

Sermons of John Newton

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

Booklet Fourteen

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31. The Gospel Message, Glad Tidings - Romans 10:15
32. The Progress of the Gospel - Romans 10:18

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31. The Gospel Message, Glad Tidings and 32. The Progress of the Gospel

31. The Gospel Message, Glad Tidings

“[As it is written] How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the Gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!”
Romans 10:15.

The account which the Apostle Paul gives of his first reception among the Galatians (Galatians 4:15), exemplifies the truth of this passage. He found them in a state of ignorance and misery; alienated from God, and enslaved to the blind and comfortless superstitions of idolatry. His preaching, accompanied with the power of the Holy Spirit, had a great and marvellous effect. His principal subject was the death of Jesus, who had lately suffered as a malefactor at Jerusalem. Though the transaction was past, and the scene at a considerable distance, yet by the manner of his representation, the fact was realized to their minds [the fact became real to them]; and they could have been no more affected, had they been actually upon the spot, at the time. Jesus Christ was exhibited to them, as crucified before their eyes (Galatians 3:1). By the same divine energy they were instructed in the knowledge of His character, who He was, and why He suffered; and likewise, understood their own need of such a Saviour. Thus they hearkened to him, not with the indifference of the Athenians, but with the application to themselves of all that he had said. They heard, they believed, and they rejoiced. The Apostle reminds them, that they had not received a cold speculative doctrine, but such a one as imparted blessedness to them. Indeed, many of them lost this afterwards, when they were unhappily seduced by false teachers. But for a time the knowledge of a Saviour, so exactly suited to their circumstances, made them happy. And while they were so, they felt very strong emotions of gratitude and esteem for the messenger who brought them these glad tidings. Though he was by many accounted and treated as the off-scouring and filth of all things, the Galatians

received him as an angel of God, and attended to him, as if the Lord, who sent him, had spoken to them in person. And although he had, till then, been an entire stranger to them, his message opened a way to their hearts, and they gave him every testimony of the most cordial friendship; insomuch “that had it been possible, they would have plucked out their own eyes, and have given them to him.”

Thus, likewise, when Philip preached the Gospel in Samaria, the consequence was great joy in that city (Acts 8:8). But when the Gospel is thus gladly received, there must be a suitable disposition of mind. It is sent “to the poor.” It is designed to “heal the broken-hearted, to deliver the captives, and to give sight to the blind” (Luke 4:18). And therefore they who are well-satisfied with themselves, who say, “We see,” and who boast of their freedom, cannot possibly judge either of the truth, or of the importance of the Gospel doctrine. As the Lord waters the earth with a profusion worthy of His magnificence and bounty, and does not confine His rain to cultivated soils, so the good seed of His Word often “falls upon the highway, upon the rocks, and among thorns” (Luke 8:13-15); but is only productive upon the good ground of an “honest and good heart.” Not that any human heart is truly good by nature, but some are prepared for the reception of the truth. And this preparation is the first effect of the Word, when it brings forth fruit unto life eternal. It undeceives those who were for a time deluded with vain hopes, and convinces them that they are poor, blind, and wretched and helpless. Then they gladly accept the Gospel of peace, and the message is to them as life from the dead.

The passage in the Prophet Isaiah from which my text is quoted, is very animated and descriptive. “How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings!” (Isaiah 52:7). Imagine a distressed people, at the will and disposal of a conqueror who was justly offended with them, and under an anxious trembling uncertainty how he would treat them. If an authorized messenger should inform them that, instead of the punishment they deserved, the king vouchsafed [graciously granted] them a free pardon, was ready to receive them with favour, and to bestow honours and possessions upon all who applied to him, without excepting the most guilty, even the ringleaders in rebellion: how welcome would this messenger be to them! This, indeed, is beyond the manner of

men. No earthly monarch has either magnanimity to make, or power to make good, so gracious and unlimited a proclamation to a whole nation of rebels. But this is the manner of the great God. Such an act of grace is the Gospel. An act of grace to sinners, yet founded in righteousness, and displaying the glory of His justice equally with the riches of His mercy. For it is founded on the mediation of the Son of His love, and procured by His blood. The messengers of this grace are thus welcomed and honoured by those who believe their report: “and are esteemed very highly in love for their works’ sake” (1 Thessalonians 5:13). We may observe,

