


# Sermons of John Newton

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

## Booklet Ten

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21. Messiah Derided Upon the Cross - Psalm 22:7, 8  
22. Messiah Unpitied, and Without a Comforter - Psalm 69:20  
23. No Sorrow Like Messiah's Sorrow - Lamentations 1:12

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## Booklet Ten

- 21. Messiah Derided Upon the Cross,
- 22. Messiah Unpitied, and Without a Comforter and
- 23. No Sorrow Like Messiah's Sorrow

### 21. Messiah Derided Upon the Cross

*“All they that see me laugh me to scorn: they shoot out the lip, they shake the head saying, He trusted on the LORD that he would deliver him: let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him”* Psalm 22:7, 8.

Fallen man, though alienated from the life of God, and degraded with respect to many of his propensities and pursuits, to a level with the beasts that perish, is not wholly destitute of kind and compassionate feelings towards his fellow-creatures. While self-interest does not interfere, and the bitter passions of envy, hatred, malice, and revenge, are not roused into exercise, he has a degree of instinctive sympathy with them in their sufferings, and a disposition to assist them, if he can do it without much detriment to himself. The source of these social feelings, we express, by the term humanity; which seems to imply a consciousness that they properly belong to our nature, and that we ought, at least, to be always, and universally affected in this manner, when occasions offer. But while the heart is under the government of self, our humanity is very partial and limited. And it is to be ascribed to the goodness of God, rather than to any real goodness in man, that it is not wholly extinguished. Were this the case, and were the native evils of the heart left to exert themselves in their full strength, and without control, earth would be the very image of hell, and there could be no such thing as society. But to prevent things from running into utter confusion, God mercifully preserves in mankind, some social dispositions. They are, however, so weak in themselves, so powerfully counteracted by the stronger

principles of our depravity, and so frequently suppressed by obstinate habits of wickedness; that in the present state of things, we may almost as justly define man, (whatever impropriety there may seem in the expression) by saying, He is an inhuman creature, as by ascribing to him the benevolent properties of humanity.

The rage, cruelty, and savage insensibility, with which sin and Satan have poisoned our nature, never appear in so strong a light, as when they assume a religious form; when ignorance, bigotry, and blind zeal, oppose the will and grace of God, under a pretence of doing Him service. By this infatuation, every hateful passion is sanctified, and every feeling of humanity stifled. Thus, though the sufferings of the most atrocious malefactors, usually excite pity in the spectators, and often draw tears from their eyes; yet, the agonies of God's persecuted servants, under the most exquisite tortures which malice could invent, have frequently raised no other emotions, than those of derision and scorn. My text leads us to consider the highest instance of this kind. The twenty second Psalm, undoubtedly, refers to MESSIAH. It begins with the very words which He uttered upon the cross; nor could David speak of himself, when he said, "They pierced my hands and my feet." He was God's servant in the most eminent sense, and the service He performed, was an uninterrupted course of benevolence to the souls and bodies of men. He spent His life in "going about doing good" (Acts 10:38), nor could His enemies fix a single stain upon His conduct. Yet they thirsted for His blood; and, because He came into the world to save sinners, they accomplished their cruel designs. We have already seen how He was treated by the servants and by the soldiers, when condemned by the Jewish council, and by the Roman governor. This prophecy was fulfilled when He hung upon the cross. There have been persons in our own days, whose crimes have excited such detestation, that the populace would probably have torn them in pieces, before, and even after their trial, if they could have had them in their power. Yet when these very obnoxious persons have been

executed, according to their sentence, if, perhaps, there was not one spectator who wished them to escape, yet neither was one found, so lost to sensibility, as to insult them in their dying moments. But when Jesus suffers, “all that see Him, laugh Him to scorn; they shoot out the lip, they shake the head;” they insult His character, and His hope. The Evangelists furnish us with an affecting comment upon this passage. They inform us, by whom He was thus scorned and derided; they mention some circumstances, which strongly mark the peculiar and excessive contempt, with which He was treated; and they take notice of the especial scope and object of their insults, namely, the gracious purpose He had often expressed towards sinners, and the strong confidence He had avowed in God His Father.

1. The persons who scorned and derided Him, were various, and of different characters.

(1). The Chief Priests, Elders, and Rulers of the people. When these, who were held in ignorant admiration by the multitude, set the example, we do not wonder that it was generally followed. They had been His most avowed and determined enemies, they had long conspired to take away His life, and in the appointed hour their plots were permitted to succeed. They now rejoiced in their success. By their office as teachers and expounders of the law, they ought to have pointed Him out to the people as the object of their reverence and hope; but having rejected Him themselves, they employed all the authority and influence to make Him the object of general contempt. And lest the extremity of His torments should awaken sentiments of commiseration in the multitude, they were the first, and the loudest, in reviling Him, as He hung upon the cross.

