

Sermons of John Newton

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

Booklet Six

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12. Effects of Messiah's Appearance - Isaiah 35:5, 6
13. The Great Shepherd - Isaiah 40:11

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13. The Great Shepherd

12. Effects of Messiah's Appearance

“The eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped: Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing” Isaiah 35:5, 6.

How beautiful and magnificent is the imagery, by which the Prophet, in this chapter, represents the effects of MESSIAH'S appearance! The scene, proposed to our view, is a barren and desolate wilderness. But when He, who in the beginning said, “Let there be light, and there was light,” condescends to visit this wilderness, the face of nature is suddenly changed by His presence! Fountains and streams of water burst forth in the burning desert, the soil becomes fruitful, clothed with verdure, and adorned with flowers. The towering cedars, which were the glory of Lebanon, and the richest pastures, which were the excellency of Carmel, present themselves to the eye, where, a little before, all was uncomfortable and dreary. How is it, that so few of those who value themselves upon their taste, and who profess to be admirers of pastoral poetry in particular, are struck with the elegance and beauty of this description? Alas, we can only ascribe their indifference to the depravity of the human heart. They would, surely, have admired this picture, could they have met with it in any of their favourite authors; but descriptive paintings in this style, so exquisitely combining grandeur with simplicity, are only to be found in the Bible, a book, which their unhappy prejudices and passions too often lead to depreciate and neglect.

But they who have a scriptural and spiritual taste, not only admire this passage as a description of a pleasing change in outward nature, but consider it as a just and expressive representation of a more important change, a moral change, of which they have themselves been, in a measure, the happy

subjects. The barren wilderness reminds them of the state of mankind by the Fall, and of their own hearts, before MESSIAH, the Sun of Righteousness arose upon them with healing, with light, power, and comfort, in His beams. In that memorable hour, old things passed away, and all things became new. The Lord, by shining into their hearts, and showing them His glory in the person of Christ, has created for them a new heaven and a new earth. The works of God around them in His creation and providence assume a different appearance. Before, they lived without Him in the world; but now, they see His hand wherever they look, they hear His voice in every event, for now the principles of His grace are planted in their souls, and they are no longer barren or unfruitful, but are “filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Christ Jesus to His praise” (Philippians 1:11).

The verses which I have read, exhibit the effects of MESSIAH’S power and goodness by another image equally pleasing. Not only the wilderness, but the inhabitants of the wilderness partake of the virtue of the great Redeemer. He finds them in circumstances of distress, which only He can relieve. But when He comes, the blind receive their sight, the deaf hear, the lame walk, and the dumb have voices given them to resound His praise. These mighty works, in their literal sense, marked His character, and confirmed His claims, when He was upon earth; and He Himself appealed to these, in proof of His being the promised Saviour whom the prophets had foretold, and that no other was to be expected (Matthew 11:3-6).

But the words have a still more sublime and important sense. As the great Physician, He cured all manner of diseases and infirmities. But this was not the principle design for which He came into the world. The maladies to which sin has subjected the body, are but emblems of the more dreadful evils which it has brought upon the soul. He came to open the eyes of the mind; to make the obstinate will attentive and obedient to the voice of God; to invigorate our benumbed and paralytic faculties; that we may be active and cheerful in His service; and to open our lips,

that our mouths may show forth His praise. I have a good hope that I may warrantably say, “This day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears” (Luke 4:21). Some of you who were once darkness, are now light in the Lord.

These different effects are produced by one simple, but powerful, operation. While Lazarus lay in the grave, all his natural powers were inactive. But when the voice of the Son of God restored him to life (John 11:43), he was, of course, immediately enabled to see, to hear, to move, and to speak. Thus, while we were spiritually dead, we were necessarily blind, deaf, dumb, and motionless, with respect to all the objects and faculties of that life of God in the soul, which is the perfection and honour of our nature. When we are made partakers of this life, by a new and heavenly birth, then our spiritual senses are brought into exercise. Then the eyes of the blind are opened, to see the beauty and glory of divine truths; we hear the voice of God, we feel at liberty to walk and act in His service, and our tongues are taught to praise Him. Here are four chief effects of a work of grace upon the heart, which distinguish believers from the rest of mankind.

