

CHAPTER 20

This evangelist, though he began not his gospel as the rest did, yet concludes it as they did, with the history of Christ's resurrection; not of the thing itself, for none of them describe how he rose, but of the proofs and evidences of it, which demonstrated that he was risen. The proofs of Christ's resurrection, which we have in this chapter, are

I. Such as occurred immediately at the sepulchre.

- 1.** The sepulchre found empty, and the graveclothes in good order (v. 1-10).
- 2.** Two angels appearing to Mary Magdalene at the sepulchre (v. 11-13).
- 3.** Christ himself appearing to her (v. 14-18).

II. Such as occurred afterwards at the meetings of the apostles.

- 1.** At one, the same day at evening that Christ rose, when Thomas was absent (v. 19-25).
- 2.** At another, that day seven-night, when Thomas was with them (v. 26-31). What is related here is mostly what was omitted by the other evangelists.

◀▶ JOHN 20:1-10

THE RESURRECTION

There was no one thing of which the apostles were more concerned to produce substantial proof than the resurrection of their Master,

- 1.** Because it was that which he himself appealed to as the last and most cogent proof of his being the Messiah. Those that would not believe other signs were referred to this sign of the prophet Jonas. And therefore enemies were most solicitous to stifle the notice of this, because it was put on this issue, and, if he be risen, they are not only murderers, but murderers of the Messiah.
- 2.** Because it was upon this the performance of his undertaking for our redemption and salvation did depend. If he give his life a ransom, and do

not resume it, it does not appear that his giving it was accepted as a satisfaction. If he be imprisoned for our debt, and lie by it, we are undone, ~~457~~1 Corinthians 15:17.

3. Because he never showed himself alive after his resurrection to all the people, ~~400~~Acts 10:40, 41. We should have said, "Let his ignominious death be private, and his glorious resurrection public." But God's thoughts are not as ours; and he ordered it that his death should be public before the sun, by the same token that the sun blushed and hid his face upon it. But the demonstrations of his resurrection should be reserved as a favour for his particular friends, and by them be published to the world, that those might be blessed who have not seen, and yet have believed. The method of proof is such as gives abundant satisfaction to those who are piously disposed to receive the doctrine and law of Christ, and yet leaves room for those to object who are willingly ignorant and obstinate in their unbelief. And this is a fair trial, suited to the case of those who are probationers.

In these verses we have the first step towards the proof of Christ's resurrection, which is, that the sepulchre was found empty. *He is not here*, and, if so, they must tell us where he is or we conclude him risen.

I. Mary Magdalene, coming to the sepulchre, finds the *stone taken away*. This evangelist does not mention the other women that went with Mary Magdalene, but here only, because she was the most active and forward in this visit to the sepulchre, and in her appeared the most affection; and it was an affection kindled by a good cause, in consideration of the great things Christ had done for her. Much was forgiven her, therefore she loved much. She had shown her affection to him while he lived, attended his doctrine, ministered to him of her substance, ~~400~~Luke 8:2, 3. It does not appear that she had any business now at Jerusalem, but to wait upon him for the women were not bound to go up to the feast, and probably she and others followed him the closer, as Elisha did Elijah, now that they knew their Master would shortly be *taken from their head*, ~~400~~2 Kings 2:1-6. The continued instances of her respect to him at and after his death prove the sincerity of her love. Note, Love to Christ, if it be cordial, will be constant. Her love to Christ was *strong as death*, the death of the cross, for it stood by that; *cruel as the grave*, for it made a visit to that, and was not deterred by its terrors.

1. She came to the sepulchre, to wash the dead body with her tears, for she went to the grave, to weep there, and to anoint it with the ointment she had prepared. The grave is a house that people do not care for making visits to. They that are free among the dead are separated from the living; and it must be an extraordinary affection to the person which will endear his grave to us. It is especially frightful to the weak and timorous sex. Could she, that had not strength enough to roll away the stone, pretend to such a presence of mind as to enter the grave? The Jews' religion forbade them to meddle any more than needs must with graves and dead bodies. In visiting Christ's sepulchre she exposed herself, and perhaps the disciples, to the suspicion of a design to steal him away; and what real service could she do him by it? But her love answers these, and a thousand such objections. Note,

(1.) We must study to do honour to Christ in those things wherein yet we cannot be profitable to him.