(2). The populace derided Him. They had been instigated by the priests to demand His death of Pilate, when he was desirous of dismissing Him, and, rather, to insist that Barabbas should be spared (Matthew 27:20). The populace, though no less ignorant, were less malicious than their leaders. At different times, when they heard His public discourses, and saw His wonderful works,

they had been staggered and constrained to say, “Is not this the Son of David?” and not many days before, the popular cry had been strongly in His favour (Matthew 21:10, 11); though quickly after, it was, “Crucify Him, crucify Him” (Luke 23:21). As the sea, though sometimes smooth, is always disposed to obey the impulse of the wind, so the common people, though easily roused to oppose the truth, would, perhaps, be quiet, if they were left to themselves; but there are seldom wanting artful and designing men, who by a pretended regard for religion, and by misrepresentations, work upon their passions and prejudices, and stir them up to a compliance with their purposes. The priests by degrees, wrought the populace up, first to reject MESSIAH, and then, to join their leaders, in mocking and deriding Him.

(3). The Roman soldiers, who had contemptuously clothed Him with a scarlet robe, and bowed the knee before Him in derision, continued to mock Him when He was hanging upon the cross. The Romans to whom many monarchies were become subject and tributary, affected to despise the name of king. They held the Jewish nation in peculiar contempt. Therefore, the title KING of the JEWS, affixed to His cross, afforded them a subject for the keenest sarcasm.

(4). Yea, such is the hardness of the human heart, that one of the malefactors (Luke 23:39), who was crucified by His side, unaffected with his own guilt, and insensible of the just judgment of God, and of the account he was soon to render at His awful tribunal, seemed to seek some relief in the midst of his agonies, by joining with the priests and people, in railing on the innocent Jesus, who was suffering before his eyes. Thus He was the object of universal derision. They who were at the greatest distance in character and sentiment, who differed from, despised and hated each other, on other accounts, united as one man, in expressing every possible mark of hatred and scorn against Him, who had done nothing amiss.

2. They showed their scorn in the most pointed and cruel

manner. Not only they, who had clamoured for His death, derided Him, but others, who were only passing by upon their ordinary occasions, could not pass on till they had stopped a while to insult Him, wagging their heads, and reminding Him of what He had formerly said, and charging Him with the supposed folly and arrogance of His claims. They jested upon His wants; when He said, "I thirst," they gave Him vinegar to drink, mingled with gall. They jested upon His words; when He uttered His dolorous complaint, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" some of them, with a malicious turn, (which possibly was applauded for wit by others) from the sound of the beginning of the sentence, took occasion to suggest, that by saying "Eli, Eli," He called for Elias, the Prophet, to come to His assistance. Alas! of what dreadful malignity and obduracy [stubbornness] is the heart of man capable? How may we conceive the heavenly host to have been affected with this scene, when they beheld their Lord, the object of their worship and supreme love, thus treated by sinners? But it behoved Him thus to suffer (Luke 24:46), for He had undertaken to expiate the sins of many of His murderers, and to offer such satisfaction to pardon the vilest offenders who should trust in His name, in all future ages. Therefore there was no voice, arrest, or interposition from the heavenly world—thus He must be tormented, thus He must be scorned, and suspended as a spectacle to angels and to men, till He had paid the full price of redemption, and could say, "It is finished." Then, and not till then, He bowed His head, and breathed His spirit into His Father's hands. There were, however, attestations to his dignity, in this His lowest state. He showed, by His gracious answer to the penitent malefactor, that He had still upon earth authority to forgive sin, and to save to the uttermost. And the sun withdrew his light, and the rocks rent, though daring sinners derided and mocked.

3. The bulk of the people bore their part in this tragedy, through precipitation and ignorance. In His prayer for their

forgiveness (a prayer which was signally answered after His ascension) He mentioned the only extenuation their wickedness could possibly admit, They knew not what they did. It was otherwise, with those who were principally concerned in procuring His death. Long before, when they could not deny the reality of His miracles, they ascribed them to the agency of Beelzebub. By this malicious, wilful opposition to the strongest evidence of fact, against the conviction of their own minds, and by their violent, determined rejection of His mission, they committed the unpardonable sin. They spoke and sinned against the Holy Spirit. This sin no one can have committed, while he is fearful lest he has committed it, for it essentially consists, in a deliberate and wilful refusal of the only means of salvation. It is the sign of final absolute impenitence. They who had thus ascribed His miracles to Beelzebub, expressed the same height of enlightened malice against Him in His dying agonies, and there was a poignancy in their insults, of which the ignorant multitude were not capable.

(1). They reproached His great design for which He came into the world. “He saved others, himself he cannot save” (Matthew 27:42) How different is the force of the same words, according to the intention of the speaker! When they said, “His blood be upon us and upon our children!” (Matthew 27:25) they spoke the very language of the hearts of those who love Him, and who derive all their hopes, and all their happiness, from the application of His blood to their consciences. But, to themselves, it proved the most dreadful imprecation. So, it will be the grateful acknowledgment of His people in time, and to eternity, that when He was resolved to save them, the difficulties in the way were so great, that neither His prayers, nor His tears, nor His unspotted innocence, could prevail to save Himself. But for this, His love to sinners, His enemies reviled Him. Nor would they have offered to believe, if He would come down from the cross, as they supposed there was the least probability of such an event; for they had often rejected evidence, equal to what they now demanded.