And these effects are all to be ascribed to MESSIAH. For they are all wrought by the agency of His Holy Spirit. The gifts and graces of the Holy Spirit which are absolutely necessary, as well for the perpetuating of His Gospel from age to age, as for making it efficacious and successful, are bestowed upon sinners wholly upon the account of His mediation. It was when “He ascended on high and led captivity captive” (Psalm 68:18), that He procured these blessings for “rebellious men, that the LORD God might dwell among them.” And it was only for His sake, and on the account of what He was to accomplish in the fullness of time, as intimated in the promise of the seed of the woman appointed to break the serpent’s head, that there were any gracious communications afforded to fallen man, from the first entrance of sin into the world. But now the Redeemer’s great work is fulfilled, His salvation is more openly revealed and applied, by the publication of the Gospel, with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven, and sinners hear the voice of God and live. Then all

the changes, prefigured and predicted in my text, take place, and the wilderness becomes a fruitful field.

1. They were once blind, but now they see. The religion of true believers is not the effect of imagination and blind impulse, but is derived from a solid knowledge which will bear the strictest scrutiny, and is the reasonable service of an enlightened understanding. They see God; their apprehensions of Him, are, in some measure, answerable to His greatness and His goodness, and inspire them with reverence and love. Their conceptions of other things in which they are most nearly interested, are agreeable to the truth. Sin appears to them hateful in itself, as well as mischievous in its consequences; and holiness, not only necessary by the ordination of God, but desirable for its own sake, as essentially belonging to the true dignity and happiness of man. They know themselves; they see and feel that they are such creatures as the Bible describes them to be, weak, depraved, and vile. Of course, they see the folly of attempting to recommend themselves to God, and can no longer place any dependence on what they once accounted their wisdom, power, and righteousness; and therefore they see the absolute necessity of a Saviour. They see, likewise, and approve the method of salvation proposed by the Gospel, as worthy of the wisdom and justice of God, and every way adapted to the exigencies [urgent requirements] of their sins, wants, and fears. They see and admire the excellence, dignity, and sufficiency of Him, on whom their help is laid. His power and authority engage their confidence, His love captivates and fixes their hearts. They see the vanity of the present state, and the vast importance of eternity. In these respects they have all of them a good understanding, however inferior in natural capacity, or acquired knowledge, to the wise men of the world.

2. Their knowledge, so far as they have attained, is not merely speculative, cold, and indistinct, like the light of the moon. The Sun of Righteousness has shined into their hearts. The light they enjoy is vital, cheering and effective. Because they thus see, they

hear likewise. They were once deaf to the voice of God, whether He spoke by His Word or His Providence; whether in the language of mercy or judgment. But now their deaf ears are unstopped. They are now attentive, submissive, and willing to receive His instructions, and to obey His commands. With them, one “Thus saith the LORD,” has the force of a thousand arguments. They desire no further proof of a doctrine, no other warrant for their practice, no other reason for any dispensation, than Thus the Lord has said, This He requires, and This is His appointment. Thus their wills are brought into subjection; and they so understand, as to believe and obey.

3. Farther, with their sight and hearing, they receive power and activity. Once they were tied and bound in the chain of their sins, or like a man benumbed with a dead-palsy, unable to move. If they sometimes seemed to express desires, that might be called good with respect to their object, they were faint and ineffectual. But now their fetters are broken, the health and strength of their souls is restored, and God has wrought within them not only to “will,” but also to “do according to His good pleasure” (Philippians 2:13). It is not more wonderful that a cripple should suddenly recover the use of his limbs, than that a person, who has long been fettered in sinful habits, should be enabled to move and act with alacrity in the service of God. But in the day of divine power, sinners are made both willing and able. How burdensome was that which they once accounted their religion! how little comfort did it yield them! how little did it assist them against their passions, or against their fears? But all things are become new, since they have attained to a life of faith in the Son of God. Their religious service is now pleasant, and their warfare against sin and the world, victorious.

Their obligations, motives, resources, encouragements, and prospects, inspire them with a holy vigour to run, with patience and perseverance, the race that is set before them.