(2.) Love to Christ will take off the terror of death and the grave. If we cannot come to Christ but through that darksome valley, even in that, if we love him, we shall fear no evil.

2. She came as soon as she could, for she came,

(1.) Upon the first day of the week, as soon as ever the sabbath was gone, longing, not to sell corn and to set forth wheat (as ~~3085~~ Amos 8:5), but to be at the sepulchre. Those that love Christ will take the first opportunity of testifying their respect to him. This was the first Christian sabbath, and she begins it accordingly with enquiries after Christ. She had spent the day before in commemorating the work of creation, and therefore rested; but now she is upon search into the work of redemption, and therefore makes a visit to Christ and him crucified.

(2.) She came early, while it was yet dark; so early did she set out. Note, Those who would seek Christ so as to find him must seek him early; that is,

[1.] Seek him solicitously, with such a care as even breaks the sleep; be up early for fear of missing him.

[2.] Seek him industriously; we must deny ourselves and our own repose in pursuit of Christ.

[3.] Seek him betimes, early in our days, early every day. *My voice shalt thou hear in the morning.* That day is in a fair way to be well ended that is thus begun. Those that diligently enquire after Christ *while it is yet dark* shall have such light given them concerning him as shall shine *more and more.*

3. She found the stone taken away, which she had seen *rolled to the door of the sepulchre.* Now this was,

(1.) A surprise to her, for she little expected it. Christ crucified is the fountain of life. His grave is one of the wells of salvation; if we come to it in faith; though to a carnal heart it be a spring shut up, we shall find the stone rolled away (as ¹²⁹Genesis 29:10) and free access to the comforts of it. Surprising comforts are the frequent encouragements of early seekers.

(2.) It was the beginning of a glorious discovery; the Lord was risen, though she did not at first apprehend it so. Note,

[1.] Those that are most constant in their adherence to Christ, and most diligent in their enquiries after him, have commonly the first and sweetest notices of the divine grace. Mary Magdalene, who followed Christ to the last in his humiliation, met him with the first in his exaltation.

[2.] God ordinarily reveals himself and his comforts to us by degrees; to raise our expectations and quicken our enquiries.

II. Finding the stone taken away, she hastens back to Peter and John, who probably lodged together at that end of the town, not far off, and acquaints them with it: "*They have taken the Lord out of the sepulchre, envying him the honour of such a decent burying-place, and we know not where they have laid him, nor where to find him, that we may pay him the remainder of our last respects.*" Observe here,

1. What a notion Mary had of the thing as it now appeared; she found the stone gone, looked into the grave, and saw it empty. Now one would expect that the first thought that offered itself would have been, Surely the Lord is risen; for whenever he had told them that he should be crucified, which she had now lately seen accomplished, he still subjoined in the same breath that *the third day he should rise again.* Could she feel the great earthquake that happened as she was coming to the sepulchre, or getting ready to come, and now see the grave empty, and yet have no thought of the resurrection enter into her mind? what, no conjecture, no

suspicion of it? So it seems by the odd construction she puts upon the removing of the stone, which was very far fetched. Note, When we come to reflect upon our own conduct in a *cloudy and dark day*, we shall stand amazed at our dulness and forgetfulness, that we could miss of such thoughts as afterwards appear obvious, and how they could be so far out of the way when we had occasion for them. She suggested, *They have taken away the Lord*; either the chief priests have taken him away, to put him in a worse place, or Joseph and Nicodemus have, upon second thoughts, taken him away, to avoid the ill-will of the Jews. Whatever was her suspicion, it seems it was a great vexation and disturbance to her that the body was gone; whereas, if she had understood it rightly, nothing could be more happy. Note, Weak believers often make that the matter of their complaint which is really just ground of hope, and matter of joy. We cry out that this and the other creature-comfort are taken away, and we know not how to retrieve them, when indeed the removal of our temporal comforts, which we lament, is in order to the resurrection of our spiritual comforts, which we should rejoice in too.

2. What a narrative she made of it to Peter and John. She did not stand poring upon the grief herself, but acquaints her friends with it. Note, The communication of sorrows is one good improvement of the communion of saints. Observe, Peter, though he had denied his Master, had not deserted his Master's friends; by this appears the sincerity of his repentance, that he associated with the disciple whom Jesus loved. And the disciples' keeping up their intimacy with him as formerly, notwithstanding his fall, teaches us to restore those with a spirit of meekness that have been faulty. If God has received them upon their repentance, why should not we?

