

Some believers, while Christ was on earth, beheld his glory, as the glory of the only begotten of his Father, full of grace and truth; but since his ascension, who can say how many, with open face, have beheld, as in a glass, the glory of the Lord? But still, as in a glass. If that mirror is removed, we either lose sight of his glory, or form fantastic notions of it; as it is regarded, the glory of our Lord is to believers, at once, incontestable and incomprehensible.

Again; if Christ pre-existed as has been supposed, his condescension bears a proportion to his dignity.—Paul said to the Romans, Mind not high things; but condescend to men of low estate. Yet, where, I pray, is the wonderful condescension in one Roman being respectful to another? Or in one man being courteous to another? Vanity often makes us think we have condescended greatly, when common sense would have drawn a very different conclusion. The character of Christ is not liable to such censure. The more attentively we consider it, the more we are convinced

vinced his condescension is without the shadow of equality among the sons of men. The same mind may be in us which was also in Christ Jesus; but it is not possible that the same character should belong to us and him. Whatever resemblance there may be between Christ and Christians, the disparity is as conspicuous, and as instructing, as the agreement. Our condescension must be tinged with our low and weak condition; and, on that account, it can never be so great to our fellow men, as it is sometimes represented; but the voluntary humility of the Son of God, is such as produces in heaven itself, lasting admiration.

Further; from the pre-existence of Christ it appears, that his compassion to his people is as great as his condescension. It is said, Because the children were partakers of flesh and blood, he likewise himself partook of the same. Who is not touched with such goodness, and charmed with such commiseration? But why this painful sympathy, this holy partiality, to the children? Were they by
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nature, or without grace, better than others? No, in no wise. Why, therefore, so compassionate to them? The answer is, that through death, [his own death, his death on the cross] he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest, in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of his people.

Wonderful compassion! have we not felt its force? Shall we ever forget its sacred influence? Allured by it, we have taken courage to approach unto God, when otherwise, we had been driven far from him. Feeling its power, our resentments to our fellow men have died away, and we have put on at once, and with ease, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, and long suffering. May we reflect on those moments with the most grateful acknowledgments, and, by a renewal of them, more and more adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour!

It now, I hope, appears, that from the
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pre-existence of our Lord, believers may derive strong consolation. It is that which makes his Incarnation illustrious, his obedience glorious, his atonement precious, and his resurrection the solid ground of their lively hope. But for the union of the divine and human nature in Christ, how could we confide in him, or believe, that all power in heaven and earth is put into his hands? Till we behold Immanuel, we are always exposed to delusion, or distress. But resting on the divinity and filiation of our Lord, the veil of his flesh does not diminish, but increase our confidence in his mediation. It removes the fear of our being thought presumptuous; since we are told, that is the new and living way which is consecrated for us; and that in it we are ever welcome to draw near unto God.

Were we, my brethren, constantly to walk up and down in the name of the Lord, and to live by faith on the Son of God, in a settled and sound persuasion, that he has loved us, and given himself for us, and has made

kings and priests unto God and his Father, we should live in the best manner it is possible to live in this world, and should leave it, when we are called hence, not only without regret, but in hope that the grace bestowed upon us, will terminate in glory.

These are strong inducements to believe in Christ: yet how great is the number of unbelievers! What must they feel, when they shall be convinced of having deliberately rejected the only name under heaven, whereby they must be saved!

How are we to address this unthinking, or deluded set of people? To say we pity them, while they think they need it not, is but to provoke resentment, and, in their eyes, to make ourselves ridiculous. To throw out illiberal invectives, would ill become us, who have so frequently confessed, we are saved by grace. To connive at their folly, and form apologies for it, would be equally offensive to the Almighty. What then remains, but that we reprove, rebuke,
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and exhort, with all long suffering and doctrine. This is our duty, as a capacity, and a proper opportunity to discharge it, are united; nor is it then, on any pretence, to be omitted.

They who are left without remedy, are always left without excuse. Unbelief gains no dominion over them, without the evil dispositions of their own hearts. If they imagine, THAT is not to be accounted evil, which, by their own power, they cannot resist, or remove, they are deceived; and the deception, I fear, is very common. The question is not, what they can, or cannot be, as independents; (for no man, accurately speaking, is an independent, except in his own imagination;) but the question is, what they might avoid, and pursue, by divine assistance. This question, however, can never be answered by speculation. Up and try, in that way which God hath directed, is essential to the sober solution of it.

But it is said, The wicked, through the
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pride of his countenance, will not seek after God; and, that God is not in all his thoughts. Now, though God should be found of them that sought him not; yet should he leave such persons to die in their sins, they would justly perish in their own folly.—How far any of us ever indulged this evil temper, let each of us, for himself, consider: and may we remember, that though our unbelief may be accounted for by the depravity of human nature, yet that faith which accompanies salvation, must be attributed to sovereign grace!

SERMON III.

S E R M O N III.