4. Having their sight and hearing thus restored, and their hearts enlarged to walk at liberty in the ways of wisdom; they are no

longer dumb, silent, and sullen, but out of the abundance of their hearts their mouths speak the language of gratitude, praise, and joy. For though most people have the faculty of speech, and can use, or rather abuse, their tongues fluently; though we are sufficiently expert from our childhood, in the dialects of falsehood, profaneness and folly, yet, by nature, we are dumb with respect to the language that becomes us, as the creatures of God, and as those who have sinned against Him, and are yet invited to seek His mercy. But when grace teaches the heart, then the heart teaches the mouth (Proverbs 16:23). When we believe, then we speak, yea, we sing and greatly rejoice; as it is written, “In that day I will praise thee; though Thou wast angry, Thine anger is turned away” (Isaiah 12:1). And again, “The voice of joy and thanksgiving is in the tabernacles of the righteous” (Psalm 118:15). “Let the redeemed of the LORD say, That He is good, and His mercy endureth for ever” (Psalm 107:1, 2).

It is of great importance to examine ourselves by this test, and not to be satisfied with our knowledge of the Gospel, any farther than our consciences bear us witness, that it has produced a real, moral, change in our tempers, conduct, and pursuits. For there is a knowledge which is falsely so called. It puffeth up, but edifieth not. Our Lord’s declaration deserves our most serious attention. “For judgment I am come into this world; that they which see not may see; and that they which see might be made blind” (John 9:39). It is very possible, yea, very easy, by the help of books, sermons, and converse, to acquire an orderly and systematic knowledge of divine truths; it may be learnt thus, like any other branch of human science, and the head be well-stored with orthodox sentiments; and there may be an ability to prove and defend them, in a way of argumentation, while the heart is utterly a stranger to their salutary influence. Such characters are too common. None make a greater parade and boast of seeing, than these persons. None are more fatally blinded. They smile, with disdain, when they speak of a self-righteousness founded upon prayers, alms-deeds, and sacraments; but are not aware that they themselves live in the very spirit of the Pharisees (Luke 18:11,

12), so clearly described, and so expressly condemned in the New Testament. Their supposed knowledge of the doctrines which they misunderstand and abused, is the righteousness on which they base their hopes; and trusting to this, they despise all those who are stricter in practice than themselves, as ignorant and legal; and discover, almost as great dislike to close and faithful preaching, as they could do to poison. Though the doctrines of the Gospel, when rightly received, are productive of godliness, it is to be feared, there are people who espouse and plead for them, to quiet their consciences, by furnishing them with excuses for the sins they are unwilling to forsake. It is not surprising, that they who are displeased with the yoke of our Lord's precepts, should seem friendly to the idea of salvation without the works of the law.

The notion of the final perseverance of believers, may afford a pillow for those to rest on, who being at present destitute of all feeling of spiritual life, labour to persuade themselves that they are Christians, because they had some serious thoughts, and made some profession of the truth, many years ago. So, likewise, in what the Scriptures teach, of the total inability of fallen man, they think they have a plea to justify their negligence and sloth, and therefore are not disposed to contradict the testimony. They evade invitation and command to wait, and watch, and strive, in the ways and means of the Lord's appointment, as they think, with impunity, by confessing the charge, and saying, I am a poor creature indeed, I can do nothing of myself aright, and therefore to what purpose should I attempt to do any thing? A minister may preach upon these points, in general terms, and obtain their good word. But if he speaks plainly and faithfully to conscience; if he bears testimony not only against dead works, but against a dead faith; against spiritual pride, evil tempers, evil speaking, love of the world, and sinful compliances; if he insists that the branches of the true vine should bear grapes, and not the same fruit as the bramble; hearers of this stamp will think they do God service by censuring all he can say, as low and legal trash. How awful! that people should be blinded by the very truths which they profess to believe! Yet I fear such cases are too frequent. God grant a

delusion of this kind may never be found amongst us! “For if the salt” itself “should lose its savour, wherewith shall it be salted?” (Matthew 5:13). May we come simply to the light, with a desire of seeing more of ourselves, and more of our Saviour; that we may be more humble and spiritual, more afraid of sin, more watchful and successful in striving against it; and, in our whole conversation, more conformable to our glorious Head!