III. Peter and John go with all speed to the sepulchre, to satisfy themselves of the truth of what was told them, and to see if they could make any further discoveries, v. 3, 4. Some think that the other disciples were with Peter and John when the news came; for they *told these things to the eleven*, ⁽²¹⁾ Luke 24:9. Others think that Mary Magdalene told her story only to Peter and John, and that the other women told theirs to the other disciples; yet none of them went to the sepulchre but Peter and John, who were two of the first three of Christ's disciples, often distinguished from the rest by special favours. Note, It is well when those that are more honoured than others with the privileges of disciples are more active than others in the duty of disciples, more willing to take pains and run hazards in a good work.

1. See here what use we should make of the experience and observations of others. When Mary told them what she had seen, they would not in this sense take her word, but would go and see with their own eyes. Do others tell us of the comfort and benefit of ordinances? Let us be engaged thereby to make trial of them. Come and see how good it is to draw near to God.

2. See how ready we should be to share with our friends in their cares and fears. Peter and John hastened to the sepulchre, that they might be able to give Mary a satisfactory answer to her jealousies. We should not grudge any pains we take for the succouring and comforting of the weak and timorous followers of Christ.

3. See what haste we should make in a good work, and when we are going on a good errand. Peter and John consulted neither their ease nor their gravity, but ran to the sepulchre, that they might show the strength of their zeal and affection, and might lose no time. If we are in the way of God's commandments, we should run in that way.

4. See what a good thing it is to have good company in a good work. Perhaps neither of these disciples would have ventured to the sepulchre alone, but, being both together, they made no difficulty of it. See ~~2:40~~ Ecclesiastes 4:9.

5. See what a laudable emulation it is among disciples to strive which shall excel, which shall exceed, in that which is good. It was no breach of ill manners for John, though the younger, to outrun Peter, and get before him. We must do our best, and neither envy those that can do better, nor despise those that do as they can, though they come behind.

(1.) He that got foremost in this race as *the disciple whom Jesus loved* in a special manner, and who therefore in a special manner loved Jesus. Note, Sense of Christ's love to us, kindling love in us to him again, will make us to excel in virtue. The love of Christ will constrain us more than any thing to abound in duty.

(2.) He that was cast behind was Peter, who had denied his Master, and was in sorrow and shame for it, and this clogged him as a weight; sense of guilt cramps us, and hinders our enlargement in the service of God. When conscience is offended we lose ground.

IV. Peter and John, having come to the sepulchre, prosecute the enquiry, yet improve little in the discovery.

1. John went no further than Mary Magdalene had done.

(1.) He had the curiosity to look into the sepulchre, and saw it was empty. He *stooped down*, and *looked in*. Those that would find the knowledge of Christ must stoop down, and look in, must with a humble heart submit to the authority of divine revelation, and must *look wistly*.

(2.) Yet he had not courage to go into the sepulchre. The warmest affections are not always accompanied with the boldest resolutions; many are swift to run religion's race that are not stout to fight her battles.

2. Peter, though he came last, went in first, and made a more exact discovery than John had done, v. 6, 7. Though John outran him, he did not therefore turn back, nor stand still, but made after him as fast as he could; and, while John was with much caution looking in, he came, and with great courage *went into the sepulchre*.

(1.) Observe here the boldness of Peter, and how God dispenses his gifts variously. John could out-run Peter, but Peter could out-dare John. It is seldom true of the same persons, what David says poetically of Saul and Jonathan, that they were *swifter than eagles*, and yet *stronger than lions*, ~~1023~~2 Samuel 1:23. Some disciples are quick, and they are useful to quicken those that are slow; others are bold, and they are useful to embolden those that are timorous; *diversity of gifts, but one Spirit*. Peter's venturing into the sepulchre may teach us,

[1.] That those who in good earnest seek after Christ must not frighten themselves with bugbears and foolish fancies: "There is a lion in the way, a ghost in the grave."

