

hath rejected. It becomes us therefore to suppose, that this way is chosen on sufficient grounds for the preference that is given unto it; and since we are told, without shedding of blood there is no remission of sin; since upon any opposite supposition, we must have false notions of the evil and the strength of our depravity, ungrateful apprehensions of the death of Christ, and of the love of God, in the gift of his Son, we may be confident, that in the redemption of sinners by his blood, he hath abounded towards us in all wisdom and prudence; and we may be satisfied, if we cordially approve of that grace which bringeth salvation, the just inference is, that we have not heard of it in vain.

In the fifth place; the grace of our Lord in his being found in fashion as a man, will still be the more conspicuous, if we consider, as was promised, the state of the church and world at the period of his Incarnation.

The Jews, in every age, from the death of Joshua to the birth of Christ, waxed worse
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and worse. If some reformati^ons intervened, they were partial, of short continuance, and constantly followed by shocking relapses into the worst of crimes. Their kingdom had been unhappily divided long before the birth of Christ; and the ten revolted tribes, some centuries before that event, had been carried into captivity far from the land of promise. Judah also, had suffered captivity in Babylon forty years; and, though returned with a mixed company, to their own land, at the Nativity, they were extremely corrupt, and in bondage to the civil power of Rome. The occasion of our Lord being born at Bethlehem, strongly marks their subjection to the Roman state. For there went out a decree from Cæsar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed. This decree brought Joseph and Mary from Nazareth to Bethlehem; and thus were the words of the prophet fulfilled: And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, art not the least among the princes of Judah, for out of thee shall come a Governor that shall rule my people Israel. But what a picture is given us of this people! They de-

nied that Jesus had any right to rule over them ; they hired false witnesses against him, and, on no better testimony, they treated him as a blasphemer in their supreme court of justice, and charged him as guilty of sedition at the bar of Pilate. There, by clamour, threatnings, and shocking imprecations, they obtained at last, sentence of death against him, and took care to see it executed, not only with rigour, but with insults which were extremely outrageous.

Who does not see from all this, that if Christ is to reign over Israel, he must rise from the dead, and that if the sons of Jacob are to submit to his sceptre, it must be owing to the plenitude of his power after his exaltation ? Believing this, David said, Gird thy sword upon thy thigh, O most mighty ; with thy glory and thy majesty ; and in thy majesty ride prosperously, because of truth, and meekness, and righteousness ! All who are well affected to the kingdom of our Lord, will say Amen !

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If we turn from the Jews to the Gentiles, we perceive among them, at the same period, that idolatry, immorality, and pride, every where abounded, and was every where applauded. We have no reason to suppose that any of the Gentiles in those days, were superior to the Romans in might, in mental abilities, or in moral worth. Yet if we regard what Saint Paul has said of them, we must own, that their crimes were equal to any thing we have yet known of the corruption of human nature. If we surmise that his account is not exact, or that the exceptions were more numerous than is commonly imagined, Horace and Ovid, Seneca, Juvenal and Persius, have each of them said more than enough to make us revoke the suspicion.

In such a church and world, what could induce our Lord to appear? Surely, if the best of men were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another, his Incarnation

must be attributed to his loving kindness, and the object of it the salvation of sinful men : not according to works of righteousness which they had done, but according to his mercy, by the washing of regeneration, and by the renewing of the Holy Ghost ; that being justified by his grace, they should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

If the apostle Paul himself, if Titus, and others, like them, owed every thing to such grace, it was necessary to their salvation : and if they could not be saved at less expence, shall we imagine that inferior favour will give us the hope of heaven ?

Yes, it is said ; for their case and ours is not the same. They were brought up either in ignorance of Christianity, or under violent prejudices against it : whereas we were born in a Christian country, and brought up in the belief of the Christian religion.

It is confessed, we have reason to be thankful

ful for the place and period in which we were born. But, if from providential favors, it is concluded we have no need of special grace; if because we were born of Christian parents, it is conceived we must of course be Christians, we are very much deceived. Besides; as our advantages are many, our disadvantages are not a few. We see not those striking examples of the truth and excellence of Christianity, which were so conspicuous in the apostolick age: when men hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. On the contrary, many are now called Christians who are only so in name; and much is held up amongst us, as Christian doctrine, which is inimical to Christianity. What is still more affecting, some of the most grievous corruptions of Christianity are *now* propagated, under pretence of bringing us back again to its original simplicity. Let no man, therefore, rely on his being born in Britain, or on the privileges of his education; since it is still a fact, that unless he is born again, or from above, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

Sixthly;

Sixthly ; the different dispositions of men when our Lord appeared amongst them, and the manner in which the report of his birth was varied to these discordant characters, is worth our notice. There was at that time, a general expectation that the Messiah would soon appear ; but, as we have seen, that hope was blended with very erroneous apprehensions of him. The greater part looked for nothing more than a worldly prince ; some of them had confused notions which they could neither explain, nor surmount ; while a few, a very few, expected the promised Saviour.