But to return. From what has been offered upon this subject, we may observe,

(1). That true Christianity is friendly to society, and to the common interests of mankind. It is the source of peace, tenderness, benevolence, and every humane temper. It is calculated to soothe the fierce disposition, to enlarge the selfish spirit, and to transform the lion into the lamb. What then must we think of those pretended friends to liberty and free enquiry, whose unhappy zeal is employed to rob us of the only light and balm of life? Who by their misrepresentations and cavils, endeavour to persuade others, though they cannot effectually persuade themselves, that the Gospel, a scheme so wise in its constitution, so salutary in its design, so powerful in its effects, is no better than an imposition, the contrivance of superstitious or artful men! Why should they attempt to take away the foundation of our hope, and the spring of our comfort (if they were able) when they know they have nothing to substitute, in their place! Let us think of them with the compassion which their state calls for; and pray for them, “if peradventure God will give them repentance to the acknowledgment of the truth” (2 Timothy 2:25).

(2). The change thus wrought is great, marvellous, and, if not so frequent, might be styled miraculous. It is more than education, example, persuasion, or resolution can perform. It is the work of God alone to open the blind eyes, to change the heart of stone into flesh, and to raise the dead.

This thought should exclude boasting. The happy subjects of this change, were no better by nature or practice, than others. They have nothing but what they have received. The glory and

praise is due to the Lord alone. It should likewise soften their censure of those who are still in a state of alienation from God, or, at least, prevent the emotions of anger and resentment towards them. They know not what they do. Their danger should excite our pity, and our friendly endeavours to recover them from the error of their way. And, especially, we should be careful to regulate our behaviour, “that if they obey not the Word, they may without the Word be convinced and won” (1 Peter 3:1), by the force of our example. If the Lord be pleased to do that for them, which He has done for us, their dislike of us, and their opposition to us, will be quickly at an end; and though they set out after us, they may possibly make a swifter progress in the Christian life, than we have done. Thus, though Saul of Tarsus approached Damascus as an enemy and a persecutor, when the scales fell from his eyes, he not only immediately joined the disciples, but in a little time became a pattern to them.

That the change is the work of God, should likewise be considered by those, who, from a sense of the greatness of their sins, and the strength of their sinful habits, are ready to sink into despair. Whatever apparent difficulty there may be in your case, it is easy to divine power. “All things are possible with God” (Mark 10:27), and “all things,” likewise, “are possible to him that believeth” (Mark 9:23). The promises invite you to apply to Him who is the Author and Finisher of faith, and who has said for your encouragement, “Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out.”

13. The Great Shepherd

“He shall feed his flock like a shepherd; He shall gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young” Isaiah 40:11.

It is not easy for those, whose habits of life are insensibly formed by the customs of modern times, to conceive any adequate idea of the pastoral life, as obtained in the eastern countries, before that simplicity of manners, which characterized the early ages, was corrupted, by the artificial and false refinements of

luxury. Wealth, in those days, consisted principally in flocks and herds; and Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and others, who were, to speak in modern language, persons of high distinction, were likewise shepherds. The book of Genesis, which is an authentic and infallible history of the most ancient times, exhibits a manner of living, so different from our own, that, perhaps, few persons are qualified to enter fully into the spirit of the description. The poets seem to have derived their idea of the golden age, from some imperfect tradition of this primitive state; and if we compare it with the state of things around us, methinks we have reason to say, "How is the gold become dim," and the "fine gold changed!" (Lamentations 4:1). The opulence of Jacob may be conjectured from the present he sent to his brother Esau (Genesis 32:14, 15). Yet Jacob attended his flocks himself, in the drought by day, and in the frost by night (Genesis 31:40). The vigilance, the providence, the tenderness, necessary to the due discharge of the shepherd's office, have been frequently applied, in describing the nature and ends of government; and it has been esteemed a high encomium [formal expression of high praise] of a good king, to style him the shepherd of his people. This character, MESSIAH the Saviour condescends to bear; and happy are they who can say, with pleasing consciousness, "We are His people, and the sheep of His pasture" (Psalm 100:3).

The passage will lead me to speak of the Shepherd, the flock, and His care and tenderness over them.