(2). They reproached Him for His trust and confidence in God. He had said that “God was His own Father” (John 5:18). And they understood Him to use the expression in so high a sense, as thereby to make Himself equal to God. Had they misunderstood Him; had He not really intended what they laid to His charge, surely He would have explained Himself. This was the very ground of their proceeding against Him before the council, and the formal reason of the sentence of death they pronounced against Him. How often did He appeal to the testimony of the Scriptures, and of John, whom they durst not but acknowledge to have been a Prophet, and to His own mighty works, in support of His claim? But having fastened Him upon the cross, they triumphed and unwittingly expressed their exultation, in the very words which David had foretold should be used to MESSIAH. So exactly were the Scriptures fulfilled, by those who used their utmost endeavours to evade them, and to prevent their accomplishment.

But what is all this to us? It is very much to us. Christ could suffer but once, yet we read of those “who crucify Him afresh.” His Gospel represents His personal ministry, declares His character, reveals His love, produces the same effects in those who receive it, and they who oppose it, are considered as opposing Him, and are influenced, by the same spirit, which instigated the unbelieving Jews. It is to be hoped that many reject and scorn it through ignorance, as the multitude did of old; and that the intercession of Him, who prayed for those that knew not what they did, will prevail for their conversion. Whenever their eyes are opened, “they will be pricked to the heart” (Acts 2:37), and will then gladly enquire of those, whom now they despise, What they must do to be saved?

But it is to be feared, there are, in Christian countries many persons who too nearly resemble the spirit and conduct of the Jewish rulers; whose opposition proceeds from rooted enmity to the truth persisted in against light that has sometimes forced upon their minds, and who, though convinced, will not be persuaded. They, who despise, calumniate and scorn the



believers of the Gospel, would certainly offer the like treatment to the Author of it, if He was within their reach. They are ill-treated for His sake, and He considers it as an affront to Himself. Thus He said to Saul of Tarsus, when breathing out threatening against His disciples, “Why persecutest thou Me?” They who reject his ministers, reject Him (Luke 10:16). They who speak disdainfully of His dying Himself to save others; they who reproach or ridicule the humble confidence of His people; who censure and revile their hopes and comforts derived from His good Word, as enthusiasm [fanaticism] or hypocrisy; who have no compassion for their distresses, but rather wound them as with a sword in their bones, saying unto them, “Where is now your God?” (Psalm 115:2), are certainly treading, if not altogether with equal vehemence, in the footsteps of the Jewish rulers. May the Lord, in mercy, show them the danger of their path, and give them a timely apprehension of the destruction to which it leads! That they may humble themselves to do His will, implore His pardon, espouse His cause, and experience the comforts and privileges of that Gospel, which they have hitherto reviled and scorned.

## **22. Messiah Unpitied, and Without a Comforter**

***“Reproach [Rebuke] hath broken my heart; and I am full of heaviness: and I looked for some to take pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none” Psalm 69:20.***

The greatness of suffering cannot be certainly estimated by the single consideration of the immediate, apparent cause; the impression it actually makes upon the mind of the sufferer, must likewise be taken into the account. That which is a heavy trial to one person, may be much lighter to another, and, perhaps, no trial at all. And a state of outward prosperity, in which, the eye of the bystander can see nothing wanting to happiness, may be, (and I doubt not, often is) a state of torment to the possessor. On the other hand, we know that the consolations, with which it has sometimes pleased God to cheer His suffering servants, have

enabled them to rejoice in the greatest extremities. They have triumphed upon the rack, and while their flesh was being consumed by the fire. The Lord has had many followers, who, for His sake, have endured scourgings, and tortures, and terrible deaths, not only without reluctance or dismay, but without a groan. But He, Himself, was terrified, amazed, and filled with anguish when He suffered for us. Shall we say, The disciples, in such cases, have been superior to their Master; when yet they acknowledged, that they derived all their strength and resolution, from Him? This difference, cannot be well accounted for, by those who deny that His sufferings were a proper atonement for sin, and who can see no other reason for His death, than that by dying He was to seal the truth of His doctrine, and to propose Himself to us as an example of constancy and patience. But the great aggravation of MESSIAH'S sufferings was, the suspensions of those divine supports, which enable His people to endure the severest afflictions to which He calls them. Perhaps some persons who acknowledge our Lord's true character, may, upon that ground, think His agonies less insupportable, since He was not a mere man, but God in the human nature. It was, indeed, the dignity of His person that gave influence and efficacy to all that He did and suffered for sinners. It is likewise true that the weight laid upon Him was more than any mere creature could sustain. I would speak, with reverence and reserve, upon a point which is too high for our weak minds fully to comprehend. But in whatever way the nature of man, which He assumed, was upheld by His eternal power and Godhead, we may venture to affirm, that He derived no sensible comfort from it. For we have His own testimony that, in this sense, "God had forsaken Him." The divine nature could neither bleed nor suffer. He was truly and properly a man; and as a man, He suffered, and He suffered alone. Many of His servants have rejoiced while they were tormented, because God overbalanced all they felt, with the light of His countenance; but the Saviour Himself, deprived of this light, experienced to the uttermost all that sin deserved, that was

not inconsistent with the perfection of His character. My text expresses, so far as human words and ideas can reach, His exquisite distress, when “He bore our sins in His own body, upon the tree. Reproach broke His heart, and when He looked for pity and comfort He found none.”

