

SERMON I.



A COMPENDIUM OF THE GOSPEL.

MARK, xvi. 15.

Preach the Gospel to every creature.

IT is now about eighteen hundred and twenty years since there appeared in the Eastern World, a person of singular dignity, and of uncommon wisdom and disinterestedness, calling himself the Son of God. His avowed object was, to enlighten and redeem the moral world. This person was, from the beginning, attended with such uncommon signs, and endowed with such extraordinary gifts, as could not fail to draw upon him the attention of all the people. Yet such was his modesty, and indifference to personal aggrandizement, that nothing seemed farther from his heart than a desire "to be seen of men." He exhibited nothing of a spirit of emulation, nor affected the parade and glory of human greatness. All the supernatural works which he performed, and all which were wrought by the Father in his behalf, were merely attestations to his superior excellence, or vouchers to the truth of his pretensions. As he assumed the character of the Messiah, he appealed to the Prophets, who had testified of him, whose writings were in the hands of the people, and whose descriptions might be easily com-

pared with the life he exhibited. The manner of his coming; the prodigies which should attend and follow him, the works he should perform, and the death he should die, were all foretold. He, and no other, answered the inspired description of the Messiah. He taught with authority hitherto unknown. He commanded with unheard-of effect. The powers of the natural and moral world alike obeyed him. For this, though unknown by all, and envied and hated by the Prince and the Priest, he was able to engage the affections and procure the company of a chosen few. These he called Disciples, and trained them up in the knowledge and love of his kingdom. They had left all to attend and follow him, and were soon to be invested, by him, with powers similar, but subordinate, to his own, and to be made the vehicles of his communications to all the world.

The writings of his Disciples, dictated under an influence precluding the possibility of mistake, give an account of his character and business ;—his whole design concerning our guilty and miserable world : and these constitute what he calls the *Gospel*, or the good tidings from heaven to men. The system of religion here taught, is eminently the *good news*, inasmuch as the holiness and hope of every rational inhabitant of the globe, have their only basis in the truths of this revelation, and man's way to Divine knowledge no other sufficient and effectual guide.

When about to separate himself from his little family, in order to secure the end of his life, he gave them the charge in the text. Addressing them officially, and therefore their successors in office, he solemnly and authoritatively required them to communicate these tidings to all nations, and pledged himself to continue the Christian Ministry to the end of the world.

To shew you, that what is here called the Gospel, or good news, is pre-eminently entitled to this appellation, and therefore worthy of universal acceptance, is the object of

this discourse. This will be accomplished by a *compendious account of what the Gospel is*:—and to render the subject as simple as possible, and easy to be remembered, I shall consider the whole testimony of Christ and his Apostles as being comprised in a DOCTRINE—a COMMAND—an INVITATION—a PROMISE—and a THREAT.

I. THE DOCTRINE of the Gospel,—which is,—that “Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners.” This is, emphatically, the peculiar Doctrine of the books of the New Testament. For though there are many other doctrinal truths contained in them, yet this, thoroughly understood, will be found to include them all.—This is the grand truth announced by the angel at the Nativity. “Behold I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people: for unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord.”—This is the Messiah, “whose goings forth have been from everlasting,” and of whose nature and office and object, testimony is borne in Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms.

1. In this DOCTRINE then, is implied, first, the *ruined state of man*. The Wisdom and Goodness of a God could never be employed in providing a Saviour for the *innocent*;—nor for the *guilty*, if able to succor and recover themselves. That is, for men, who have either deserved *well*, or who, though *ill-deserving*, are in a capacity for restoration to righteousness and peace. To put them in a capacity for salvation—to expiate their guilt—to recover them to holiness, and, in this way, to honor and happiness—was the grand object of Christ’s embassy to earth. This is his own account of it. “The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.” His *name* denotes his *object*—“his name shall be called JESUS, because he shall save his people from their sins.” Thus to be saved, is to be delivered alike from the miseries of a polluted nature, and a *guilty and condemned state*.—From all the evils indeed,

which, since the expulsion of man from Paradise, have poured in one unbroken torrent on the world, and deluged mountain and valley, island and continent alike, with iniquity and woe.

