

Sermons of John Newton

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

Booklet Seven

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14. Rest for the Weary - Matthew 11:28
15. Messiah's Easy Yoke - Matthew 11: 29, 30

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15. Messiah's Easy Yoke

14. Rest for the Weary

“Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” Matthew 11:28.

Which shall we admire most—the majesty, or the grace, conspicuous in this invitation? How soon would the greatest earthly monarch be impoverished, and his treasures utterly exhausted, if all, that are poor and miserable, had encouragement to apply freely to him, with a promise of relief, fully answerable to their wants and wishes! But the riches of Christ are unsearchable and inexhaustible. If millions and millions of distressed sinners seek to Him for relief, He has a sufficiency for them all. His mercy is infinite to pardon all their sins; His grace is infinite, to answer and exceed their utmost desires; His power is infinite, to help them in all their difficulties. A number, without number, have been thus waiting upon Him, from age to age; and not one of them has been sent away disappointed and empty. And the streams of His bounty are still flowing, and still full. Thus the sun, His brightest material image, has been the source of light to the earth, and to all its inhabitants, from the creation; and will be equally so to all succeeding generations, till time shall be no more. There is, indeed, an appointed hour, when the sun shall cease to shine, and the course of nature shall fail. But the true Sun, the Sun of Righteousness has no variableness or shadow of turning (Malachi 4:2; James 1:17); and they who depend upon Him, while in this world, shall rejoice in His light forever. Can we hesitate to accept of these words, as affording a full proof of the divine character, the proper Godhead of our Lord and Saviour; supposing only, that He meant what He said, and that He is able to make His promise good? Can a creature, however excellent and glorious, use this language? Can a creature discharge the debts, soothe the

distresses, and satisfy the desires of every individual who looks to him? Who but the Lord God can raise up all that are bowed down, and comfort all that mourn? (Psalm 146:8; Isaiah 61:2).

Again, as is His majesty, so is His mercy. In acts of grace amongst men, there are always some limitations. If a king proclaims a pardon to a rebellious nation, there are still exceptions. Some ringleaders are excluded. Either their crimes were too great to be forgiven, or their obstinacy, or influence, are supposed to be too great, to render their safety consistent with the safety of the State. But the Saviour excludes none, but those who wilfully exclude themselves. As no case is too hard for His power, so no person who applies to Him is shut out from His compassion. “Him that cometh to Him,” whatever his former character or conduct may have been, “He will in no wise cast out” (John 6:37). This glorious exercise of sovereign mercy, is no less a divine attribute, than the power, by which He created the heavens and the earth. It is the consideration of His mercy in pardoning sin, and saving sinners, which causes that admiring exclamation of the Prophet, “Who is a God like unto Thee?” (Micah 7:18).

This passage (including the two following verses) closes the first part of the Oratorio. In tracing the series of the Scriptures thus far, we have considered several signal prophecies which foretold His appearance; we have seen their accomplishment in His birth, and have (I hope) joined with the heavenly host, in ascribing glory to God in the highest, for this unspeakable gift and effect of His love. From the prophets we have learnt His characters, as the great Restorer, and the great Shepherd. The Evangelist proposes Him to our meditation here, in a gracious and inviting attitude, as opening His high commission, proclaiming His own sovereignty and power, and declaring His compassionate purpose and readiness, to give refreshment and rest to the weary and heavy laden.

The principal points in the text are, the Invitation and the Promise.

1. The Invitation is expressed in very general terms. “Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden.” There is no qualifying or restraining clause, to discharge any person who is willing to