1. “Reproach hath broken my heart.” We must not confine our thoughts here, to the reproach of His enemies. The passage in the Messiah [Oratorio] expresses it, agreeably to the version of the Psalms used in our liturgy, “Thy rebuke.” Though “He knew no sin, He was made sin for us.” He was accounted and treated as a sinner. Now a sinner is, deservedly, the greatest object of contempt in the universe, and, indeed, the only object of deserved contempt. Thus He incurred the reproach of the law and justice of God. The Holy Father, viewing the Son of His love in this light, as charged with the sins of His people, forsook Him. God infinitely hates sin, and will have no fellowship with it; and of this He gave the most awful proof, by forsaking His beloved Son; when He took upon Him to answer for the sins of men. Then the sword of the Almighty awoke against Him, and He spared Him not (Zechariah 13:7).

This rebuke broke His heart. Let broken-hearted sinners look, by faith, upon a broken-hearted Saviour. The phrase denotes woe and dejection inconceivable, with a failure of all resource. Anything may be borne while the spirit, the heart, remains firm; but if the heart itself be broken, who can endure? “A wounded spirit, who can bear?” (Proverbs 18:14).

It is not surprising, therefore, that He says, “I am full of heaviness.” In the Evangelists, we read, that “He began to be sore amazed, and very heavy” (Matthew 26:37, 38; Mark 14:33); and He said to His disciples, “My soul is exceeding sorrowful even unto death.” The most emphatic words are used, to describe His sensation of the bitter conflict of His soul, in the garden of Gethsemane, when as yet the hand of man had not touched Him. He began to be “amazed” [ekthambeo], or astonished. This word properly signifies, to be struck with terror

and surprise, by some supernatural power, such as Belshazzar felt, when he suddenly saw the hand-writing against him upon the wall (Daniel 5:6) And to be “very heavy” [ademoneo - the strongest of the three words used in the New Testament for depression], sated with grief, full, so as to be incapable of more. Some critics explain the word, as importing such an oppression of mind, as quite unfits a person for converse or society (compare Job 30:29) He said, “I am exceeding sorrowful” — surrounded, encompassed with sorrows [perilypos - encompassed with grief—Matthew 26:38]. It is added, He was in an “agony” [agonia - severe mental struggle and emotions, anguish— Luke 22:44]—a consternation of mind, such as arises from the prospect of some impending, unavoidable evil; like the suspense of mariners upon the point of shipwreck, who tremble, equally at the view of the raging waves behind them, and the rocky shore before their eyes, on which they expect, in a few moments, to be dashed. The evils He was to bear, and to expiate, were now collecting to a point, and formed a dark tremendous storm just ready to break upon His devoted head; and the prospect filled His soul with unutterable horror, so that His sweat was, as it were, great drops of blood falling down to the ground. Many have sweat under the extremity of pain, or terror; but His agonies, and the effect of them, were peculiar to Himself. His sweat was blood.

This is not a subject for declamation. It rather becomes us to adore in humble silence, the manifestation “of the goodness and severity of God” (Romans 11:22), in the Redeemer’s sufferings, than to indulge in conjecture and the flights of imagination. What is expressly revealed we may assert, contemplate, and admire. “His soul was made an offering for sin” (Isaiah 53:10). We know but little of the extreme malignity of sin, because we have but faint views of the majesty, holiness, and goodness of God, against whom it is committed. Yet a single sin, if clothed with all its aggravations, and the guilt of it brought home with power to the heart, is sufficient to make the sinner a terror to himself. Adam had sinned but once, when he lost all comfort

and confidence in God, and sought to hide himself. We have but slight thoughts of the extent of sin. Not only positive disobedience, but want of conformity to the law of God, is sinful. Every rising thought which does not comport with that reverence, dependence, and love, which is due to God, from creatures constituted, furnished, and indebted, as we are, is sinful. The sins of one person, in thought, word, and deed, sins of omission, and commission, are innumerable. What then is contained in the collective idea, in what the Scripture calls, “the sin of the world?” What then must be the atonement, the consideration, on the account of which the great God is no less righteous than merciful, in forgiving the sins, which His inviolable truth, and the honour of His government engage Him to punish. And they are punished, though forgiven. They were charged upon Jesus, they exposed Him to a rebuke which broke His heart. They filled Him with heaviness. When therefore, we are assured that the justice of God is satisfied, with respect to every sinner of the race of mankind, who, in obedience to the divine command, makes the sufferings of the Saviour his plea for pardon, and trusts in Him for salvation; and that upon this one ground they are freed from all condemnation, and accepted as children; when we are told, that the glory of the divine perfections is displayed in the highest, by this method of saving millions, who deserved to perish; we safely infer the greatness of the cause, from the greatness of the effect. The sufferings of Christ, which free a multitude of sinners from the guilt of innumerable sins, must have been inconceivably great indeed!