1. Our Lord expressly styled Himself the "Shepherd," the "good Shepherd of the sheep" (John 10:11, 14), and the Apostle Peter styled Him the "chief Shepherd" (1 Peter 5:4). His faithful ministers have the honour to be under-shepherds; He appoints, and qualifies them, to feed His flock. They are the messengers of His will, but they can do nothing without Him; they can only communicate what they receive, and cannot watch over the flock, unless they are themselves watched over by Him (Psalm 127:1). For, with respect to efficacy, He is the chief, and, indeed, the sole Shepherd. The eyes of all are upon Him, and His eye is upon, and over, all His flock. The Old Testament Church had a Shepherd,

and their Shepherd was Jehovah (Psalm 23:1). Unless, therefore, the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls, likewise, be Jehovah, we fall unspeakably short of the privilege of ancient Israel, if their Shepherd was almighty, and if ours could be but a creature. Surely we could not then say, what yet the Apostle affirms, that we have a “better covenant, established upon better promises” (Hebrews 8:6); since MESSIAH, Himself, is expressly declared, to be the Surety and the Mediator of this Covenant. But would it not be better, upon this supposition, with David, who could say, Jehovah is my Shepherd, than with us, who are entrusted to the care of a delegated and inferior keeper, if Jesus be not Jehovah. Besides, who but Jehovah can relieve the necessities of multitudes in all places, in the same moment, and be equally near and attentive to them, in every age? The sinner, who is enlightened to know himself, his want, enemies, and dangers, will not dare to confide in anything short of an almighty arm; he needs a shepherd, who is full of wisdom, full of care, full of power; able, like the sun, to shine upon millions at once, and possessed of those incommunicable attributes of Deity, omniscience and omnipresence. Such is our great Shepherd; and He is eminently the good Shepherd also, for He laid down His life for the sheep, and has redeemed them to God by His own blood.

2. Shepherd is a relative name; it has reference to a flock. This great and good Shepherd has a flock whom He loved from everlasting, and whom having loved, He will love to the end (John 13:1).

Formosi pecoris custos, formosior ipse! [The Shepherd with a handsome flock, is Himself more handsome!]

He humbled Himself for their sakes, submitted to partake of their nature and their sorrows, took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of sinful flesh. He died for His sheep, “the just for the unjust” (1 Peter 3:18), to redeem them from the curse of the law, from the guilt and dominion of sin, from the power of Satan, and to bring them to God. They, by nature, are all “gone astray, every one to his own way” (Isaiah 53:6); but having thus bought them with His blood, in His own appointed

time, He seeks, finds, and restores His sheep. By the power of His Word and Spirit, He makes Himself known to their hearts, causes them to hear and understand His voice, and guides them into the fold. Then, they became His sheep in the sense of my text. They are under His immediate protection and government.

Considered as individuals, they are fitly described by the name of sheep. A sheep is a weak, defenceless, improvident creature; prone to wander, and if once astray, is seldom known to return of its own accord. A sheep has neither strength to fight with the wolf, nor speed to escape from him; nor has it the fore-sight of the ant, to provide its own sustenance. Such is our character, and our situation. Unable to take care of ourselves, prone to wander from our resting-place, exposed to enemies which we can neither withstand nor avoid, without resource in ourselves, and taught, by daily experience, the insufficiency of everything around us. Yet, if this Shepherd be our Shepherd, weak and helpless as we are, we may be of good courage. If we say with David, "The LORD is my Shepherd," we may make the same inferences he did, Therefore "I shall not want;" therefore I need not fear.

Collectively they are a flock. They are not, indeed, in one place. They are scattered abroad, dispersed through different ages and countries, separated by seas and mountains, and, too often, by misapprehensions and prejudices, by names and forms; and, only a very small part of the flock are known to each other. But they are all equally known to Him, and equally under His eye. In His view they are one flock, one body; they are animated by one and the same spirit; their views, hopes, and aims are the same; and, yet a little while, they shall be all brought together, a number without number, to rejoice and to join in worship, before His throne of glory. For they have an inheritance reserved for them in heaven (1 Peter 1:4, 5), and they shall be safely kept, while they are sojourners upon earth, for the Shepherd of Israel is their Keeper.

3. "He shall feed His flock like a shepherd."

The word is not restrained to feeding. It includes all the branches of the shepherd's office. He shall act the part of a Shepherd to His flock. We have a beautiful miniature description,

of what He has engaged to do, for His people, as their Shepherd, in the twenty third Psalm. And the subject is more largely illustrated in the thirty fourth chapter of Ezekiel's Prophecy. His sheep, from age to age, have been witnesses to the truth of His promises. He has a flock at present who rejoice in His care; and greater multitudes, as yet unborn, shall successively arise in their appointed seasons "and call Him blessed" (Psalm 72:17). For He is the "same yesterday, today, and for ever."