2. In the second place, this DOCTRINE implies an amplitude and sufficiency, in Jesus Christ, to save unto the uttermost all that cordially receive him—a power, adequate to the subjugation of every enemy of man's peace and virtue—an adaptedness of official virtue, to supply every moral want, and relieve every spiritual infirmity—and wisdom as extensive as his power, to remove all the obstacles to reconciliation between God and man. Obstacles, on the part of GOD, presented by the sanction of his law, requiring the death of its every transgressor—a sanction, which the honor of his government, and the immutability of his perfections, required him to maintain. Obstacles, on the part of *man*, found in the impotence of his understanding to find a way of escape, and the inveterate opposition of his will to returning to God in any way. To remove the obstacle, on the part of GOD, it was necessary to vindicate the perfections of GOD, in his denunciations against the transgressor. To remove the obstacles on the part of *man*, it was equally necessary to secure an influence upon his heart which should transform it into the love and likeness of the Divine law. To vindicate the Divine perfections, and establish the law, the proper wages of sin must be paid, and the curse inflicted. The Messiah must bear in his own person the iniquities of us all, and thus furnish an expression of GOD's displeasure against sin, while he pardons the sinner; and an affecting and powerful motive to all who return to their allegiance, never more by transgression to move his displeasure, or to incur the penalty of his broken law.

It was necessary that a Mediator should have power to enlighten human ignorance, in respect of the character and counsels of the kingdom; and grace to stoop to our infirm-

ities, that he might illustrate and magnify, in all eyes, the principles of the Divine Government, expose the evil of sin, and exemplify, in man's nature, the excellence of the preceptive will of God. To all these purposes, the Messiah was found equal, and in the office of a Teacher and Sacrifice, a Potentate and Sanctifier, became the author of salvation to all them who obey him. "Great is this mystery of Godliness." "God was manifest in the flesh," according to the testimony of the evangelist John, and as such, was "preached unto the Gentiles" by the Apostles, and "believed on, in" every age of "the world." He is the source of life—"the bread of God." In him the hope of the sinner commences its purifying and animating course, and to him all the ends of the earth look for salvation. Had God exacted of man even one stone, in the foundation of his spiritual house, the temple to this day had been a ruin. But salvation is of the Lord. He is the great corner-stone of the edifice, whose whole foundation was laid, whose superstructure has been reared, and whose top-stone is to be brought forth, in acclamations of rich and infinite grace.

II. But secondly, the Gospel has a COMMAND: and as all its *Doctrines* are involved in the one truth we have examined, so all its *precepts* are comprehended in this one commandment of God—"that ye believe on him whom he hath sent." Faith, working by love, is the evangelical Law, by obedience to which, all flesh may be saved. This is "good tidings" to a world under a Law, requiring the death of its every transgressor. Good news indeed—that God can "be just, and yet the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus."—Since, "what the Law could not do in that it was weak, through the flesh," the Gospel has achieved. 'For now there is no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus; the law of the spirit of life having freed them from the law of sin and death.' Freed already from guilt, they are destined to perfect freedom from corruption, and shall

ultimately inherit every good comprised in the promise of mercy unto salvation.

III. The Gospel, in the third place, contains an INVITATION. "Whosoever will, let him come and take of the water of life freely." This invitation is universal. No nation, nor men of any rank or condition, are forbidden the privilege. "To every creature," the commission to preach the Gospel, extends. "In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, if any man thirst let him come unto me and drink." "And the Spirit and the Bride say come, and let all who are interested say come, and whosoever will, let him come, and take the water of life freely." O wretched heathens! who have wasted all your intellectual, physical and moral powers, upon "cisterns which can hold no water," what cheering tidings shall these be to you! What to your nation, miserable Jew! Tired of your disappointments from lying prophets and seers, of a Saviour to come—what joyful tidings will they shortly be to you? And you, miserable worldling, of christian name!—when in the light of the spirit of truth, you shall behold your needs and your interest in the invitation—what overwhelming gladness will these tidings be to you! And what, at last, to all who welcome cordially and duly prize this Gospel, will be the delights of that banquet which has been spread by redeeming love!

IV. For the answer, take the fourth part. The PROMISE of the Gospel. "An entrance shall be ministered to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ—I will give you rest." How sweet to the weary traveller, the man of active business, the sick man's aching frame, the galley slave, and the victim of oppression, is the period of deliverance. Yet how soon is every man's resting season over! But the christian's rest is an eternal day. 'Tis not cessation from toil and trial merely—but from the galling servitude and disgraceful