2. Under this accumulated distress, though His will was perfectly submissive to the will of God, and His determination fixed to endure all that the case required; yet, as He was truly a man, He felt like a man. His fortitude was very different from a stoical hardness of spirit. All the affections of pure humanity, whatever does not imply sin (such as impatience under suffering, and an undue premature desire for deliverance), operated in Him, as they might do in one of us. It was no

impeachment of His innocence, or of His willingness, that He wished, if it were possible, for some relief or alleviation of His misery. "He looked," as we do, when we are in heaviness, for "some to have pity on Him, and to comfort Him," but there was none. Though the pity of our friends is often ineffectual, and can afford us no real assistance, yet it gives a little relief to have those about us, to whom we can open our minds; who will sympathize with us, and compassionately attend to our complaints, if they can do no more. And to be neglected and forsaken in extremity, especially by those who have expressed great friendship, or are under great obligations to us, will be felt as an aggravation of the most distressing case that can be imagined. But thus it was with MESSIAH. He had to complain, not only of the cruelty of His enemies, but of the insensibility and inconstancy, of those, who had professed the most cordial attachment to Him. The impression this made upon Him, as a man, was such that it is distinctly specified in the prophetic enumeration of the ingredients, which composed the bitter cup of His sufferings.

He was not only apprehended by cruel men, but betrayed into their hands by one whom He had admitted into the number of His select apostles, who had been employed in His service, favoured with access to Him in His more retired hours, and was present with the rest when he kept His last Passover, and took His solemn and affectionate leave of them, before He entered upon His Passion. It was not an avowed enemy, but one of the twelve who dipped with Him in the dish, that was guilty of this enormous ingratitude and treachery. How keen are our resentments, if those, to whom we have shown great kindness, are discovered to have studied our ruin while they wore the mask of friendship? Though MESSIAH was incapable of any sinful perturbation of mind, He was very capable of being painfully affected, by the conduct of Judas; He had reason to look for pity from him, but He found none.

When He entered the Garden of Gethsemane, He commanded, may I not say, He entreated, His disciples to tarry there and

watch with Him. And to engage their utmost attention, He spoke plainly to them of His distress, saying, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful even unto death." Yet when He returned to them, the first, the second, yea, the third time, "He found them sleeping." How tender, yet how forcible was His expostulation, "Could ye not watch one hour!" (Matthew 26:40). What! could they know that their Lord was in an agony, wrestling with strong cries and tears, and yet sleep! as regardless of His sorrows, as of their own approaching danger! Were our dearest friends to show themselves equally insensible, when we were in extreme anguish, would not their indifference wound our spirits? He also was a man. And we may conceive it some addition to His grief, that when He looked to them for pity and comfort, He found none.

When He was apprehended, notwithstanding their former protestation of zeal and love, "they all forsook Him and fled" (Matthew 26:56). They sought their own safety, and left Him in the hands of His enemies. The Apostle Paul was thus deserted, and his expressions intimate that he felt it. "At my first answer, no man stood by me, all men forsook me" (2 Timothy 4:16). He had imbibed, likewise, the spirit of his Master, and prayed that it might not be laid to their charge. And though the Lord Jesus pitied and excused the weakness of His disciples, and permitted them to take care of themselves, it was in them, an instance, how little He could depend upon those, who were under the strongest obligations to Him.

But Peter followed his Lord to the hall of the High Priest, and there saw Him, with his own eyes, insulted, arraigned, and unjustly condemned. Might He not expect that Peter, the most active and earnest of all His followers, would have pitied Him at least at such a time? Alas! instead of pitying Him, Peter "denied Him;" he denied with oaths and imprecations, that he had any knowledge of Him, whom he had seen transfigured upon the mount, and whom he had seen agonizing in the garden. We read, "that the Lord turned and looked upon Peter" (Luke 22:61). Who can conceive the energy of that look! It was full of

meaning, and Peter well understood it. Surely, though a look of tenderness and compassion, it conveyed the expostulation of an injured benefactor, no less forcibly, than if all who were present had heard him say, “Peter, is this the pity I am to expect from thee?”

When He was nailed to the cross, He was surrounded only by enemies. These, as we have seen, far from pitying, or attempting to comfort Him, derided and mocked Him. How have some of us felt for our friends in their dying hours, though we have seen every possible attention paid to them, and everything provided and done for them, that could administer to their relief and comfort! But they, who have the faith which realizes unseen things, have their best Friend expiring in tortures, and insulted by His murderers, in His last moments.

But had all His disciples been near Him, and had all His enemies been His friends, still, in His situation, He would have been alone. The loss of the light of God’s countenance, will, to the soul that has enjoyed it, create a universal solitude, and render every earthly good tasteless, in proportion as that soul is united to Him in love; and still more, if there be superadded a sense of His displeasure. They, who have never tasted that the Lord is good, not having known the difference, can have no conception of this subject. Their minds are, at present, occupied with earthly things; and while they are thus engaged with trifles, they cannot believe, though they are repeatedly told it, that to an immortal spirit, a separation from the favour of God involves in it the very essence of misery. But should death surprise them in their sins, tear them from all that they have seen and loved, and plunge them into an unknown, unchangeable world, then (alas! too late!) they will be sensible of their immense, irreparable loss, in being cut off from the fountain of life and comfort. A suspension of this Divine presence, with an awful sense and feeling of what those, for whom He made Himself responsible, deserved, was the most dreadful part of the Redeemer’s sufferings. He was perfectly united to the will and love of His Heavenly Father, and by the perfect holiness of His nature,



incapable of tasting satisfaction in any thing else, if His presence were withdrawn. But when He endured the curse of the law for us, “He looked to God for pity and comfort, but He found none.”