"He feeds them."

He leads them into green and pleasant pastures. These pastures are His Word and Ordinances, by which He communicates to them of His own fullness; for, in strict propriety of speech, He Himself is their Food. They eat His Flesh and drink His blood (John 6:54). This was once thought a hard saying (John 6:58-60) by some of His professed followers, and is still thought so by too many. But it is His own saying, and, therefore, I am not concerned, either to conform, or to vindicate it. The knowledge they receive by faith, of His incarnation and sufferings unto death, of the names He bears, and of the offices and relations in which He is pleased to act for them, is the life and food of their souls. The expression of feeding them' is agreeable to the analogy He has been pleased to establish, between the natural and the spiritual life. As the strength of the body is maintained and renewed, by eating and drinking; so they, who, in this sense, feed upon Him in their hearts by faith with thanksgiving, even they live (John 6:57) by Him, "for His flesh is meat indeed, and His blood is drink indeed."

"He guides them."

First by His example. He has trodden the path of duty and trial before them; and they perceive and follow His footsteps. Again, by His Word and Spirit He teaches them the way in which they should go; and both inclines and enables them to walk in it (Isaiah 30:21). He guides them, likewise, by His Providence; He appoints the bounds of their habitations, the line and calling in which they are to serve Him, and orders and adjusts the circumstances of their lives, according to His infinite wisdom, so as, finally, to

accomplish His gracious designs in their favour.

“He guards them.”

It is written concerning Him, “He shall stand and feed in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the Lord His God” (Micah 5:4). If we conceive of a flock of sheep feeding in the midst of wolves, who are restrained from breaking in upon them, not by any visible enclosure, but merely by the power of the shepherd’s eye, which keeps them in awe at a distance, it will give us some idea of the situation of His people. He provides them food in the midst of many mighty enemies (Psalm 23:3), who envy them their privilege; but cannot prevent it. If, for a single minute, He should withdraw His attention from the flock, they would be worried. But He has promised to keep them night and day (Isaiah 27:3), and every moment; therefore their enemies plot and rage in vain. Their visible foes are numerous; but if we could look into the invisible world, and take a view of the subtlety, malice, machinations, and assiduity of the powers of darkness, who are incessantly watching for opportunities of annoying them, we should have a most striking conviction that a flock, so defenceless and feeble in themselves, and against which such a combination is formed, can only be kept by the power of God.

“He heals them.”

A good shepherd will examine the state of his flock. But there is no attention worthy of being compared with His flock. Not the slightest circumstance in their concerns, escapes His notice. When they are ready to faint, borne down with heavy exercises of mind, wearied with temptations, dry and disconsolate in their spirits, He seasonably revives them. Nor are they in heaviness without a need-be for it. All His dispensations towards them are medicinal, designed to correct, or to restrain, or to cure, the maladies of their souls. And they are adjusted, by His wisdom and tenderness, to what they can bear, and to what their case requires. It is He, likewise, who heals their bodily sickness, and gives them help in all their temporal trouble. He is represented to us, as counting their sighs (Psalm 56:8), putting their tears into His bottle,

recording their sorrows in His book of remembrance; and even, as being Himself “touched with a feeling of their infirmities” (Hebrews 4:15), as the Head feels for the members of the Body.

“He restores them.”

The power and subtlety of their enemies, are employed to force, or entice them from His rule; and too often prevail for a season. The sheep turn aside into forbidden paths; and whenever they do, they would wander, farther and farther, till they were quite lost again, if He were not their Shepherd. If He permits them to deviate, He has a time, to convince them, that it was an evil and a bitter thing to forsake the LORD their Shepherd (Jeremiah 2:19), and to humble them, and to bring them back. Thus they become more sensible of their own weakness, and of the obligations to His gracious care; for He will not suffer their enemies to triumph over them. He will not lose one of His true flock; not one convinced sinner, who has, indeed, and in truth, surrendered and entrusted his all to Him. They must, and they shall, smart and mourn for their folly; but He will, in due season, break their snares, and lead them again into the paths of peace, for His own name’s sake.