1. The message of the Gospel is glad tidings of peace and good things.

2. The messengers, or preachers, find ample reward in their success and acceptance.

1. According to the Hebrew idiom, (which frequently obtains [is applicable] in the New Testament) all good things are comprised [included] in the term peace. They are eminently comprised in the peace of the Gospel, for it is “the peace of God which passeth understanding.” It brings a blessed assurance, that MESSIAH has made peace by the blood of His cross. They who believe this good report, derive peace of conscience from it; and are able to say, “Though thou wert justly angry, thine anger is turned away” (Isaiah 12:1). It dispels their fears and forebodings, and inspires them with liberty to come to God as children; consequently, on their parts, alienation and enmity cease. They no longer conceive of Him as an avenging Judge, or a hard Master. They no longer dispute His authority, nor repine at His appointments. They become a willing people. They yield themselves to Him. They cultivate peace in all their connections. The forgiveness and bounty they have received, teaches them likewise to forgive, and be kind, as they have opportunity. They possess good things—communion with God, grace, wisdom, and power; such as the world can neither give nor take away. They serve Him with their all, and are supported by His good Spirit in every trying circumstance. And they have a good hope, which enables them to rejoice in tribulation, and to smile in death.

If the wickedness and obstinacy of mankind were not so strongly

described and exemplified in the Bible, and if we could forget that this obstinate perverseness was once our own character, we should find it difficult to conceive, after we understand the nature and design of the Gospel, upon what grounds a scheme so wisely and completely adapted to relieve men from misery, to promote their present comfort, and to secure their future happiness, should, instead of being received with thankfulness, generally excite contempt and opposition. Can the world afford a peace which shall abide and cheer the heart under all the changing circumstances incident to us in this mortal state? Can it propose any good, any honours, profit, or pleasures, worthy of being compared with the honour which comes from God only, the light of His countenance, and the riches of glory? Can the influence of the world preserve us from trouble, or support us under it, or deliver us out of it? Has it any charms capable of soothing the anguish of a wounded conscience? Can it obviate [prevent] the stroke, or overcome the fear of death? Or can it inspire the soul with confidence and joy, in the contemplation of that approaching day, when we must all appear before the tribunal of the supreme Judge? That the world, if we possessed the whole of it, cannot do these things for us, is acknowledged by many, and felt by all. The Gospel proposes a cordial [tonic; cheering comfort] for every care, a balm for every wound; and none who make the experiment of its efficacy are disappointed. In other cases, they who have received great obligations may speak highly of their benefactor; and they, who beyond hope, have been recovered from a dangerous malady, may commend the skill and care of their physician, to those who are labouring under the same disease, without giving offence. But if they who have obtained life and peace by believing in Jesus, proclaim His goodness, and point Him out to their fellow-sinners, as the only Physician and Saviour of souls, their testimony is charged with folly, and their endeavours rejected with scorn, as officious and impertinent. Men, while left to themselves, will not come to Him that they may have life. The god of this world so works upon their prejudices, pride, and passions, that though the light of truth shines around them like the light of the sun, the eyes of their mind are blinded, and they are pleased with their darkness, and unwilling to see (2 Corinthians 4:4). Hence, of the comparatively few who are

favoured with a clear and faithful dispensation [declaration] of the Gospel, the greater part, it is to be feared, reject the counsel of God against themselves: and His ministers, in all ages, have had cause to adopt the Prophet's complaint, Lord, "who hath believed our report?" (Isaiah 53:1). It would be thus universally, if the Lord who gave the Word, and who sends forth the preachers, had not engaged His promise, that they shall not labour wholly in vain, nor spend their strength for naught. He prepares a people to serve Him, and to show forth His praise. And while some mock, others refuse to hear; (Acts 17:32) and others, with an indolent indifference, are content to hear again and again; there are others, whose hearts are opened to receive the truth in the love of it. They hear and believe to everlasting life.

2. The instruments of this happy change, find their reward in their work. It being owned to the salvation of a few, they are compensated for all the opposition they meet with from the many; and this on a two-fold account:

First, and principally, for the love they bear to their Lord and to souls for His sake.