[2.] That good Christians need not be afraid of the grave, since Christ has lain in it; for to them there is nothing in it frightful; it is not the pit of destruction, nor are the worms in it never-dying worms. Let us therefore not indulge, but conquer, the fear we are apt to conceive upon the sight of a dead body, or being alone among the graves; and, since we must be dead and in the grave shortly, let us make death and the grave familiar to us, as our near kindred, ~~874~~Job 17:14.

[3.] We must be willing to go through the grave to Christ; that way he went to his glory, and so must we. If we cannot see God's face and live, better die than never see it. See ~~8825~~Job 19:25, etc.

(2.) Observe the posture in which he found things in the sepulchre.

[1.] Christ had left his grave-clothes behind him there; what clothes he appeared in to his disciples we are not told, but he never appeared in his grave-clothes, as ghosts are supposed to do; no, he laid them aside, *First*, Because he arose to die no more; death was to have no more dominion over him, ^{<869>}Romans 6:9. Lazarus came out with his grave-clothes on, for he was to use them again; but Christ, rising to an immortal life, came out free from those incumbrances. *Secondly*, because he was going to be clothed with the robes of glory, therefore he lays aside these rags; in the heavenly paradise there will be no more occasion for clothes than there was in the earthly. The ascending prophet dropped his mantle. *Thirdly*, When we arise from the death of sin to the life of righteousness, we must leave our grave-clothes behind us, must put off all our corruptions. *Fourthly*, Christ left those in the grave, as it were, for our use if the grave be a bed to the saints, thus he hath sheeted that bed, and made it ready for them; and the napkin by itself is of use for the mourning survivors to *wipe away their tears*.

[2.] The grave-clothes were found in very good order, which serves for an evidence that his body was not stolen away while men slept. Robbers of tombs have been known to take away the clothes and leave the body; but none [prior to the practices of modern resurrectionists] ever took away the body and left the clothes, especially when it was fine linen and new, ^{<156>}Mark 15:46. Any one would rather choose to carry a dead body in its clothes than naked. Or, if those that were supposed to have stolen it would have left the grave-clothes behind, yet it cannot be supposed they should find leisure to fold up the linen.

(3.) See how Peter's boldness encouraged John; now he took heart and ventured in (v. 8), and *he saw and believed*; not barely believed what Mary said, that the body was gone (no thanks to him to believe what *he saw*), but he began to believe that Jesus was risen to life again, though his faith, as yet, was weak and wavering.

[1.] John followed Peter in venturing. It should seem, he durst not have gone into the sepulchre if Peter had not gone in first. Note, It is good to be emboldened in a good work by the boldness of others. The dread of difficulty and danger will be taken off by observing the resolution and courage of others. Perhaps John's quickness had made Peter run faster, and now Peter's boldness makes John venture further, than otherwise either the

one or the other would have done; though Peter had lately fallen under the disgrace of being a deserter, and John had been advanced to the honour of a confidant (Christ having committed his mother to him), yet John not only associated with Peter, but thought it no disparagement to follow him.

[2.] Yet, it should seem, John got the start of Peter in believing. Peter saw and wondered (^{<2212>}Luke 24:12), but John saw and believed. A mind disposed to contemplation may perhaps sooner receive the evidence of divine truth than a mind disposed to action. But what was the reason that they were so slow of heart to believe? The evangelist tells us (v. 9), as yet they *knew not the scripture*, that is, they did not consider, and apply, and duly improve, what they knew of the scripture, that he must *rise again from the dead*. The Old Testament spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah; they believed him to be the Messiah; he himself had often told them that, according to the scriptures of the Old Testament, he should rise again; but they had not presence of mind sufficient by these to explain the present appearances. Observe here, *First*, How unapt the disciples themselves were, at first, to believe the resurrection of Christ, which confirms the testimony they afterwards gave with so much assurance concerning it; for, by their backwardness to believe it, it appears that they were not credulous concerning it, nor of those simple ones that believe every word. If they had had any design to advance their own interest by it, they would greedily have caught at the first spark of its evidence, would have raised and supported one another's expectations of it, and have prepared the minds of those that followed them to receive the notices of it; but we find, on the contrary, that their hopes were frustrated, it was to them as a strange thing, and one of the furthest things from their thoughts. Peter and John were so shy of believing it at first that nothing less than the most convincing proof the thing was capable of could bring them to testify it afterwards with so much assurance. Hereby it appears that they were not only honest men, who would not deceive others, but cautious men, who would not themselves be imposed upon. *Secondly*, What was the reason of their slowness to believe; because as yet they *knew not the scripture*. This seems to be the evangelist's acknowledgment of his own fault among the rest; he does not say, "For as yet Jesus had not appeared to them, had not shown them his hands and his side," but, "As yet he had not *opened their understandings to understand the scripture*" (^{<2244>}Luke 24:44, 45), for that is the *most sure word of prophecy*.