accept it. Whoever hath an ear to hear, let him hear. “Let him that is athirst come, and whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely” (Revelation 22:17). I cannot doubt, but these words authorize me to address myself to every person in the assembly. I speak first to you, who are “spending your money for that which satisfieth not” (Isaiah 55:2): who are wearied in seeking happiness where it is not to be found, and “in digging pits, and hewing out cisterns for yourselves, which will hold no water” (Jeremiah 2:13), and have hitherto been regardless “of the fountain of living waters,” which is always near you. While you are pursuing the wealth, or honours, of this world, or wasting your time and strength, in the indulgence of sensual appetites, and look no higher, are you, indeed, happy and satisfied? Do you find the paths in which you are led, or rather hurried and driven on, to be the “paths of pleasantness and peace?” (Proverbs 3:17). With what face can you charge the professors of religion with hypocrisy, if you pretend to satisfaction in these ways? We have trodden them far enough ourselves, to be assured that there are feelings in your heart which contradict your assertion. You know that you are not happy, and we know it likewise. Are you quite strangers to a secret wish, that you had never been born? Or that you could change condition with some of the brute creation? “Are you not heavy laden,” burdened with guilt, and fears, and forebodings; harassed with crosses, disappointments, and mortifications? Are you not often, at least sometimes, like children in the dark, afraid of being alone; unable to support the reflections which are forced upon you in a solitary hour, when you have nothing to amuse you? And while you seem so alert, and upon the wing, after every kind of dissipation within your reach, is not a chief motive that impels you, a desire, if possible, of hiding yourselves from yourselves, and of calling off your attention from those thoughts, which, like vultures, are ready to seize you, and prey upon you, the moment they find you unemployed. And how often do your poor expedients fail you, especially in a time of trouble, or on a sick bed? What comfort does the world afford you then? What relief do you then derive from the companions of your vain and gay hours?

Most probably, at such a season, they stand aloof from you; the house of mourning, or the chamber of sickness, are no less unpleasing to them, than to yourself. They do not choose the pain of being reminded, by a sight of your distress, how soon the case may be their own. Or, if they visit you, you find them miserable comforters. But I have to speak to you of One, who is able to comfort you in all seasons, and under all circumstances; whose favour is better than life. And will you still refuse to hear His voice? What hard thing does the Lord require of you? Only to come to Him, for that peace and rest, to which you have hitherto been strangers. But though you are invited, I know that of yourselves you will not come; you will not, and, therefore, you cannot. Be assured, however, the invitation does not mock you; and if you finally refuse it, the fault will lie at your own doors. But may I not hope that you will refuse no longer? The preaching of the Gospel is His appointment, and has a great effect, when accompanied with His Holy Spirit, to make “a willing people in the day of His power.”

There are others, however, to whom this invitation speaks more directly. The convinced sinner is heavy laden with the guilt of sin, and wearied with ineffectual strivings against it. He is weary of the yoke and burden of the law, when he can neither answer its commands with cheerful and acceptable obedience, nor see any way of escaping the penalty which is due to transgressors. He sighs earnestly and anxiously for pardon and liberty. If he has an interval of comparative peace and hope, it is more derived from some occasional fervour and liveliness in the frame of his spirit, than from the exercise of faith; and, therefore, as that fervour abates, (and it will not always remain at the same height) his fears return. If, in such a favoured moment, he feels little solicitation, or trouble, from the evil propensities of his heart, he is willing to hope they are subdued, and that they will trouble him no more; but his triumph is short, the next return of temptation revives all his difficulties, and he is again brought into bondage. For nothing but the knowledge of the Saviour, and the supplies of His Spirit, can give stable peace to the mind, or victory over sin. A repetition of

these disappointments and changes, fixes a heavy burden and distress upon the mind. But here is help provided exactly suitable to the case. Comply with this invitation, “Come to Him, and He will surely give you rest.”