To see His name made precious to the hearts of sinners; to see those who were blind admiring His excellence; to see those who were so far off from God brought so nigh; to see those who were wretched, rejoicing in His goodness; to hear those whose lips were filled with folly, falsehood, or blasphemy, proclaiming His praise. Such salutary effects of their ministry fill them likewise with praise and joy. And when their hearers express the power and spirit of the Gospel, in their tempers and conduct, they can say, "Now we live, if you stand fast in the Lord" (1 Thessalonians 3:8).

A secondary satisfaction, which of itself is sufficient to make them full amends for all the scorn of an unkind world, is, the share they have in the affections of the people, who are thus benefited by their ministry. This is the popularity which alone is desirable. It would be a small thing to be able merely to hold a multitude by the ears; but to be approved, and loved, by those to whom the Lord has made them useful, is a high honour, and a source of sublime pleasure. When Peter and John (Acts 3:11) had healed the lame

man, I doubt not but they were more affected by the simple honest testimony of his gratitude, than by the unmeaning wonder of all the surrounding multitude. If a true servant of the Lord, by any advantage of abilities or elocution, should attach a large congregation to a personal regard for himself; should be admired and beloved by them, and yet discover no attachment in them to the Saviour whom he preaches, their partiality to him would give him but little pleasure. He would be more ready to weep over them, than to rejoice in the preference they gave him. For he seeks not their applause, but their edification. And he aims not to promote his own glory, but the glory of Him who sent him (John 7:18). He is, indeed, glad to see them attending upon the means which God has promised to bless. But the faithfulness and closeness of his addresses to their consciences, by which many are sooner or later disgusted and driven away, is a proof that he does not want them merely to make up a number about him. They who make the office of a preacher an occasion whereby to promote their own interest or reputation, may, perhaps, obtain the reward they seek; but it is such a reward, as can only satisfy a weak and mercenary mind. And from Him, whose name they prostitute, they can only expect the reward assigned to hypocrites and unbelievers.

But true Christians will, and do, set a high value upon the ministers, who with simplicity and godly sincerity, preach the Gospel of peace, in such a manner as to evidence that they are influenced by a regard to the glory of God, and to the good of souls. And they give proof of their affection in more ways than by speaking well of them.

(1). By the satisfaction with which they accept a faithful ministry, as a balance to the trials they meet with in common life. There are many poor, and many afflicted people, who have little comfort in the things of this life, and in their own houses. Some are pinched by penury, and some who live in opulence, yet dwell, as the Psalmist expresses it (Psalm 57:4), in the fire and among lions. They suffer not less than the others, though in a different way, from the unkindness and opposition of their nearest connections. But in the house of God, they are satisfied and comforted. And, according to the words of the Prophet, “though the Lord is pleased to give them the bread of adversity, and the water of affliction” (Isaiah 30:20),

yet, since their teachers are not removed into corners, but they have free access to the preaching of His Word, and can attend upon a minister who careth for their souls, and meets them, when they are weary, with “a word in season,” they bear their appointed cross with cheerfulness. Though they have much bitterness of heart at home, known only to themselves, they have a pleasure with which a stranger intermeddles not, when they go up to the house of the Lord. But if the instrument, who is the messenger of God to them for good be removed, and they are deprived of these opportunities, the regard they bore him is manifested, by their sorrow for losing him; which often affects them more sensibly than all their other griefs.

(2). By, in public, taking kindly and in good part his most searching discourses, or even his reproofs and admonitions in private, if needful. For they know that he watches over their souls, as one who must give account (Hebrews 13:17). And because they love him, they do all in their power to make the service a pleasure, and not a grief to him. They do not wish him to speak smooth things to them, or to entertain them with the discussion of points in which they have little concern, but to hear that which is suitable to their own case and circumstances. And if the preacher discovers to them, that through inadvertence, they have allowed themselves in any wrong practice, or have lived in the omission of any duty, instead of being offended with his plain dealing, they love him the better for it.