ON THE INCARNATION OF CHRIST.

LUKE ii. 7.

AND SHE BROUGHT FORTH HER FIRST-BORN SON,
AND WRAPPED HIM IN SWADDLING CLOTHES,
AND LAID HIM IN A MANGER ; BECAUSE THERE
WAS NO ROOM FOR THEM IN THE INN.

NEVER was any object so much expected,
or so ardently desired, as Jesus Christ; yet
never were any people more disappointed
than those who waited for his appearing.
He was in the world, and the world was
made by him, and it knew him not. He
came unto his own, and his own received
him not. In short, after all the prophets had
said, and all that John could say, unto the
Jews he was a stumbling block; and after
every thing the Apostles could urge, and Paul

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himself

himself could preach, unto the Greeks, Christ was foolishness.

How are we to account for this contempt of the Son of God?—That may be done sufficiently, by giving a due attention to prophecy and history, and by serious reflections on our own behaviour towards the same object.

From prophecy, it appears, that other, and better treatment of our Lord in the vail of his flesh, was not, at first, to be expected. He cometh, saith Malachi, but who may abide the day of his coming? and who may stand when he appeareth? How beautiful upon the mountains, said Isaiah, are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings; that publisheth peace; that bringing good tidings of good; that saith unto Zion, thy God reigneth! Yet the same prophet, speaking of our Lord's first appearance after his Incarnation, asks, Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?

vealed? and declares he is despised and rejected of men.

From history, it is manifest, such was the state of the church and world, at the Incarnation of Christ, (of which sufficient proof will be given in its proper place,) that it was not probable that his visit would be welcome either to the Jews or Gentiles. When he was born, there was no room for Mary and Joseph in the *inn*; and when he went up to Jerusalem, there was no room for him in the *temple*. In the moment the Virgin was to be delivered, she was obliged to withdraw into a stable; and when her son said, O Jerusalem, Jerusalem—how often would I have gathered thy *children* together, as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! at that moment, the heads of houses in the abandoned city, conspired to put him to death. Nothing could soften their resentments. Unable to take away his life themselves, they applied to Pilate, and roared out, If thou let this man go, thou art not Cæsar's friend.

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From reflection on our own behaviour towards the Son of God, we have reason to believe, that had we lived in those days, we might have been carried away with the frenzy of the times; and either have mocked the Lord of glory, or have thought him an object beneath our notice. If in a Christian country, we have sincerely embraced that report which the Prophets and Evangelists have given us of him, and have believed unto righteousness, it has been owing to that grace which excites our wonder, and mortifies our pride, and by which, we have often confessed, all ground of boasting is effectually excluded.

Having removed an objection which seemed to stand in our way, let us now give a closer attention to the Incarnation of our Lord: not with a view to explain what is incomprehensible, but with a wish, and endeavor, to make such remarks as may confirm our faith in it; as may incline us to be more thankful for salvation by him, and may lead us to be more obedient to his will.

Previous

Previous to these remarks, permit me to say, that in this discourse, and throughout these lectures, ye are rather to regard the SUBJECT which is introduced, than to expect a *minute* attention to the words of the TEXT. It being my purpose to treat on the character of Christ, every lecture will bring forward a distinct subject subservient to that design. I wish therefore your attention to them as they are produced; and perhaps it will be found, that such a method of preaching may include a better exposition of the leading words of the text than some are apt to suppose.

My first observation on the present subject is, that very much depends on our obtaining right notions of HIM who was made flesh and dwelt among us. We are not allowed to say, he was the Father, or the holy Spirit; much less are we permitted to say, he was a created angel; least of all are we at liberty to say, that he who became incarnate was in his former state, a man.

Without

Without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness : and what less could be expected, if God was manifest in the flesh ? The moment any person positively rejects this great mystery, he sinks into something which is absurd, and cannot avoid falling into the crudest contradictions. This is the more remarkable, because by a bold effort to comprehend what is only open to belief, he is justly left to grope as if he had no eyes, and to stumble at the noon day as in the night.

Who our Lord was in his pre-existent state has been considered ; and upon a review of that subject, it is thought, that while we live in belief of his being the Son of God, we need not be alarmed at the most formidable opposition which can be made to our faith. But should we turn aside from what God hath testified of his Son, to embrace the doctrines of those men, whose rage for erring reason hath pushed them into notice ; or should we be seized with the frenzy of explaining inexplicable things, we have every thing unpleasant to expect. For God resisteth

resisteth the proud, though he giveth grace to the humble.

Secondly ; the Incarnation of Christ was not only the subject of prophecy for four thousand years, but the great thing promised to be fulfilled at the commencement of the present dispensation. It was a prediction of this event, which first terrified Satan for his seduction of Eve. It was the promise of the seed of the woman, which gave our trembling parents the first ray of hope ; and from that hour to this, Satan has fled from no other adversary : nor by any other advocate than Jesus Christ the righteous, hath one burdened conscience been properly relieved.