3. Peter and John pursued their enquiry no further, but desisted, hovering between faith and unbelief (v. 10): *The disciples went away*, not much the wiser, *to their own home, pros heautous* — *to their own friends and companions*, the rest of the disciples to their own lodgings, for homes they had none at Jerusalem. They went away,

(1.) For fear of being taken up upon suspicion of a design to steal away the body, or of being charged with it now that it was gone. Instead of improving their faith, their care is to secure themselves, to shift for their own safety. In difficult dangerous times it is hard even for good men to go on in their work with the resolution that becomes them.

(2.) Because they were at a loss, and knew not what to do next, nor what to make of what they had seen; and therefore, not having courage to stay at the grave, they resolve to go home, and wait till God shall *reveal even this unto them*, which is an instance of their weakness as yet.

(3.) It is probable that the rest of the disciples were together; to them they return, to make report of what they had discovered and to consult with them what was to be done; and, probably, now they appointed their meeting in the evening, when Christ came to them. It is observable that before Peter and John came to the sepulchre an angel had appeared there, rolled away the stone, frightened the guard, and comforted the women; as soon as they were gone from the sepulchre, Mary Magdalene here sees two angels in the sepulchre (v. 12), and yet Peter and John come to the sepulchre, and go into it, and see none. What shall we make of this? Where were the angels when Peter and John were at the sepulchre, who appeared there before and after?

[1.] Angels appear and disappear at pleasure, according to the orders and instructions given them. They may be, and are really, where they are not visibly; nay, it should seem, may be visible to one and not to another, at the same time, ^{<1023>}Numbers 22:23; ^{<1167>}2 Kings 6:17. How they make themselves visible, then invisible, and then visible again, it is presumption for us to enquire; but that they do so is plain from this story.

[2.] This favour was shown to those who were early and constant in their enquiries after Christ, and was the reward of those that came first and staid last, but denied to those that made a transient visit.

[3.] The apostles were not to receive their instructions from the angels, but from the Spirit of grace. See ^{<305>}Hebrews 2:5.

^{<311>}JOHN 20:11-18

THE RESURRECTION

St. Mark tells us that Christ appeared first to Mary Magdalene (^{<419>}Mark 16:9); that appearance is here largely related; and we may observe,

I. The constancy and fervency of Mary Magdalene's affection to the Lord Jesus, v. 11.

1. She staid at the sepulchre, when Peter and John were gone, because there her Master had lain, and there she was likeliest to hear some tidings of him. Note,

(1.) Where there is a true love to Christ there will be a constant adherence to him, and a resolution with purpose of heart to cleave to him. This good woman, though she has lost him, yet, rather than seem to desert him, will abide by his grave for his sake, and continue in his love even when she wants the comfort of it.

(2.) Where there is a true desire of acquaintance with Christ there will be a constant attendance on the means of knowledge. See ^{<312>}Hosea 6:2, 3, *The third day he will raise us up*; and then shall we know the meaning of that resurrection, if we follow on to know, as Mary here.

2. She staid there weeping, and these tears loudly bespoke her affection to her Master. Those that have lost Christ have cause to weep; she wept at the remembrance of his bitter sufferings; wept for his death, and the loss which she and her friends and the country sustained by it; wept to think of returning home without him; wept because she did not now find his body. Those that seek Christ must *seek him sorrowing* (^{<428>}Luke 2:48), must weep, not for him, but for themselves.

3. *As she wept, she looked into the sepulchre*, that her eye might affect her heart. When we are in search of something that we have lost we look again and again in the place where we last left it, and expected to have found it.

She will look *yet seven times*, not knowing but that at length she may see some encouragement. Note,

(1.) Weeping must not hinder seeking. Though she wept, she *stooped down and looked in*.

(2.) Those are likely to seek and find that seek with affection, that seek in tears.