(3). By their tenderness and sympathy with him in all his exercises; and by their care, according to their ability, to make his situation comfortable, and to avoid everything that might give him just occasion for complaint or grief. The trials of a faithful minister are neither few nor small. His work is great; he is sure to meet with enemies and discouragements. He travails in birth for souls (Galatians 4:19); he is pained by the opposition of the wicked, the inconstancy of the wavering, and the inconsistency of many who make profession of the truth. He feels many anxieties for those who are enquiring the way to the Kingdom, lest they should be turned aside and hindered; and too often the hopes he had indulged, of some who discovered a concern for religion, are disappointed. His inward conflicts are many. He often walks in much weakness, fear, and trembling (1 Corinthians 2:3). When he considers what he is, what he ought to be, and what he has to do, he is often distressed,

afraid, and ashamed, and unable to speak. His path is spread with snares, his heart wounded with temptations. But his judicious hearers have some knowledge of what he endures for their sakes, and in their service; they love him, pity him, and pray for him, and their kind attention comforts him under all his tribulations.

Sometimes their regard is rather improperly expressed; as when they not only value his ministry, but hold him so highly a favourite, that they can hardly hear another. A preference is certainly due to the person who is made especially useful, but no faithful preacher should be slighted. Though gifts and abilities are not equal in all, yet, they are all the Lord's messengers, and entitled to regard.

Again, it is an improper regard, if they yield themselves implicitly to him, to be governed by his will. So far as we speak agreeably to the Scripture, which is the rule and standard of faith and practice, both to you and to us, we are authorized to require your attention and obedience; but you are not bound to receive what we propose, merely upon our own authority. There are those who account ignorance the mother of devotion, and expect an implicit compliance with their injunctions, by virtue of their office and personal influence. But a true minister, will account it his honour and pleasure to preach to an enlightened people, who love and study the Bible, and, like the Bereans, "in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so" (Acts 17:11). "We have no dominion over your faith, but wish to be helpers of your joy" (2 Corinthians 1:24). Nor do we pretend to dominion over your purses, though we are to remind you of the Apostle's charge, "To do good, and to communicate, forget not" (Hebrews 13:16).

How much are they to be pitied, who account that word of grace a burden, which to those who receive it with thankfulness, proves the balm and cordial [cheering comfort] of life! "Take heed how you hear." If the Gospel is not made to you a savour of life, it will be a savour of death. It will aggravate your guilt and condemnation, and leave you utterly hopeless and inexcusable. If you continue impenitent and obstinate, the hour is coming when you will wish you had never heard the name of Jesus. It had been better for you never to have been born, or to have lived and died among the savage Indians; or to have been an idiot or a lunatic to the end of

your days, than to have lived where the doctrine of salvation was published in your hearing, if you finally reject the counsel of God against yourselves!

32. The Progress of the Gospel

“Their sound went into all the earth, and their words unto the end of the world” Romans 10:18.

“The heavens declare the glory of God” (Psalm 19:1). The grandeur of the arch over our heads, the number and lustre of the stars, the beauty of the light, the splendour of the sun, the regular succession of day and night, and of the seasons of the year, are such proofs of infinite wisdom and power, that the Scripture attributes to them a voice, a universal language, intelligible to all mankind, accommodated to every capacity. There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard. The combined effect of the visible works of the great Architect, presses a declaration upon the ear of reason—“The hand that made us is divine.” We must, however, understand it of the ear of right reason. The loudest voice is unnoticed by the deaf. Thus it ought to be, and thus it would be, if man were indeed a rational creature, as he proudly boasts himself. That the fact in general is otherwise; that the bulk of mankind are no more affected by the works of God, than the beasts of the field: that the philosophers who profess to study them, so faintly discern, so frequently deny, the great first Cause of all, is proof that sin has darkened and depraved the noblest powers of the soul, and degraded man into the state of an inattentive idiot. However, the evidence, if it does not excite his admiration and praise, is abundantly sufficient to convict him of stupidity and ingratitude, and to leave him without excuse (Romans 1:20).