drudgery of sin. 'Tis the termination of darkness and apprehension and doubt, and sorrow and temptation and conflict. 'Tis the jubilee of nations.—The rest of Jehovah's kingdom, from the war which has kept it in commotion, from the day of the apostacy in heaven. 'Tis the day of final separation, between the friends of God, and the principalities and powers and thrones and dominions, which have assailed his people and opposed Messiah's reign. 'Tis a rest, comprehensive of all the enjoyment of a prospective eternity of increasing knowledge, holiness and joy. 'Tis a "being filled with the fulness of God." In contrast with man's vassalage, and an imprisoned state of the spirit, it is liberty.—In opposition to the tendency of our present existence, it is immortality.—Compared with the deformity and imperfection of the Church on earth, it is purity and glory. "All things," says this evangelical promise, "are yours."—'Life, death, the world, the goods of the rich, the gifts of the wise, things present and things to come.' To all who receive the DOCTRINE, obey the COMMAND, accept the INVITATION, the PROMISE is made sure. It leads them with acceptance, while here, to a Throne of Grace, and hereafter, to a crown of unfading glory. This—sinful heart! this, is to be saved. And that the heirs of the promise "who have fled for refuge and laid hold on the hope set before them in the Gospel, might have strong consolation, God has confirmed that promise by oath:" so that by two immutable securities they have, made over to them, all that God can grant, compatible with the retention of his supremacy, and all that man can desire, while possessing only a limited capacity.

If this be the Gospel, well do we, Christian Brethren, glory only in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ—and though we have not seen him, though it doth not yet appear what we shall be when awaked in his likeness, yet believing in him, we may well rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory!

V. **But in the last place, the Gospel contains a THREAT,** and this completes the *evidence*, as well as the *description* of its evangelical excellence. The **THREAT** is terrible; and to an eye of flesh does not readily suggest the consistency or connection between the several parts of these good tidings: and perhaps this appendage may excite a doubt whether the Gospel be quite deserving of the appellation by which it commends itself to men. But what is the **THREAT**? Be not alarmed—contrite spirit! it was never designed to distress the broken heart. Be not high minded—unbeliever! it will be executed with palpable justice on thee, except thou art willing to be saved. He who denies the **DOCTRINE**, disobeys the **COMMAND**, refuses the **INVITATION**, disregards the **PROMISE**, and is unmoved by the **THREAT**, he, and he *surely* “shall be damned”—that is, according to inspired explanation, “shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his power.” This you will observe is not the language of the Law only, but of the Gospel. Not of unmixed justice merely, but of Justice looking on the world with the eyes of *Grace*. Of *Grace*, in the first place to all who hear the Gospel. Of *Grace*, in the second place, to all who shall be ultimately benefited by the Gospel; and therefore of *Grace*, thirdly, to the Universe as a *whole*.

Strange as it may appear, this very menace is, by the Apostle, stated to be an act of *Grace* to all who hear the Gospel. And none but unbelievers will dissent from this sentiment: for none but unbelievers are determined to reject salvation; and therefore none others have any selfish interest, to bias them to such dissent. But even unbelievers themselves, may possibly be persuaded that the **THREAT**, awful and severe as it is, proceeds from compassion toward them, so far as it has a tendency to evince the absolute necessity of a change of purpose and pursuit, and of exciting them to inquire after the way of escape. That such is its tendency,

we are authorized to say—for in sacred language we have observed that by the terrors of the Lord men have been persuaded. And though it has ever been the language of the thoughtless and profane, as well as of some visionary theologians, ‘we are neither to be *driven* to heaven, nor *frighted* into a course of evangelical virtue;’ yet should they ever touch the skirts of that virtue, or find the gate to heaven, this **THREAT** will have had some influence in rendering that touch desirable—some instrumentality in persuading them to escape from death.

God did not act without design in revealing his wrath from heaven, against all unrighteousness and ungodliness in men: and what it is not weakness in God to reveal, it is no virtue nor wisdom in man to disbelieve. Whoever believes him sincere in the **THREAT**, will be influenced by his belief; for faith is an actuating power, and embraces the whole testimony of God. And should so important a part of his testimony have no influence on the heart? And is it not gracious in God to attempt to move us, by every motive which can touch the springs of human action? And if destruction actually impends, is it not kind to give the warning as well as provide the way of escape? And if we hear the note of danger, is it unmanly or unwise to be alarmed and flee?—Or is it greatness and courage, for a little puny thing, like man, to defy the Almighty’s **Thunders**; and boast of bravery in combating the strength of an Omnipotent arm? As if Jehovah would not stoop to consume the briars arrayed against him, by so insignificant an enemy—or, as if even HE were too weak to make a sinner tremble. ’Tis grace in God to speak in every tongue of entreaty and of admonition, of threatening and of promise, and he is in the grossest sense “a fool,” who is not moved, when he hears the voice, to **turn** and live.