But what is it “to come to Christ?” It is, to believe in Him, to apply to Him, to make His invitation and promise, our ground and warrant for putting our trust in Him. On another occasion, He said, “He that cometh to me shall never hunger, and he that believeth in me shall never thirst” (John 6:35). The expressions are of the same import. When He was upon earth, many who came to Him, and even followed Him for a season, received no saving benefit from Him. Some came to Him from motives of malice and ill will, to ensnare or insult Him. Some followed Him for loaves and fishes. And of others, who were frequently near Him, He complained, “Ye will not come to me, that ye might have life” (John 5:40). But they who were distressed and came to Him for relief, were not disappointed. To come to Him, therefore, implies a knowledge of His power, and an application for His help. To us He is not visible, but He is always near us. And as He appointed His disciples to meet Him in Galilee (Matthew 28:16), previous to His ascension, so He has promised to be found of those who seek Him, and wait for Him, in certain means of His own institution. He is seated upon a Throne of Grace; He is to be sought in His Word, and where His people assemble in His name; for He has said, “There will I be in the midst of them” (Matthew 18:20). They, therefore, who read His Word, frequent His ordinances and pray unto Him with a desire that they may know Him, and “be remembered with the favour which He bears to His own people” (Psalm 106:4), answer the design of my text. They come to Him, and He assures them that, whoever they are, He will in no wise cast them out. If they thus come to Him, they will of course “come out from the world and be separate” (2 Cor. 6:17). If they apply to Him for refuge, they will renounce all other refuge and dependence, and trust in Him alone; according to the words of the Prophet, “Asshur shall not save us; we will not ride upon horses: neither will we say any more to the works of our hands, Ye are our gods: for in Thee

the fatherless (the helpless and comfortless) findeth mercy” (Hosea 14:3).

2. The promise is, “I will give you rest.”* The word signifies both rest and refreshment. He gives a relief and cessation from former labour and bondage; and super-adds a peace, a joy, a comfort, which revives the weary spirit, and proves itself to be that very satisfaction which the soul had been ignorantly, and in vain, seeking, amongst the creatures, and objects of sense.

* Compare 1 Corinthians 16:18; 2 Corinthians 7:13; Philemon verses 7 and 20.

This “rest” includes a freedom from the forebodings and distressing accusations of a guilty conscience; from the long and fruitless struggle between the will and the judgment; from the condemning power of the law; from the tyranny of irregular and inconsistent appetites; and from the dominion of pride and self, which make us unhappy in ourselves, and hated and despised by others. A freedom, likewise, from the cares and anxieties, which, in such an uncertain world as this, disquiet the minds of those who have no solid scriptural dependence upon God; and especially a freedom from the dread of death, and of the things which are beyond it. In these and other respects, the believer in Jesus enters into a present rest. He is under the guidance of infinite wisdom, and the protection of almighty power; he is permitted to “cast all his cares upon the Lord” (1 Peter 5:7), and is assured that the Lord “careth for him.” So far as he possesses by faith the spirit and liberty of his high calling, he is in perfect peace. The Prophet Jeremiah has given a beautiful description and illustration of this rest of a believer (Jeremiah 17:5-8); which is rendered more striking, by being contrasted with the miserable state of those who live without God in the world. “Thus saith the LORD, Cursed is the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the LORD. For he shall be like the heath in the desert, and shall not see when good cometh, but shall inhabit the parched places of the wilderness, in a salt land not inhabited.” But, “blessed is the man that trusteth in the LORD, and whose hope the LORD is. For he shall be like a tree planted by the

waters, and that spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall not see when heat cometh, but her leaf shall be green, and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit.”

But besides rest, there is refreshment. There are pleasures and consolations, in that intercourse and communion with God, to which we are invited by the Gospel; which, both in kind and degree, are unspeakably superior to all that the world can bestow, and such as the world cannot deprive us of. For they have no necessary dependence upon outward situation or circumstances; they are compatible with poverty, sickness, and sufferings. They are often most sensibly sweet and lively, when the streams of creature comfort are at the lowest ebb. Many have been able to say with the Apostle, “As the sufferings of Christ (those which we endure for His sake, or submit to from His hand) abound in us, so our consolation in Christ also aboundeth” (2 Corinthians 1:5). The all-sufficient God, can increase these communications of comfort from Himself, to a degree beyond our ordinary conception; so as not only to support His people, under the most exquisite pains, but even to suspend and overpower all sense of pain, when the torment would otherwise be extreme. And He has sometimes been pleased to honour the fidelity of His servants, and to manifest His own faithfulness to them, by such an interposition. Our own martyrology affords one well-attested instance—that of Mr. Bainham, who suffered in the reign of Queen Mary. When he was in the fire, he addressed himself to his persecutors, to this effect: “You call for miracles in proof of our doctrine, now, behold one; I feel no more pain from these flames, than if I was laid upon a bed of roses.” But in ordinary cases, and in all cases, they who taste how good the Lord is to them that seek Him, how He cheers them with the light of His countenance, and what supports He affords them in the hour of need, can without regret, part with the poor perishing pleasures of sin, and encounter all the difficulties they meet with in the path of duty. Whatever their profession of His name, and their attachment to His cause, may have cost them, they will acknowledge that it has made them ample amends.