This passage, taken from that sublime ode of David, the Nineteenth Psalm, is applied by the Apostle to illustrate the character, and the progress of the still more wonderful display of the divine perfections, which God has made known by the glorious Gospel. A variety of truths shine (like stars in the firmament) in the system of revelation. But principally Jesus the Sun of truth and righteousness, the Source of spiritual light and life, answers to the description there given of the material sun, “His going forth is from

the end of heaven, and his circuit unto the ends of it, and there is nothing hid from his heat” (Psalm 19:6).

But the fulfilment of the promises respecting MESSIAH’S Kingdom is progressive. So far as this prophecy has been accomplished, the arm of the Lord has been revealed. It is His doing, and may justly be marvellous in our eyes. The truth of the prophecy will be proved by its final completion; which, though not likely to take place in our time, we may be assured that it cannot fail, for the Lord has spoken it. And besides, we have a sufficient pledge and security for the whole, in what He has already done. It was not necessary for the fulfilling of this prophecy, nor consistent with the tenor of many other prophecies, that the spread of the Gospel should be instantaneous and universal on its first publication. MESSIAH is to rule in the midst of His enemies, till the appointed season, when all enemies shall be subdued under His feet. The Gospel, the rod of His power, is so admirably adapted to the necessities of mankind, that the obstructions it has met with must be ascribed to their wickedness and obstinacy. Not that they could resist the will of God. Had He intended to give it universal success from the beginning, the event would have been answerable. But it was His pleasure to conduct the dispensation [ordering] of it, so as on the one hand to display His sovereignty, wisdom, and power, and on the other, to afford a full proof of the depravity and alienation of the heart of man. This point is so much misunderstood and misrepresented, that though it is attended with great difficulties, especially if we give way to vain reasonings upon it, I shall venture in the present discourse to offer a few thoughts towards clearing the subject, and vindicating (if the very attempt be not presumptuous) the ways of God to man.

When the Sun of righteousness, after a long night of darkness, rose upon the world, there appeared a strong probability that the prophecies concerning the extent of His vital influence, from east to west, from pole to pole, would soon be completely realized.

In a very short space He was known and adored by multitudes, through the greatest part of the Roman Empire, and beyond its limits. But, perhaps, for about seventeen hundred years since that period, the boundaries of His Kingdom, though they have been altered, have not been much enlarged. If He has since in some

measure enlightened the more western parts of the globe, the eastern regions which once rejoiced in His light, are now overwhelmed with gross Mohammedan darkness. And if we were capable of investigating the state of the world at this day, we should probably find that five out of six of the human race now living, never so much as heard of the name of Jesus as a Saviour. There is reason to fear likewise, that in the nations that professedly call Him Lord, and are not unwilling to be themselves called Christians, a greater proportion than five out of six, are no less strangers to His power and grace than the Mohammedans who reject Him, or the heathens who never heard of Him.

There is not perhaps a darker chapter in the book of divine providence, nor a meditation which calls for a more absolute subjection and submission to the holy will and unsearchable wisdom of God, than this. The first spread of the Gospel proved it to be a divine expedient, fully capable of producing all the great purposes which the prophets had foretold, and which the state of the world required. It reconciled men to God, to themselves, and to each other. It subdued their passions, regulated their affections, freed them from the guilt and bondage of sin, from the love of the world, and from the fear of death. Wherever the doctrine of the cross was preached, it produced that salutary change of conduct, which philosophy had long attempted in vain; and raised men to that life of communion with God, of which philosophers had no conception. Such was the bright morning of the Gospel Day. But in time, yea, in a little time, dark clouds obscured its light, its progress was impeded, and in a manner stopped. On one hand, the profession and name of the Gospel gave occasion to mischief and abominations, which had been unknown among the heathens; so that the part of the world which received the name of Christendom, was little distinguished from the rest, in a religious view, but by a fierce and rancorous superstition which tyrannized over the consciences, liberties, and the lives of men. On the other hand, as I have observed, the very name of Christianity was restrained to a small portion of the earth; many nations have not heard of it to this day, and many who once professed it, have renounced it long ago.

Thus the fact stands. We cannot deny it. But how shall we account for it? Infidels and petty-reasoners think they here find an

invincible objection against the truth. They say, "If the Gospel you speak of be so salutary and necessary, if it be indeed the greatest effect of the divine goodness, why has not God who is the common Father of mankind, afforded it to all the nations of the earth? And why is it restrained to so few?"