In this glass [magnifying glass of Gods Word] we are to contemplate the demerit of sin. But there are some sufferings due to the impenitent sinner, of which MESSIAH was not capable. I mean the consciousness of personal guilt, the gnawing of a remorseful conscience, and the rage of despair. If we add the idea of eternity to the whole, we may form some faint judgment of what they are delivered from, who believe in Him, and what misery awaits those who presume to reject Him. Awful thought, to reject the only Saviour. If they refuse His mediation, they must answer in their own persons. Then they will find no pity, no comforter. For who, or what, can comfort, when the LORD God Omnipotent arises to punish? What will your pleasures, your wealth, or friends, do for you, when the hand of the Lord shall touch you to the quick? What smile can you expect will support you, against the terror of His frown?

Should any of you hear the Messiah [Oratorio] performed again, then and there, if not before, may God impress upon your heart the sense of this passage. Then you will understand, that the sufferings of the Son of God, are, by no means, a proper subject for the amusement of a vacant hour.

### **23. No Sorrow like Messiah’s Sorrow**

***“Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by? Behold, and see, if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow!” Lamentations 1:12.***

Although the Scriptures of the Old Testament, the law of Moses, the Psalms, and the Prophecies (Luke 24:44), bear an harmonious testimony to MESSIAH; it is not necessary to suppose that every single passage has an immediate and direct relation to Him. A method of exposition has frequently obtained [frequently been in vogue], of a fanciful and allegorical cast [contrivance], under the pretext of spiritualizing the Word of

God. Ingenious men, and sometimes men not very ingenious, have endeavoured to discover types [prophetic symbols] and mysteries in the plainest of historical parts, where we have no sufficient evidence that the Holy Spirit intended to teach them. And, upon very slight grounds, a proof has been attempted of the great doctrines of the Gospel, which may be proved much more safely and solidly from the passages of Scripture in which they are plainly and expressly revealed. But, by taking this course, instead of throwing real light upon the places they have, in this manner, attempted to explain; they have perplexed their hearers and readers, and led them to question whether there be any fixed and determinate sense of Scripture, that may be fully depended upon. It is true, when we have the authority of an inspired expositor to lead us, we may follow him without fear; but this will not warrant us to strike out a path for ourselves, and trust to our conjectures, where we have not such an infallible guide. The epistle to the Hebrews is a key to explain to us many passages, in a higher sense, than perhaps we should have otherwise understood them. But it is best for us to keep within safe bounds, and to propose our own sentiments with great modesty, when they are not supported by New Testament authority; lest we should incur the censure of being wise, above what is written. I may, without scruple, affirm, that the history of Sarah and Hagar, is an allegory referring to the two Covenants, because the Apostle Paul has affirmed it before me (Galatians 4:24); but if I attempted to spiritualize the history of Leah and Rachel, likewise, you would not be bound to believe me, without proof. I may preach the Gospel of Christ, from a text which mentions the manna, or the brazen serpent, because, our Lord has expounded these things, as typical of Himself (John 3:14; John 6:31, 35). But I must not be confident that every resemblance, which I think I can trace, is the true sense of the place; because, I may imagine many resemblances and types [symbols] which the Scripture does not authorize.

There is, however, a useful way of preaching, by accommodation, that is, when the literal sense is first clearly

stated to apply the passage, not directly to prove a doctrine, as if really contained in it, but only to illustrate the doctrine expressly taught in other parts of the Scripture. Thus, for instance, if the question of Jonadab to Amnon (2 Samuel 13:4), were chosen for the subject of discourse, “Why art thou, being a king’s son, lean from day to day?” The history of the context directly proves the malignity of sinful inordinate desire, and the misery of those who are under its dominion; that it poisons every situation in life, and renders the sinner incapable of satisfaction, though he were a king’s son. The form of the question might then lead, to observe, That believers are king’s sons, to show what are the great privileges of their adoption; and to enquire, how it comes to pass that many persons, so highly privileged, are lean, that is, uncomfortable, weak, and languishing in their profession? These points might, not improperly, be introduced, by way of accommodation, though they are not, directly deducible from the literal sense of the question.