Come therefore unto Him, venture upon His gracious Word, and you shall find rest for your souls! Can the world out-bid this gracious offer? Can the world promise to give you rest, when you are burdened with trouble? When your cisterns fail, and your gourds wither? Or when you are terrified with the approach of death, when your pulse intermits, when you are about to take a final farewell of all you ever saw with your eyes, and an awful, unknown, untried, unchangeable eternity is opening upon your view. Such a moment most certainly awaits you; and when it arrives, if you die in your senses, and are not judicially given up to hardness and blindness of heart, you will assuredly tremble, if you never trembled before. Oh! be persuaded; may the Lord Himself persuade you to be timely wise, to seek Him now, while He is yet near. Lest that dreadful threatening should be your portion: “Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh” (Proverbs 1:24, 26).

15. Messiah’s Easy Yoke

“Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” Matthew 11: 29, 30.

Though the influence of education and example, may dispose us to acknowledge the Gospel to be a revelation from God; it can only be rightly understood, or duly prized, by those persons who feel themselves in the circumstances of distress, which it is designed to relieve. No Israelite would think of fleeing to a city of refuge (Joshua 20:2, 3), till, by having unwittingly slain a man, he was exposed to the resentment of the next of kin, the legal avenger of blood; but then, a sense of his danger, would induce him readily to avail himself of the appointed method of safety. The skill of a physician may be acknowledged, in general terms, by many; but he is applied to, only by the sick (Matthew 9:12). Thus our Saviour’s gracious invitation to come to Him for rest, will be little regarded, till we really feel ourselves weary and heavy laden. This is a principal reason why the Gospel is heard with so much

indifference. For though sin be a grievous illness, and a hard bondage, yet one effect of it is, a strange stupidity and infatuation, which renders us (like a person in a delirium) insensible of our true state. It is a happy time, when the Holy Spirit, by His convincing power, removes that stupor, which, while it prevents us from fully perceiving our misery, renders us likewise indifferent to the only means of deliverance. Such a conviction of the guilt, and desert of sin, is the first hopeful symptom in a sinner's case; but it is necessarily painful and distressing. It is not pleasant to be weary and heavy laden; but it awakens our attention to Him who says, "Come unto me, and I will give you rest," and makes us willing to take His yoke upon us.

Oxen are yoked to labour. From hence the yoke is a figurative expression to denote servitude. Our Lord seems to use it here, both to intimate our natural prejudices against His service, and to obviate them. Though He submitted to sufferings, reproach, and death, for our sakes; though He invites us, not because He has need of us, but because we have need of Him, and cannot be happy without Him, yet our ungrateful hearts think unkindly of Him. We conceive of Him as a hard Master; and suppose, that if we engage ourselves to Him, we must bid farewell to pleasure, and live under a continual constraint. His rule is deemed too strict, His laws too severe; and we imagine that we could be more happy upon our own plans, than by acceding to His. Such unjust, unfriendly, and dishonourable thoughts of Him, whose heart is full of tenderness, whose bowels melt with love, are strong proofs of our baseness, blindness, and depravity; yet still He continues His invitation, "Come unto me"—as if He had said, Be not afraid of me. Only make the experiment, and you shall find, that what you have accounted my "yoke" is true liberty; and that in my service, which you have avoided as burdensome, there is no burden at all; for "my ways are ways of pleasantness, and all my paths are peace." I have a good hope, that many of my hearers can testify from their own happy experience, that (according to the beautiful expression in our liturgy) "His service is perfect freedom."