The flock are not all sheep. There are lambs among them These are especially mentioned, and for these He expresses a peculiar tenderness. “He will gather them in His arm, and carry them in His bosom.” Though they are weaklings, they shall not be left behind. This is a beautiful and pathetic [pitiful, piteous] image. If a poor lamb is weary, and unable to keep up with the flock, it shall be carried. This clause affords encouragement,

(1). To young people. Early serious impressions are often made upon the hearts of children, which we are to cherish, by directing their thoughts to the compassion of the Good Shepherd, who has said, “Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the Kingdom of God” (Mark 10:14). This high and holy One, who humbles Himself to notice the worship of the heavenly host, hears the prayers of worms upon the earth; and

His ear is open to the prayers of a child, no less so, than to the prayer of a king.

(2). To Young converts. These, at whatever age, are children in the Lord's family, lambs in His flock. They are, as yet, weak, unsettled, and inexperienced. Almost every day brings them into a new and untried situation. They often meet with opposition and discouragement, where they have promised themselves help and countenance. Perhaps their nearest friends are displeased with them. They are liable, likewise, while they are enquiring the way to Zion, to be perplexed by the various opinions, and angry contentions, prevailing among the different religious persons, or parties, to whom they may address themselves. They are frequently discouraged by the falls and miscarriages of professors, some of whom, it is possible, they may have admired, and looked up to, as patterns for their own imitation. Add to these things, what they suffer from new and unexpected discoveries of the evil and deceitfulness of their hearts; the mistakes they commit, in judgment and practice, for want of a more solid and extensive knowledge of the Scriptures; and the advantage the great enemy of their souls derives from these their various difficulties to assault their peace, and obstruct their progress. What would become of them in such circumstances, if their faithful Shepherd had not promised to lead, and uphold them, with the arm of His power?

There is, likewise, particular mention made of "those who are with young." These He will gently lead. If we take the word according to our version, it may signify a state of conviction, or trouble. "Many are the afflictions of the righteous" (Psalm 34:19), by which they are often wearied and heavy-laden. But when their spirits are overwhelmed within them, He knoweth their path. Jacob would not permit his cattle, that were with young, to be over-driven for one day, lest they should die (Genesis 33:13). Much less will this Good Shepherd suffer the burdened, among His flock, to be hurried and tempted, beyond what they are able, or what He will enable them to bear.

But the word signifies, Those that have young, rather than those that are with young. Two sorts of persons in the Lord's flock, who come under this description, feel an especial need of His compassion, tenderness, and patience.

First, He only knows the feelings of the hearts of parents. What solicitude and anxiety they have for their young ones, the sucklings, if I may so speak, of the flock, which mingle with all their endeavours, to manage rightly the important charge committed to them, and to bring their "children up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord."

Second, Ministers, likewise, have painful exercises of mind. The Apostle Paul speaks of travailing in birth again, till Christ be formed in our hearers (Galatians 4:19). When we know of any newly-awakened, and begin to seek his salvation, how solicitous is our care to bring them forward, to comfort them, to warn them against the devices of their own hearts, and of their enemies! And how piercing our grief and disappointment, if they miscarry! How much is felt in sympathy for the trials of the flock! What wisdom, faithfulness, courage, meekness, and unction from on high, are necessary to the due discharge of what we owe to the flocks, of which we have the oversight! Who is sufficient for these things! And when we have done our best, our all, what defects and defilements have we to mourn over! But this is our great consolation, that He, who knows us, and leads us, considers "our frame, and remembers that we are but dust."

In this delineation of the character and conduct of the "Great Shepherd of the sheep" (Hebrews 13:20), we have an affecting Exemplar and Pattern, for the imitation of those, who act in the honourable office of under-shepherd, and are called, by their profession and engagement, to feed His sheep and lambs. Whether there be any ministers in our assembly, or not, you will at least permit me to speak a word to my own heart; which may, I hope, at the same time, impress your minds with a sense of our great need of your prayers. "Brethren, pray for us!" (1 Thessalonians 5:25); and pray to the "Lord of the harvest, that He