But admit that there are men hardy enough to laugh at

his terrors, and to mock when his fear has not yet come— Admit that there are hearts so obdurate, as to contemn alike the tender and the terrible, and to sin on in defiance both of mercy and of vengeance—Is it not an act of the highest compassion to the rest of the universe, to gather such out from among the just, and bind them down to a condition where they can no more annoy the heritage of God, and no more offend by their blasphemies, nor interrupt forever the pleasures of the pure in heart? Is there any other way, to secure the peace, and preserve, uncontaminated, the virtue of his kingdom? In omitting to do this, how is he to fulfil his promises to the redeemed? How is he to shield from outrage, and fulfil his covenant with, his Son? How, in short, is he to do justice to those perfections, which his truth is pledged to exonerate from the imputations with which the incorrigible continues practically to tax them? In a word, without doing all this, before the sun, how far short will he have come, of consummating the glories of his kingdom!

It seems hardly possible, that the intelligent hearer should not perceive, that the glory of God's name and kingdom, requires alike the publication and execution of this **THREAT**; and if so, that it is fitly comprehended in those tidings which angels, and the spirits of good men, proclaim and echo back with gladness, and whose fruits they will ever contemplate with ineffable delight. To the prisoners of despair, it cannot be good tidings. Prisoners of hope, however, as *we* are, it should not grieve.

Tell me, I pray you, if you do not rejoice, when, after having been cruelly oppressed and trodden down by insolence and malice, and your best friends having undeservedly suffered with you from men who have "felt power and forgotten right"—you see that power restrained, that will to inflict such wrongs, confined by proper authority, and rendered harmless to society? And why not thus judge of the Government of God? Is not his the proper authority?

Will he not as accurately apportion punishment to crime? Why then, may it not be esteemed good news, not that others suffer, but that their power to *cause* suffering is abridged? That a day is coming which shall put an end to the mischiefs of sin, and to the power of those who hurt and offend—a day which shall liberate Jehovah's kingdom from evil—when the oppressor shall cease and the vile man no more speak villainy, and the scourge be wrested out of the hand of the malignant—a day in which the faithfulness of God, as his patience has already been, shall be made to excel in glory, and his goodness be relieved from the charge of indifference to sin. Is not all this necessary to the prevention of crime, to the safety of the virtuous, and to the glory of him who has borne, and will ever bear, the sceptre of the worlds? And, if he who would secrete the assassin, and rescue the public robber from the hands of justice, does but excite against himself the indignant sentiments of a virtuous community—how far short of genuine benevolence to God's kingdom, must *we* fall, to account it an unrighteous thing in God, “when he shall come to be glorified in his saints and admired in all them that believe,” to rescue his people from the contamination and injuries of a guilty world!

It is in view of the retributions of that day, that Jesus Christ bids his disciples cultivate the virtues of passive courage—*forbearance, patience, fortitude, meekness.*—It is because such a day is appointed, that he bids us bear the scoff and jest and strife of tongues, and unresistingly take wrong, and receive outrage with christian meekness. “Dearly beloved”—is the argument—“avenge not yourselves—vengeance is mine—I will repay.” The righteous leave the retribution of the wicked to that day—and notwithstanding, love his appearing. Let us not then with arrogance such as approaches that of Eden's seducer, affect to surpass in our mercifulness, the great God himself, whose nature is love, and rear our claim to benevolence on a sup-

position, which subverts the integrity and kindness of Jehovah's throne.—While we adore the *grace*, let us not disjoin it from the *truth* which came by Jesus Christ.

If now it has been made out to your conviction, hearer—as was proposed in the beginning—that the testimony of Jesus Christ, called the “good tidings,” is preeminently entitled to this appellation; then, in the name of its blessed author, why do you not receive and welcome it to your hearts? What barrier is there between that heart and salvation? If you like the Gospel—if it be not in pretence merely, but in *truth* good tidings to your ear—if the DOCTRINE be such as you believe and love—the COMMAND not grievous—the INVITATION such as you dare not refuse—and if, of consequence, you embrace and rest upon the PROMISE—and acquiesce in the THREAT—then, I repeat it, what barrier is there between the heart and salvation? No other salvation is offered, no other possible to a sinner. And Jesus Christ came, and laboured, and died, and revived for a very different end from that you covet, if you *desire* any other!

The view then which we have taken of the Gospel, if substantially correct, settles the question, for each of us, whether there exists at this time, a controversy between him and God. Whether Jesus Christ, by the Gospel, has effected a reconciliation between the Father and his heart; or whether God and he be still at variance. Nor can the question be fairly evaded—for Christ himself has already decided the previous question, whether a man may, at the same time, love the Father and make no terms with the Son, by saying peremptorily,—“he that hateth me, hateth my Father also.” What then must be the depravity of *his* heart and how certainly is he in a state of condemnation, who does not love the Gospel!