If we are really Christians, Jesus is our Master, our Lord, and we

are His servants. It is in vain to call Him, “Lord, Lord” (Luke 6:46), unless we keep His commandments. They who know Him will love Him; and they who love Him, will desire to please Him, not by a course of service of their own devising, but by accepting His revealed will, as the standard and rule, to every part of which, they endeavour to conform in their tempers, and in their conduct. He is, likewise, our Master in another sense; that is, He is our great Teacher; if we submit to Him as such, we are His “disciples” or “scholars.” We cannot serve Him acceptably, unless we are taught by Him. The philosophers of old had their disciples, who imbibed their sentiments, and were therefore called after their names, as the Pythagoreans and Platonists, from * Pythagoras and * Plato. The general name of Christians, which was first assumed by the believers at Antioch (Acts 11:26) (possibly by divine directions) intimates that they are the professed disciples of Christ. If we wish to be truly wise, to be wise unto salvation, we must apply to Him. For in this sense, the “disciple” or “scholar,” cannot be “above his Master” (Luke 6:40). We can learn of men no more than they can teach us. But He says, “Learn of me;” and He cautions us against calling anyone master, upon earth. He does, indeed, instruct His people by ministers and instruments; but unless He is pleased to super-add His influence, what we seem to learn from them only, will profit us but little. Nor are the best of them so thoroughly furnished, nor so free from mistake, as to deserve our implicit confidence. But they whom He descends to teach, shall learn what no instruction, merely human, can impart. Let us consider the peculiar, the unspeakable, advantages of being His scholars.

* Pythagoras - Greek philosopher and mathematician (approx. 569-475 BC)

* Plato - Greek philosopher (approx 429-347 BC)

1. In the first place, this great Teacher can give the capacity, requisite to the reception of His sublime instructions. There is no respect of excelling in human arts and sciences, without a previous, natural ability, suited to the subject. For instance, if a person has not an ear and taste for music, he will make but small proficiency under the best masters. It will be the same with respect to the

mathematics, or any branch of science. A skilful master may improve and inform the scholar, if he be rightly disposed to learn; but he cannot communicate the disposition. But Jesus can open and enliven the dullest mind; He teaches the blind to see, and the deaf to hear. By nature we are intractable, and incapable of relishing divine truth, however advantageously proposed to us, by men like ourselves. But happy are His scholars! He enables them to surmount all difficulties. He takes away the heart of stone, subdues the most obstinate prejudices, enlightens the dark understanding, and inspires a genius, and a taste, for the sublime [resplendent, noble] and interesting lessons He proposes to them. In this respect, as in every other, there is none “teacheth like Him” (Job 36:22).

2. He teaches the most important things. The subjects of human science are, comparatively, trivial and insignificant. We may be safely ignorant of them all. And we may acquire the knowledge of them all, without being wiser, or better, with respect to the concerns of our true happiness. Experience and observation abundantly confirm the remark of Solomon, that “he who increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow: the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear with hearing (Ecclesiastes 1:8, 18). Unless the heart be seasoned and sanctified by grace, the sum total of all other acquisitions, is but vanity and vexation of spirit (Ecclesiastes 2:17). Human learning will neither support the mind under trouble, nor weaken its attachment to worldly things, nor control its impetuous passions, nor overcome the fear of death. The confession of the learned * Grotius, towards the close of life spent in literary pursuits, is much more generally known, than properly attended to. He had deservedly a great name and reputation as a scholar; but his own reflection upon the result of his labours, expresses what he learnt, not from his books, and ordinary course of his studies, but from the Teacher I am commending to you. He lived to leave his testimony for the admonition of the learned, or to this effect. Ah, vitam prorfus perdidit nihil agendo laboriose. “Alas! I have wasted my whole life, in taking much pains to no purpose.” But Jesus makes His scholars wise unto eternal life, and reveals that knowledge to babes, to persons of weak and confined

abilities, of which, the wisdom of the world can form no idea.