may send forth” more faithful “labourers into His harvest” (Matthew 9:38); for it is His work alone. It is not absolutely necessary, that a minister of the Gospel should be in the first line, of those who are admired for their abilities or literature; much less that he should be distinguished by such titles, honours, and emoluments as this world can give. But it is necessary, and of the last importance, to his character and usefulness here, and to his acceptance in the great Day of the LORD, that he should have a shepherd’s eye and a shepherd’s heart. He must serve the flock, “not for filthy lucre,” or “by constraint” (1 Peter 5:2, 3)—(that constraint, which the Apostle attributes to the love of Christ, only excepted)—“but willingly,” and with a view to their edification. And he must, indeed, serve them, not acting as a “lord over God’s heritage, but as an example to the flock.” Not preaching himself (2 Corinthians 4:5), perverting his sacred office to the purposes of ambition, or vain-glory, or the acquisition of wealth; but preaching Christ Jesus the Lord, and employing all his powers to turn sinners from the error of their ways. “He who winneth souls is wise” (Proverbs 11:30). If it be wisdom, to propose the noblest end, the faithful minister is wise; the end at which he aims, in subordination to the will and glory of God, is the salvation of souls; and the recovery of one immortal soul to the favour and image of God, is, and will at length be found, a greater and more important event, than the deliverance of a whole kingdom from slavery or temporal ruin.

If it be wisdom, to pursue a right end by the fittest means, he is wise; he knows the Gospel of Christ to be the power of God, the appointed, the effectual, the only sufficient means for accomplishing His great purpose; therefore, however unfashionable it may be, he is not ashamed of it, he preaches it, and he glories in it. If it be an effect of wisdom, not to be deterred from the prosecution of a great and noble design, by the censure and dislike of weak and incompetent judges, the faithful minister is truly wise. He loves his fellow-creatures, and would willingly please them for their good, but he cannot fear them, because he fears and serves the Lord. He looks forward, with desire, to the

day of that solemn and general visitation, when the “Shepherd and Bishop of souls” “shall Himself appear” (1 Peter 2:25, 5:4). And if he may then stand among those, who are pardoned and accepted in the Beloved, and receive the crown of life, which his Lord has promised to them that love Him (2 Timothy 4:8)—this thought fully reconciles him to the trials of his situation; and however depreciated, misrepresented, opposed, or ill-treated here, he can say, “None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the Gospel of the grace of God” (Acts 20:24).

There is a counterpart to this character, described by the prophets in strong and glowing language. There are idle shepherds, who feed not the flock, but themselves (Ezekiel 34:2); who neither attempt to heal the sick, to strengthen the feeble, to bind up that which is broken, nor to recover that which has been driven away. Shepherds who cannot understand, greedy, lovers of gain—and who, by a change of metaphor, are compared to slumbering watchmen, and dumb dogs that cannot bark (Isaiah 56:10, 11). The New Testament teaches us to expect that such persons, under the name of ministers, will be found, likewise, in the visible Church of Christ. Men of corrupt minds, destitute of the truth, who serve not the Lord Jesus, but their own belly (1 Timothy 6:5; Romans 16:18). Men who are of the world (1 John 4:5) and speak of the world, and therefore the world hears and favours them. But alas!—neither the wretched slave who toils at the galley-oar, nor he that is doomed to labour in a deep mine, where the light of the sun never reaches him; nor the lunatic who howls in a chain, are such emphatical [striking] objects of our compassion, as the unhappy man, who prostitutes the name and function of a minister of Christ, to the gratification of his pride and avarice; and the whole object, is not the welfare of the flock, but the possession of the fleece. Who intrudes into the post of a watchman, but gives no alarm of the impending danger (Ezekiel 33:7, 8). If the Scriptures be true; if the Gospel be not, indeed, as Pope Leo the tenth, profanely styled it, a lucrative fable; the more

he accumulates riches, the more he rises in dignity, the more his influence extends, the more he is to be commiserated. He may have the reward he seeks. He may be admired and flattered; he may, for a season, be permitted to withstand and discountenance the efforts of the Lord's faithful servants; he may shine in the accomplishments of a scholar or a courtier. But nothing less than repentance, and faith in the Redeemer, whose name and cause he has dishonoured, can finally screen him from the full effect of that terrible denunciation —“Woe to the idol shepherd that forsaketh [neglects] the flock: The sword shall be upon his arm, and upon his right eye: His arm shall be clean dried up, and his right eye shall be utterly darkened” (Zechariah 11:17).

The sixth of twenty booklets.