But I think we may retort the question, and let them who propose it, give such an answer (if they can) as shall not amount to a confession of the obstinacy and ungrateful folly of mankind. When the world saw the happy tendency and effects of this Gospel in the age of the apostles, why did they not universally receive it? We know that when the use of the mariner's compass, the art of printing, and many other inventions that might be named, were discovered in one country, they were presently adopted by the surrounding civilized nations. Even the recent attempts to venture through the air with a balloon, hazardous as they certainly are, and insignificant with respect to real usefulness, are likely in a little time not only to engage the notice, but to excite the imitation of Europe. Why then was the Gospel, the most beneficial and important discovery the world has been favoured with, the only one that has been treated with general contempt? Certainly our Lord has assigned the true reason, "Light is come into the world, but men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil" (John 3:19). They hate the light; they will not come to it, nor will they permit it to come to them if they can possibly prevent it. This glorious Gospel of the blessed God, has been and still is shunned and dreaded, and every human precaution and exertion has been employed to withstand and suppress it, as though, like the pestilence, it was baneful to the welfare of society. May we not say, speaking after the manner of men, that the Lord has done enough to confirm His own express and solemn declaration, that He "has no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked may turn from his way and live!" (Ezekiel 33:11). He has raised up a succession of faithful servants, from age to age, to publish these glad tidings. The reception they have met with, not only from the heathens, but from nominal Christians, is well known to those acquainted with ecclesiastical history; which contains little more than a detail of the arts and cruelties, by which the civil and ecclesiastical powers of almost every kingdom where the Gospel

has been known, have endeavoured to suppress it.

The nation of Great Britain, in particular, has but little right to ask, Why has the Gospel of Christ spread no farther among the heathen? The Providence of God has favoured us with peculiar advantages for this service. Our arms and commerce have opened us a way to the most distant parts of the globe; and of late years, the enterprising spirit of our navigators, has added almost a new world to the discoveries of former times. How far have our plans been formed with a subservience to the great design of evangelizing the heathen? How much have we done to promote it in Asia, where our influence and opportunities have been the greatest? What impression of the name and spirit of Christianity has our conduct given to the inhabitants of India? But I forbear—Facts are too well known to need recital; too glaring to need a comment. It is true, we have an incorporated society for propagating the Gospel in foreign parts, and we hear the missionaries; but of the good effects of their missions, as at present conducted, we neither hear, nor expect to hear. While America was ours, the efforts of a few individuals from the northern provinces in the last and present century, were not without success. But I fear this is all the honour we can claim. Some good has been done by the Danish mission to * Tranquebar, but I believe our influence in it, has been rather nominal than effective. The extent and effects of the labours of the *Unitas Fratrum* (more generally known amongst us by the name of The Brethren, or Moravians), compared with their circumstances and resources, must not be omitted on this occasion. They doubtless excite admiration, and thankfulness to God, in every serious mind acquainted with the subject. But excepting in these instances, I believe the heathens have derived but little knowledge of the Gospel from their connections with Christendom, for some ages past. And I think none of the commercial nations in Europe have had the propagation of Christianity less at heart than the English. What obligations the natives in Africa are under to us, for instruction or example, may be estimated, in part, by a cursory survey of the state of our West-India Islands.

* Seventeenth Century Danish colony on the Coromandel coast of India

That the Gospel is so little known in the world, and so little

received where it is known, cannot be so properly ascribed to the will of God, as the wickedness and wilfulness of men. Undoubtedly He to whom all things are possible, who has absolute power over the hearts of His creatures, could make a way for the universal reception of it. And we trust that in His own time He will do so. But power is not His only attribute. It would be rash and absurd to suppose that the great God will do everything that He can do. We are sure that He will do what is worthy of Himself; but of this, His own infinite wisdom is the only competent judge. What is becoming of His perfections and holy government, we can know no farther than He is pleased to inform us. But it certainly becomes us to lay our hands upon our mouths, and our mouths in the dust, when we contemplate His conduct. Or, if we do speak, to adopt the Apostle's language, "Oh the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out! For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been His counsellor? Or who has first given to Him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen." (Romans 11:33-36).