* Hugo Grotius (1583-1645) [Hugo, Huigh or Hugeianus de Groot] was a towering figure in philosophy, law, political theory and associated fields during the seventeenth century and for hundreds of years afterwards.

3. Other teachers, as I have already hinted, can only inform the head; but His instruction influences the heart. Moral philosophers, as they are called, abound in fine words and plausible speeches, concerning the beauty of virtue, the fitness of things, temperance, benevolence, and equity. And their scholars learn to talk after them. But their fine and admired sentiments, are mere empty notions, destitute of life and efficacy, and frequently leave them as much under the tyranny of pride, passion, sensuality, envy, and malice, as any of the vulgar whom they despise for their ignorance. It is well known, to the disgrace of the morality which the world applauds, that some of their most admired sentimental writers, and teachers, have deserved to be numbered among the most abandoned and despicable of mankind. They have been slaves to the basest and most degrading appetites, and the tenor of their lives has been a marked contradiction to their fine-spun theories. But Jesus Christ effectually teaches His disciples to forsake and abhor whatever is contrary to rectitude or purity; and inspires them with love, power, and a sound mind. And if they do not talk of great things, they are enabled to perform them. Their lives are exemplary and useful, their deaths comfortable, and their memory is precious.

4. The disciples of Jesus are, or may be, always learning. His providence and wisdom have so disposed things, in subservience to the purposes of His grace, that the whole world around them is a great school, and the events of every day, with which they are connected, have a tendency and suitability, if rightly improved [used to profit], to promote their instruction. Heavenly lessons are taught and illustrated by earthly objects; nor are we capable of understanding them at present, unless the mode of instruction be thus accommodated to our situation and weakness. The Scripture

(John 3:12) points out to us a wonderful and beautiful analogy between the outward visible world of nature, and that spiritual state which is called the Kingdom of God; the former is like a book written in cipher, to which the Scripture is the key, which when we obtain, we have the other opened to us. Thus wherever they look, some object presents itself, which is adapted, either, to lead their thoughts directly to Jesus, or to explain or confirm some passage in His Word. So, likewise, the incidents of human life, the characters we know, the conversations we hear, the vicissitudes which take place in families, cities, and nations; in a word, the occurrences, which furnish the history of every day, afford a perpetual commentary on what the Scriptures teach, concerning the heart of man, and the state of the world as subject to vanity, and lying in wickedness; and thereby the great truths, which it behoves us to understand and remember, are more repeatedly and forcibly exhibited before our eyes, and brought home to our bosoms. It is the peculiar advantage of the disciples of Christ, that their lessons are always before them, and their Master always with them.

5. Men who are otherwise competently qualified for teaching, in the branches of science they profess, often discourage and intimidate their scholars, by the impatience, austerity, and distance of their manner. They fail in that condescension and gentleness, which are necessary to engage the attention and affection of the timid and the volatile; or, gradually to soften and to shame the perverse. Even Moses, though eminent for his forbearance towards the obstinate people committed to his care, and though he loved them and longed for their welfare, was, at times, almost wearied by them (Numbers 11:11, 12). But Jesus, who knows beforehand the weakness, the dullness, and the refractoriness [obstinacy; stubbornness] of those whom He deigns to teach, to prevent their fears, is pleased to say, Learn of me, “for I am meek and lowly.” With what meekness did He converse among His disciples, while He was with them upon earth! He allowed them, at all times, a gracious freedom of access. He bore with their mistakes, reproved and corrected them with the greatest mildness, and taught them as they were able to bear, with a kind accommodation to their

prejudices; leading them on, step by step, and waiting for the proper season of unfolding to them, those more difficult points, which, for a time, appeared to them to be hard sayings. And though He be now exalted upon His glorious Throne and clothed with majesty, still His heart is made of tenderness, and His compassions still abound. We are still directed to think of Him, not as one who cannot be touched with a feeling of our infirmities, but as exercising the same patience and sympathy towards His disciples now, which so signally marked His character, during His state of humiliation. The compliment of the orator to a Roman emperor, though excessive and absurd, when addressed to a sinful worm, that they who durst speak to him, were ignorant of his greatness; and they who durst not, were equally ignorant of his goodness, is a just and literal truth, if applied to our meek and gracious Saviour. If we duly consider His greatness alone, it seems almost presumptuous in such creatures as we are, to dare to take His holy name upon our polluted lips; but then, if we have a proportional sense of His unbounded goodness and grace, every difficulty is overruled, and we feel a liberty of drawing near to Him, though with reverence, and with the confidence of children, when they speak to an affectionate parent.