The text I have just read to you (Lamentations 1:12), has led me to this digression. I find it in the series of the passages in the Messiah [Oratorio], but I am not sure that, in the literal sense, it immediately refers to Him. It is a pathetic exclamation by which the Prophet Jeremiah expresses his grief, or rather the grief of Jerusalem, when the sins of the people had given success to the Chaldean army, and the temple and the city were destroyed. Jerusalem is poetically considered as a woman, lately reigning a queen among the nations, but now a captive, dishonoured, spoiled, and sitting upon the ground. She entreats the commiseration of those who pass by, and asks, “If there be any sorrow like unto her sorrow?” Such a question, has often been in the heart, and in the mouth of the afflicted, especially in an hour of impatience. We are all, in our turns, disposed to think our own trials peculiarly heavy, and our own cases singular. But to them who ask this question, we may answer, Yes—there has been a sorrow greater than yours, greater than the sorrow of Jeremiah, or of Jerusalem. They who have heard of the sorrows of Jesus, will surely, upon the hearing of this question, be

reminded of Him, whether it was the intention of the Prophet to personate Him, or not. If we conceive of Him hanging upon the cross, and speaking in this language to us, “Was ever any sorrow like my sorrow?” must not we reply with admiration and gratitude, “No Lord, never was love, never was grief, like Thine.”

The expostulation, and the question, are equally applicable to the sufferings of MESSIAH. The former, indeed, is not inserted in the Oratorio, but I am not willing to leave it out. The highest wonder ever exhibited to the world, to angels, and men, is the Son of God, suffering and dying for sinners. Next to this, hardly anything is more astonishing to an enlightened mind—than the gross and stupid insensibility with which the sufferings of the Saviour are treated, and the indifference with which this wonderful event is regarded by creatures who are so nearly concerned in it. If they believe in Him, they will be healed by His wounds, and live by His death. If they finally reject Him, they must perish; and their guilt, and misery will be greatly aggravated by what they have heard of Him! But sin has so blinded our understandings, and hardened our hearts, that we have, naturally, no feeling, either for Him, or for ourselves.

1. Is the expostulation suited to any person here? Can I, with propriety, say, to some who are now present, Has this subject been, hitherto, nothing to you? Then, surely, you have not heard of it before; and, therefore, now you do hear of it, you will, you must, be affected. If you were to read in the common newspapers, that a benevolent and excellent person had fallen into the hands of murderers, who had put him to death in the most cruel manner, would it not be something to you? Could you avoid impressions of surprise, indignation, and grief? Surely, if this transaction were news to you, it would engross your thoughts. But alas! you have rather heard of it too often, till it has become to you as a worn-out tale. I am willing to take it for granted, that you allow the fact. You believe that Jesus Christ suffered under Pontius Pilate, was condemned by the

Jews, and crucified by the Romans. And is it possible this should be nothing to you? Is it too insignificant to engage, or deserve your attention? And yet, perhaps, you have wept at a representation, or a narrative, which, you knew, was wholly founded in fiction. How strange? What! the sorrows of Jesus nothing to you ! when you admit that He suffered for sinners, and will probably admit that you are a sinner. No longer, then, boast of your sensibility! Your heart must be a heart of stone. Yet thus it is with too many; your tempers, your conduct, give evidence that, hitherto, the death of Jesus has been nothing to you. You would not have acted otherwise, at least you would not have acted worse, if you had never heard of His name. Were His sufferings anything to you, is it possible that you would live in the practice of those sins, for which no atonement could suffice, but His blood? Were you duly affected by the thought of His crucifixion, is it possible that you could crucify Him afresh, and put Him to open shame, by bearing the name of a Christian, and yet living in a course unsuitable to the spirit and precepts of His Gospel? But if you are indifferent to His grief, is it nothing to you on your own account? What! is it nothing to you whether you are saved or perish? whether you are found at His right, or His left hand, in the great Day of His appearance? or whether He shall then say to you, “Come ye blessed, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you;” or, “Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire?” (Matthew 25:34, 41). There is no medium, no alternative. If you refuse this, there remains no other sacrifice for sin. This lamentable indifference to the Redeemer’s sorrows, is a full proof of the baseness and wickedness of the human heart; and it is felt as such, when the Holy Spirit convinces of sin. Natural conscience, may excite a painful conviction, of the sinfulness of many actions. But this stupid unbelief of the heart is, if I may so speak, the sin of sins, it is the root and source of every evil, and yet so congenial to our very frame as we are depraved creatures, that God alone can make the sinner feel it (John 16:9); and when he does feel it, the sense of it wounds and grieves him, more than all his other sins.

2. With respect to the question, if we rightly understand what has been observed from the Scripture history, in the six preceding sermons, concerning the particulars of His Passion; we may answer, without hesitation, Never was suffering or sorrow like that which MESSIAH endured, in the Day of the Lord's fierce anger. It is possible that history, which is little more than a detail of the cruelty and wickedness of mankind, may furnish us with instances of many persons who have suffered excruciating torments, and have been mocked and insulted in their agonies: But,

(1). Was there ever a character, of His dignity and excellence, treated in such a manner? Job considered his former state as a great aggravation of his sufferings. He enlarges upon the respect which had been shown him in his prosperity. "When I went out to the gate, through the city, the young men saw me and hid themselves, the aged arose and stood up. When the ear heard me, then it blessed me; and when the eye saw me, it gave witness to me" (Job 29: 8, 11). But afterwards speaking of fools, of base men, of the vilest of the earth, he adds, "Now I am their song, yea, their by-word. They abhor me, and spare not to spit in my face. They mar my path, they set forward my calamity, they come upon me as a wide breaking in of waters" (Job 30:8-14). But Jesus was the Lord of glory. He whom all the angels of God worshipped, was buffeted and spit upon by the lowest rabble. If a great king was degraded from his throne, and exposed to the derision of slaves, this would be a small thing, compared with the humiliation of Him, who, in His own right, was "King of kings, and Lord of lords."