Characters so evidently opposite were not to be treated alike ; nor were they so treated. The Virgin was informed of the approaching advent of her son by an angel. Joseph was admonished of the birth of Christ by a dream. Zechariah and Elizabeth, were instructed by inspiration ; and they had their faith confirmed by a visit from Mary. The shepherds heard of the glad tidings from the heavenly host. The Magi had their attention
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raised by a star : while Herod, and those who sided with him, had little more than confused reports of the Incarnation of our Lord. Who but the Almighty could thus have varied the mode of information ? and who does not perceive, that both wisdom and grace are conspicuous in these variations ? The consequence is, that we who are favoured with a narrative of these things, must either disbelieve it, or confess, that Christ is he who should come, and that we are not to look for any other.

In the last place ; the different effects which these tidings produced, were such as might have been expected. The most amiable and venerable characters received from them abundant consolation. Mary said, My soul doth magnify the Lord ; and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour ! Zechariah said, Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he hath visited, and redeemed, his people ! Simeon blessed God and said, Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word ; for mine eyes have seen thy

thy salvation ! and Anna, coming in at that instant, gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spake of him to all them who looked for redemption in Jerusalem. The shepherds, with that good sense, and with that simplicity, which are recorded to their honor, said, Let us go now, even to Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us. And they came in haste, and found Mary and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying that was told them, concerning this child. The wise men from the East, persevered in their intentions ; and seeing again that star which first excited their curiosity, they rejoiced with exceeding joy. And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child, with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him : and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto HIM gifts ; gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And being warned of God in a dream, that they should not return
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to Herod, they departed into their own country another way.

While these amiable and venerable persons, thus rejoiced, Herod was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. Their consternation was inevitable ; not because their crimes had been many and great ; for crimes as often repeated, and as atrocious, our Lord came to forgive ; but because they despised that relief which God had provided for the chief of sinners, and attempted to justify themselves in their opposition to his anointed. They knew, if Jesus was the Christ, their vicious notions of a carnal Messiah, were replete with folly, and that they were as dangerous as they were absurd. Enraged therefore, at current reports, concerning the new-born babe, they endeavoured, by every form of opposition, to suppress the growing opinion that he was born a king. But all their efforts were in vain. The Lord laughed at their impotent attempts : he had them in derision. The word of his testimony prevailed. It yet prevails ;

vails ; and ever will be prevalent in the thing whereunto he is pleased to send it.

After all ; the important question is, How are we ourselves affected with the Incarnation of Jesus Christ ? Ye have heard my sentiments on this subject. Allow me to add, his Incarnation appears to me, the most remarkable, and important *epoch* of time, that was ever adopted by the sons of men. Without the prediction and history of the Incarnation, the world must have been left where our Redeemer found it ; in the region and shadow of death. The abasement of our Lord was essential to our happiness. By his poverty, we are enriched ; by his humility, we have hope ; and by that hope, we are humbled. Our resurrection is connected with his death ; and the quickning influences of the spirit, with his ascension into heaven. Now, by faith, we see our own nature, complete and perfect, in the holiest place of all : and, by faith, we follow our fore-runner into heaven itself ; expecting hereafter, to be with him, where he is, to behold his glory.

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But for his Incarnation, such a prospect had been impossible, and such a hope unenjoyed. It was in believing views of this, that David rejoiced before the ark; and it is beholding the glorious effects of our Lord's humility, that angels, and elders, rejoice before the throne. With a loud voice, ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, in heaven, say, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power, and riches, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing.

Ye will perhaps reply, What are our feeble voices, compared with this grand, and unexpiring shout? True; but what is it, compared with that mercy, and with that majesty, which exceeds all praise? We have no reason to be dejected, because, compared with the heavenly inhabitants, we seem but as grasshoppers in our own apprehension. Let us rather wonder we should have any power to perceive, and any disposition to rejoice in, the Incarnation of Jesus Christ. If he be formed in us, he cannot despise his
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own image, even where the impression of it is faint, and frequently obscured. A bruised reed he will not break; the smoking flax he will not quench. No, he will bring forth judgment to victory. In us, may the gospel of his grace be continually victorious; and over every thing that obstructs its reign in our hearts, may we be more than conquerors through him that loved us!—Amen.

S E R M O N IV.

ON THE INFANCY AND YOUTH OF CHRIST.

LUKE ii. 52.

AND JESUS INCREASED IN WISDOM AND IN STATURE,
AND IN FAVOR WITH GOD AND MAN.