That the woman from whom the promised seed was to be expected, should be a virgin, Isaiah plainly foretold. Behold, said he, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name IMMANUEL. That this virgin was to be of the house and lineage of David, when that illustrious house had fallen from
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from its former splendour ; that her son should be born at Bethlehem, when the sceptre was departing from Judah ; that he should be persecuted as soon as he was born ; that he should rise superior to persecution, temptation, and death, and live, and reign for ever—all this the Prophets foretold—all this God promised to fulfil—all this, God hath performed !

What could seem more incredible than these things ? The Incarnation was contrary to the course of nature ; and, in a moral view, who could expect such mercy to be manifested to a ruined world, and to an apostate church ? Yet so it was, that when the days were accomplished in which the Virgin should be delivered, she brought forth her first born son. How great is the power, and the faithfulness of God ! How wonderful his mercy to mankind ! He delights, yes, he delights to do exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think ! And surely, we may infer, if he hath not withheld from us his only begotten son ;
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if he hath not spared him, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him, also freely give us all things.

In the third place ; the Incarnation of our Lord, may be considered as miraculous. If a miracle is an extraordinary work of God, in which he subverts, changes, or suspends, the known courses, or settled laws of nature, the conception of the Virgin, must be allowed to have been truly miraculous ; and as this miracle was repeatedly *foretold*, we must confess, that both miracle and prophecy concur to teach us the importance of what is commonly called, the Incarnation.

Of miracles, I am to speak hereafter. But if the birth of Christ was miraculous, let me here observe, that a miracle may be the subject of our belief, before we have any sensible evidence of the fact. It was not thought proper to leave the holy Virgin in a state of perplexity ; yet if Gabriel had not said unto her, Behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shall call his name
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Jesus; if he had not answered her natural question, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man? The same miracle might have been performed; and it seems it was wrought, before she had any sensible evidence that she had conceived. At first, Mary was merely a believer; and her faith was deservedly, very much commended. After Gabriel delivered his message to her, she arose, and went into the hill country in *haste*, and entered into the house of Elizabeth: and Elizabeth said unto Mary, Blessed is she that *believed*, for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord.

I fear we seldom possess accurate apprehensions of our own corporal, or intellectual abilities. In our estimations they are too frequently, every thing, or nothing, just as some idle persuasion happens to prevail. Either we are fettered by defective definitions, or disdaining those limits, like comets, we wander out of sight, and know not whither we wander, or where we are to rest.

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But why should this miraculous conception of the Virgin seem to any of us incredible? If we admit there was a first man, we must admit, that the manner in which he was to be brought into existence, must have been very different from those who descended from him by ordinary generation. He was created, they are begotten; and, if the manner in which Adam was made, may not be considered as a miracle, this, at least, may be safely asserted, that we know of no miracle that more abundantly displays the power of God than Creation. To form, settle, and preserve, what is commonly called the course of nature, is as wonderful as any deviation from it; and, on the other hand, any deviation from the common course of things, is just as easy for the Almighty to effect, as to keep unbroken the usual rotation of common events. To say, therefore, that human nature must of necessity exist, either by creation, or by generation, is to advance what we cannot prove, and to indulge a kind of temerity that admits of no defence.

Fourthly; the Incarnation of Christ was
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an event, on which every thing depended that relates to the redemption of his people. By this the power of Satan was to be destroyed, and the kingdom of God in us, to be established. Had not our Lord taken on him the seed of Abraham, he could not have been made of a woman, nor made under the law. How then could he have redeemed them that were under it, or how were they to receive the adoption of sons? Had he not been Incarnate, he could not have been tempted, nor have performed that obedience which yields the tempted Christian his only hope of being victorious. Had he not been found in fashion as a man, who had ever heard of his death, resurrection, ascension, and intercession? But, having performed, in our nature, the functions of the high priest's office on earth, he, by virtue of his own blood, entered into the holiest place of all, having thus obtained eternal redemption for us.

Since then, by man came death, by man came also the resurrection from the dead. These words are applied, by the apostle, to the
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the first and second Adam. The first Adam, however, was a mere man in every condition ; when he was in paradise, when ejected from it, and after he had obtained grace : nor can our first father be any thing greater than man even in glory. But the second Adam is the Lord from heaven, and that quickening spirit who is the life of all them who put their trust in him. The result of these remarks terminates in this, had not our mediator been a MAN, he could not have redeemed us unto God ; and had he not been IMMANUEL, our redemption must have ceased for ever.

Some indeed, have thought it indecent to say, God could not have redeemed sinners without the death of Christ ; and, when we consider, that our salvation was not necessary, but is of grace, it does not become us to limit the holy One of Israel. But, on the other side of the question, it may be observed, had there been ten thousand ways in which the elect might have been saved, they were all of them, perfectly known to the Almighty, and that every other way but this, he