(2). Was there ever so innocent a sufferer? When Aaron lost his two sons, he held his peace (Leviticus 10:3). A little before, he had been guilty of making the golden calf. The remembrance of this offence, composed his mind under his great trial. He saw that he deserved a still heavier punishment, and was silent. In like manner, David, when his rebellious son Absalom conspired against his life, was patient; he remembered the adultery and murder he had committed; and, though he mourned under his

afflictions, he durst not complain (2 Samuel 16:11). The malefactor upon the cross submitted to his sentence, because he was a malefactor, saying, “And we indeed justly” (Luke 23:41). It is thus with all who know themselves. Under their severest afflictions, they admit the propriety of the Prophet’s question, “Why should a living man complain?” (Lamentations 3:39). And they acknowledge, “It is of the LORD’s great mercy, they are not utterly consumed” (Lamentations 3:22). But Jesus was holy, harmless, and undefiled; He had fulfilled the whole law, and had nothing amiss, yet He yielded Himself “as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He opened not His mouth” (Isaiah 53:7).

(3). Did ever any sufferer experience, in an equal degree, the Day of God’s fierce anger? In the greatest of our sufferings, in those which bear the strongest marks of the Lord’s displeasure, there is always some mitigation, some mixture of mercy. At the worst, we have still reason to acknowledge that, “He hath not dealt with us after our own sins, nor according to the full desert of our iniquities” (Psalm 103:10). If we are in pain, we do not feel every kind of pain at once, yet, we can give no sufficient reason why we should not. If we are exercised with poverty and losses, yet something worth the keeping, and more than we can justly claim, is still left to us, at least our lives are spared, though forfeited by sin. If we are in distress of soul, tossed with tempest and not comforted, we are not quite out of the reach of hope. Even if sickness, pain, loss, and despair, should all overtake us in the same moment, all is still less than we deserve. Our proper desert is hell, an exclusion from God, and confinement with Satan and his angels, “where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.” Everything short of this is a mercy. But Jesus, though He had no sin of His own, bore the sins of many. His sufferings were indeed, temporary, limited in their duration, but otherwise extreme. Witness the effects, His heaviness unto death, His consternation, His bloody sweat, His eclipse upon the cross, when deprived of that Presence, which was His only, and His exceeding joy. On these accounts, “no

sorrow was like unto His sorrow!”

The unknown sorrows of the Redeemer, are a continual source of support and consolation to His believing people. In His sufferings, they contemplate His atonement, His love, and His example, and they are animated by the bright and glorious issue: For He passed from death to life, from suffering to glory.

First, His atonement, apprehended by faith, delivers them from guilt and condemnation, gives them peace with God, and access to Him with liberty as children (Romans 5:1, 2). Being thus delivered from their heavy burden, and from the power of Satan, and having a way open for receiving supplies of grace, and strength, according to their day, they are prepared to take up their cross, and to follow Him.

Second, His love, in submitting to such sorrows for their sakes, attaches their hearts to Him. Great is the power of love! It makes hard things easy, and bitter sweet. Some of us can tell, or rather, we cannot easily tell, how much we would cheerfully do, or bear, or forbear, for the sake of the person whom we dearly love. But this noblest principle of the soul, can never exert itself with its full strength, till it is supremely fixed upon its proper object. The love of Christ has a constraining force indeed! (2 Corinthians 5:14). It is stronger than death. It overcomes the world. And “we thus love Him, because He first loved us; because He loved us, and gave Himself for us” (1 John 4:19; Galatians 2:20).

Third, His example. The thought that He suffered for them, arms them with the like mind. They look to Him and are enlightened. By His cross they are crucified to the world, and the world to them. They no longer court its favour, or are afraid of its frown. They know what they must expect, if they will be His servants, by the treatment He met with; and they are content. He, who endured the contradiction of sinners against Himself, for them, is worthy that they should suffer, likewise, for Him. It is their desire neither to provoke the opposition of men, nor to dread it. They commit themselves to Him, and are sure that He



will not expose them to such sufferings, as He endured for them. So, likewise, under all the trials and afflictions, which they endure, more immediately, from the hand of the Lord, a lively thought of His sorrows reconciles them to their own. Thus by His stripes they are healed, and are comforted by having fellowship with Him in His sufferings.

Fourth, lastly, if more were necessary, (and, sometimes, through remaining infirmity and surrounding temptation, every consideration is no more than necessary) they know that their Lord passed through sufferings to glory. And they know (for they have His own gracious promise) “that if they suffer with Him, they shall also reign with Him” (John 12:26; Romans 8:18). They are sure, that the sufferings of the present “life, are not worthy to be compared with the joy which will then be revealed; and that when Christ, who is their life, shall appear, they also shall appear with Him in glory” (Colossians 3:4); and therefore they are comforted in all their tribulation, and can say, “None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I may finish my course with joy” (Acts 20:24).

The tenth of twenty booklets.