However, my text is fulfilling, and shall be fulfilled. This joyful sound has already been spread far abroad, in defiance of all attempts to restrain it. Multitudes from age to age have heard it, and found it to be the power of God unto salvation. And it would be easy to prove, if it belonged to my subject, that the superior advantages of civilization which Christendom enjoys, are remotely owing to the knowledge of revelation. To this must be chiefly ascribed, the different state of this island, from what it was when visited by Julius Caesar. Yea, our modern philosophers would make but a poor figure, were they despoiled of all the plumes they have borrowed from the Book they affect to despise. Farther, the purpose of God to save sinners, by faith in His beloved Son, is the primary ground of that patience and long-suffering which He still exercises towards such a world as this. And some imperfect traces of this design, transmitted by tradition, are probably to be found, though woefully disfigured, among every nation and people under heaven; which have at least preserved, in a degree, the notices of right and wrong, and some faint warnings of conscience, in the most savage state of

human nature. But were it not for reasons connected with the designs of His mercy, we can scarcely conceive that the holy God would have perpetuated the race of mankind in a state of rebellion and enmity against His government. Or if He had permitted them to multiply, and left them wholly and absolutely to themselves, without interposing some restraints upon their depravity, I believe the inhabitants of the earth would have been no better than incarnate fiends.

The prophecies both of the Old and New Testaments, encourage us to hope for a time, when the light of the Gospel truth will break forth with meridian brightness, the glory of the Lord be revealed, and all flesh shall see His salvation. As a pledge of this, and of the truth of the whole Scripture, we have, what may be called a standing miracle continually before our eyes. I mean the state of the Jews, who, though dispersed far and wide among many nations, are everywhere preserved a distinct and separate people. The history of the world affords no other instance of the kind. The great monarchies, by which they were successively conquered and scattered, have successively perished. Only the names of them remain. But the people whom they despised, and endeavoured to exterminate, subsist to this day; and though sifted like corn over the earth, and apparently forsaken of God, are still preserved by this wonderful Providence, unaffected by the changes and customs around them; still tenacious of the law of Moses, though the observance of it is rendered impracticable. Many days, many ages they have lived, as the prophets foretold they should, without a temple, without sacrifice or priest (Hosea 3:4, 5). As yet, many heathen nations are permitted to walk in their own ways. But at length “the fullness of the Gentiles shall come in, and all Israel shall be saved” (Romans 11:25, 26). The revolutions and commotions in kingdoms and nations, which astonish and perplex politicians, are all bringing forward this great event. The plan of the human drama, to us, who only see a single scene, is dark and intricate but the catastrophe is approaching; and in the close of the whole, the manifold wisdom of God will be admired and adored, and all holy and happy intelligences will acknowledge with transport, He has done all things well.

But the point I am chiefly to press upon my hearers, is, that this Word of Salvation is sent to you (Acts 13:26). How the great Judge will deal with the heathens, who were never favoured with it, He has not seen fit distinctly to inform us. But thus far He has assured us, that it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon, yea for Sodom and Gomorrah, than for those who have the privilege of knowing the Gospel, if they reject it (Matthew 11:20-24). To them much is given, and of them much will be required. Do not think ministers assuming [haughty, arrogant] if they magnify their office. We have no reason to think highly of ourselves. Nor would you be blameable for disregarding us if we spoke in our own names. But if we preach the truth of the Gospel, in simplicity and sincerity, then we speak in the name of the Lord, and demand your attention. Do you ask for our authority and commission? Ask your own consciences. If, like Felix, when you mean only to indulge your own curiosity by hearing us, you are constrained to tremble (Acts 24:25); if we force upon your mind the remembrance of what you have said or done; if our message makes you uneasy and dissatisfied with yourselves; if you cannot avoid feeling the truth of our principles at some times, and the necessity of the change we would press upon you; if, though you have been repeatedly displeased and offended with what you hear, and, perhaps, have gone away purposing or threatening that you would hear it no more, you still appear amongst us—then, you have a sufficient proof, that the ministers are sent and authorized to speak to you, and we take your consciences to witness that we preach the truth.

The fourteenth of twenty booklets.