OF the infancy and youth of Christ, we have only a very concise account in scripture. The tales and conjectures, which have been multiplied on this subject, are sufficiently numerous; but they are not here to be introduced.

On how many occasions are we taught the necessity and importance of revelation? As we are favored with that light, and walk in it, we enjoy religious satisfaction; but where it ceases to shine, ages roll on without giving

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us the least additional knowledge of Jesus Christ.

The historical narrative of his infancy and youth, in the New Testament, is to this effect : That he was born at Bethlehem of the Virgin Mary ; that, while an infant, he was taken into Egypt, to avoid the persecution of Herod ; that when brought back again to Judea, he was carried into Galilee, and afterwards to Nazareth ; that while he was there, he grew, and waxed strong in spirit, was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him ; that he continued in this obscure city till he was twelve years of age, and that then, he went up with Mary and Joseph to Jerusalem ; that they missed him, on their return to Nazareth, and went back again to Jerusalem seeking him ; that they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing, and asking them questions ; that all who heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers ; and that Mary, and Joseph, were amazed at his wisdom. We are further told, on their asking

asking why he had served them thus, that he replied, Wist ye not, that I must be about my Father's business ? But it is plain, however superior he was to Joseph and Mary, in understanding, he went down with them to *Nazareth*, and was subject unto them ; where, we are informed, he still increased in wisdom and in stature, and in favour with God and man.

It is the unavoidable lot of him that is born of a woman, to come into this world in a state of weakness ; and, if he rises to eminence in it, gradually to increase in wisdom and in strength. The miraculous conception of Christ, did not exempt him from the common condition of humanity. Nor did he, in our nature, increase in excellence without the favour of God. Well, therefore, may the best of men, who are so inferior to him, say, By the grace of God, we are what we are.

If we consult the prophets concerning the private life of our Lord, we shall find, that

agreement between their predictions and the history of the New Testament which is highly pleasing ; and, by comparing the one with the other, what is asserted in our text, will be the more confirmed.

Isaiah, seven hundred years before the Incarnation, said, And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots : and the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him : the spirit of wisdom and understanding ; the spirit of counsel and might ; the spirit of knowledge, and of the fear of the Lord ; and shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord. The prophet adds, And he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears. But, says Isaiah, with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity, for the meek of the earth ; and shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked : and righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins.—This prediction

diction perfectly agrees with the son of Mary ; and it agrees with no other object to whom it has been, or to whom it can be applied.

But, it has been objected, there is a seeming dissonance between what some of the inspired prophets have said of Jesus Christ : that Isaiah, speaking of him, says, He shall grow up before him, [his heavenly Father,] as a root out of a dry ground ; that he hath no form, nor comeliness, and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him : but that David, speaking of the same object, is pleased to say, Thou art fairer than the children of men ; grace is poured into thy lips ; therefore God hath blessed thee for ever.—This apparent contradiction may be removed on two suppositions ; neither of which is improbable. First, we may suppose, that Isaiah speaks of our Lord in his earliest appearance to the Jews after his nativity ; and that David speaks of him in his maturer age ; when some of his miracles had been wrought, and much of his wisdom had been displayed. Secondly, we

may suppose, that the son of Amoz drew his picture of the Messiah to agree with that opinion which *unbelievers* would form of him; and that the son of Jesse, sketched his profile of Christ, in such a manner, that those who *believed* in his name, would allow it to be strictly just.—If seeming paradoxes are apt to give us pain, we are ill qualified to enquire after truth; for though truth is immutable, yet as most of our affirmations are limited, beyond those limits very different things may be safely asserted of the same object. Young people would do well to remember this; and perhaps, some who are not young, may stand in need of such a remark.

But let us now descend to a few particular observations on the subject of this discourse.

In the first place; infancy and youth are terms which agree with our knowledge of human nature; but of the infancy and youth of the Word of God, we have no conception; and, I presume, of that, we have no belief. In him, there is no ground for progressive improvement.

improvement. But when he assumed our nature, he took it into the strictest unison with himself, with all its innocent infirmities. As the son of man therefore, he gradually advanced through the different stages of humanity, from infancy to childhood, to youth, and riper years; and as really grew in wisdom, and in stature, as John the Baptist, or as any other person. The means likewise of his corporal, and intellectual improvement, appear to have been what is common to mankind. He ate, drank, and slept; read, reflected, and prayed, as other holy men.

This throws an air of mystery over the subject of this sermon, which they who plume themselves on being very rational, are anxious to avoid. But those reasonings which are destructive of faith, or are intended to supply its place, are not to be trusted; and it will be found that they who have most of all indulged them, have reason to repent of their splendid indiscretion.

Of the true humanity of Christ, I have
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