A person may be meek, though in an elevated situation of life; but Jesus was likewise lowly. There was nothing in His external appearance, to intimidate the poor and the miserable from coming to Him. He was lowly or humble. Custom, which fixes the force and acceptance of words, will not readily allow us to speak of humility, as applicable to the great God. Yet it is said, “He humbleth Himself to behold the things that are in heaven, and in earth” (Psalm 113:6). Humility, in strictness of speech, is an attribute of magnanimity; and indifference to the little distinctions by which weak and vulgar minds are effected. In the view of the “High and Holy One who inhabits eternity” (Isaiah 57:15), all distinctions that can obtain among creatures vanish; and He humbles Himself no less to notice the worship of an angel, than the fall of a sparrow to the ground. But we more usually express this idea by the term condescension. Such was the mind that was

in Christ (Philippians 2:5). It belonged to His dignity, as Lord of all, to look with an equal eye upon all His creatures. None could recommend themselves to Him, by their rank, wealth or abilities, the gifts of His own bounty; none were excluded from His regard, by the want of those things which are in estimation among men. And to stain the pride of human glory, He was pleased to assume an humble state. “Though He was rich, He made Himself poor” (2 Corinthians 8:9), for the sake of those whom He came into the world to save. In this respect, He teaches us by His example. “He took upon Him the form of a servant” (Philippians 2:7), a poor and obscure man, to abase our pride, to cure us of selfishness, and to reconcile us to the cross.

The happy effect of His instructions upon those who receive them, is, “Rest to their souls.” This has been spoken to before; but as it is repeated in the text, I shall not entirely pass it over here. He gives rest to our souls:

First, by restoring us to our proper state of dependence upon God. A state of reconciliation and peace, and deliverance from guilt and fear. A state of subjection; for until our wills are duly subjected to the will of God, we can have no rest.

Second, by showing us the vanity of the world, and thereby putting an end to our wearisome desires and pursuits after things uncertain, frequently unattainable, always unsatisfying.

Third, by a communication of sublimer [more resplendent, more noble] pleasures and hopes, than the present state of things can possibly afford. And, lastly,

Fourth, By furnishing us with those aids, motives, and encouragements, which make our duty desirable, practicable, and pleasant.

How truly then may it be said, that “His yoke is easy, and His burden light!” It is such a burden, as wings are to a bird, raising the soul above the low and grovelling attachments, to which it was once confined. Only they who are capable of contrasting it, with the distractions and miseries, the remorse and forebodings, of

those who live without God in the world, can rightly judge of the value of this rest.

But we are all by profession, His scholars. Ought we not seriously to enquire, what we have actually learned from Him? Surely the proud, the haughty, the voluptuous, and the worldly, though they have heard of His name, and may have attended on His institutions, have not hitherto sat at His feet, or drank of His Spirit. It requires no long train of examination to determine whether you have entered into His rest, or not. Or, if you have not yet attained it, whether you are seeking it in the ways of His appointment. It is a rest for the soul, it is a spiritual blessing, and therefore does not necessarily depend upon external circumstances. Without this rest, you must be restless and comfortless in a palace. If you have it, you may be, at least comparatively, happy in a dungeon. Today, if not before today, while it is called today, hear His voice; and while He says to you by His Word, “Come unto me, and learn of me,” let your hearts answer, “Behold we come unto Thee, for Thou art the LORD our God” (Jeremiah 3:22).

The seventh of twenty booklets.

