the highest proof and testimony of divine love. The distinction and union of these widely distant natures, which constitute the Person of Christ, the God-man, the Mediator, is, in the judgment and language of the Apostle, the “great mystery of godliness” (1 Timothy 3:16), the pillar and ground of truth. I shall not repeat what I have already offered on this point in the fifth sermon (booklet 3). It is the central truth of revelation, which, like the sun, diffuses a light upon the whole system, no part of which can be rightly understood without it. Thus the Lord of all humbled Himself, to appear in the form of a servant, for the sake of sinners.

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

them, who can be against them?” What may they not expect, when He who has so loved them as to redeem them with His own blood, “has all power committed to Him, both in heaven and on earth!” For,

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

(1). “His name shall be called Wonderful. In another place the word is rendered “Secret” (Judges 13:18). It is true of Him in both senses. He is Wonderful in His person, obedience, and sufferings; in His grace, government, and glory. So far as we understand His name, the revelation by which, as by a name, He is made known, we may, we must, believe, admire, and adore. But how limited and defective is our knowledge! His name is Secret. Who can “by searching find Him out?” (Job 11:7). His greatness is incomprehensible, His wisdom untraceable, His fullness inexhaustible, His power infinite “No one knoweth the Son but the Father.” But they have a true knowledge of Him, who trust, love, and serve Him. And in their view He is Wonderful! The Apostle expresses the sentiment of their hearts, when he says, “Yea, doubtless, I count all things but loss and dung for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus the LORD.”

(2). Another of His names is “Counsellor.” The great councils of redemptions, in which, every concern respecting the glory of God, and the salvation of sinners, was adjusted, were established with Him, and in Him, before the foundation of the world. And He is our Counsellor or Advocate with the Father, who pleads our cause, and manages all our affairs in perfect righteousness, and with infallible success; so that no suit can possibly miscarry which He is pleased to undertake. To Him likewise we must apply (and we shall not apply in vain) for wisdom and direction, in all that belongs to our duty, and the honour of our profession in this present life; in all our difficulties, dangers, and cares, we must look to Him for guidance and support. This is to be wise

unto salvation. His secret is with them that consult Him, so that though the world may deem them weak and ignorant as babes (and He teaches them to think thus of themselves) they have a cheering and practical knowledge of many important subjects, which are entirely hidden from those who are wise and prudent in their own eyes.

(3). “He is the Mighty God.” Though in the office of Mediator, He acts in the character of a servant, His perfections and attributes are truly divine. Only the mighty God, could make a provision capable of answering the demands of the holy law, which we had transgressed; only the mighty God could be a suitable Shepherd to lead millions of weak, helpless creatures to glory; through the many difficulties, dangers, and enemies they are exposed to in their passage. Add to this, the honour, dependence, and obedience, which this great Shepherd claims from His sheep, are absolute and supreme; and they would be guilty of idolatry, if they did not know the He is the mighty God. Though real Christians, who are enlightened and taught by the Holy Spirit may, and do, differ in their views and explanations of some revealed truths, I conceive they must be all agreed on this point. It is not only necessary to be known as the only solid foundation of a sinner’s hope, but it immediately respects the object of divine worship. For if the Redeemer is not possessed of the incommunicable perfections of Deity, the New Testament in its most obvious and literal signification, would be chargeable, not only with countenancing, but with expressly teaching and enjoining idolatry.

(4). Farther, He shall be called the “Everlasting Father.” “He is not ashamed to call them brethren” (Hebrews 2:11), having condescended to assume their human nature. But they are also called His children. They are born into His family by the efficacy of His own Word and Spirit. From Him they derive their spiritual life, and receiving from first to last out of His fullness. And He is an “Everlasting Father.” Our fathers, according to the flesh, are subject to death; but His relation to

them subsists unshakeably, and therefore they cannot be destitute; and He is thus, equally to them all. They live upon the earth, and are removed from it, in a long succession of ages; but He is the Father of the everlasting age, “the same yesterday, today, and for ever.” “All generations shall call Him blessed.” To Him, therefore the Apostle teaches us to apply that sublime passage of the Psalmist, “Thou, LORD, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of Thy hands” (Psalm 102:25-27). “They shall perish, but Thou remainest; and they shall wax old as doth a garment; and as a vesture shalt Thou fold them up, and they shall be changed; but Thou art the same, and Thy years shall not fail” (Hebrews 1:10-12).

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

season, are like the sea in a storm, they are distressed with guilt, fears, and temptations; but when He reveals His mighty name, and boundless grace to their hearts, and says, "Peace be still" (Mark 4:39), there is a great calm. "Being justified by faith, they have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ." He gives them peace likewise in a changing troublesome world; by inviting, and enabling them to cast all their cares upon Him, and to trust all their concerns in His hands, upon the assurance His Word gives them, that He cares for them, and will manage and control everything for their good. In proportion as their faith realizes His promises, they feel a composure and satisfaction. "Knowing that the hairs of their head are numbered," that their afflictions, no less than their comforts, are tokens of His love, "that He will give them strength according to their day, that He will be their guide and their guard even unto death;" they are not greatly moved by any events, or disturbed by apprehensions, because their hearts are fixed, trusting in the Lord (Psalm 112:7).

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

the time of their dismissal actually arrives, we seldom see them afraid of the summons.

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

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

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

Hear then His voice today. Perhaps you are apprised of the necessity of a change of heart and life, at some future period, in order to die safely. Such a change is equally necessary, if you wish to live comfortably. While you are unfit to die, you can

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

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

But I would lead you to consider your delay, not only as dangerous, but as unreasonable. Why are you afraid of being happy too soon? What strange and hard thought have you of God, if you suppose you can find more pleasure in living, according to your own wills, than in obedience to His commands! Can the world give you such peace and satisfaction as I have attempted to describe? Do you think a real persuasion that God is your Friend, and that Heaven will be your home, will spoil the relish of your earthly enjoyments, or make your lives uncomfortable? What hard thing does the Lord require of you,

that you are so unwilling to comply? If we set aside, for a moment, the consideration of a future state, and a final judgment, yet even in a temporal view you would be a great gainer, if your spirit and your conduct were regulated by the Gospel. What heart-breaking troubles, what losses, contests, pains of body, and remorse of conscience, would some of you have avoided, if you had believed and obeyed the Word of God! What distresses may your head-strong passions soon plunge you into, if you presume to go on in your sins! For that the way of transgressors is hard, is not only declared in Scripture, but proved by the history and observation of every day.

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

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