II. The vision she had of two angels in the sepulchre, v. 12. Observe here,

1. The description of the persons she saw. They were *two angels in white, sitting* (probably on some benches or ledges hewn out in the rock) one at *the head*, and the other at the *feet*, of the grave. Here we have,

(1.) Their nature. They were angels, messengers from heaven, sent on purpose, on this great occasion,

[1.] To honour the Son and to grace the solemnity of his resurrection. Now that the Son of God was again to be brought into the world, the angels have a charge to attend him, as they did at his birth, ^{<316>}Hebrews 1:6.

[2.] To comfort the saints; to speak good words to those that were in sorrow, and, by giving them notice that the Lord was risen, to prepare them for the sight of him.

(2.) Their number: *two*, not a *multitude of the heavenly host*, to sing praise, only two, to bear witness; for out of the mouth of two witnesses this word would be established.

(3.) Their array: They were *in white*, denoting,

[1.] Their purity and holiness. The best of men *standing before the angels*, and compared with them, *are clothed in filthy garments* (^{<316>}Zechariah 3:3), but angels are spotless; and glorified saints, when they come to be as the angels, shall *walk with Christ in white*.

[2.] Their glory, and glorying, upon this occasion. The white in which they appeared represented the brightness of that state into which Christ was now risen.

(4.) Their posture and place: They sat, as it were, reposing themselves in Christ's grave; for angels, though they needed not a restoration, were obliged to Christ for their establishment. These angels went into the grave,

to teach us not to be afraid of it, nor to think that our resting in it awhile will be any prejudice to our immortality; no, matters are so ordered that the grave is not much out of our way to heaven. It intimates likewise that angels are to be employed about the saints, not only at their death, to carry their souls into Abraham's bosom, but at the great day, *to raise their bodies*, ⁽¹²⁶⁾ Matthew 24:31. These angelic guards (and angels are called *watchers* ⁽¹²⁷⁾ Daniel 4:23), keeping possession of the sepulchre, when they had frightened away the guards which the enemies had set, represents Christ's victory over the powers of darkness, routing and defeating them. Thus Michael and his angels are more than conquerors. Their sitting to face one another, one at his bed's head, the other at his bed's feet, denotes their care of the entire body of Christ, his mystical as well as his natural body, from head to foot; it may also remind us of the two cherubim, placed one at either end of the mercy-seat, looking one at another, ⁽¹²⁸⁾ Exodus 25:18. Christ crucified was the great propitiatory, at the head and feet of which were these two cherubim, not with flaming swords, to keep us from, but welcome messengers, to direct us to, the way of life.

2. Their compassionate enquiry into the cause of Mary Magdalene's grief (v. 13): *Woman, why weepst thou?* This question was,

(1.) A rebuke to her weeping: "*Why weepst thou, when thou has cause to rejoice?*" Many of the floods of our tears would *dry away* before such a search as this into the fountain of them. *Why are thou cast down?*

(2.) It was designed to show how much angels are concerned at the griefs of the saints, having a charge to minister to them for their comfort. Christians should thus sympathize with one another.

(3.) It was only to make an occasion of informing her of that which would turn her mourning into rejoicing, would *put off her sackcloth, and gird her with gladness*.

3. The melancholy account she gives them of her present distress: *Because they have taken away the blessed body I came to embalm, and I know not where they have laid it.* The same story she had told, v. 2. In it we may see,

(1.) The weakness of her faith. If she had had faith *as a grain of mustard-seed*, this mountain would have been removed; but we often perplex ourselves needlessly with imaginary difficulties, which faith would

discover to us as real advantages. Many good people complain of the clouds and darkness they are under, which are the necessary methods of grace for the humbling of their souls, the mortifying of their sins, and the endearing of Christ to them.

(2.) The strength of her love. Those that have a true affection for Christ cannot but be in great affliction when they have lost either the comfortable tokens of his love in their souls or the comfortable opportunities of conversing with him, and doing him honour, in his ordinances. Mary Magdalene is not diverted from her enquiries by the surprise of the vision, nor satisfied with the honour of it; but still she harps upon the same string: *They have taken away my Lord*. A sight of angels and their smiles will not suffice without a sight of Christ and God's smiles in him. Nay, the sight of angels is but an opportunity of pursuing her enquiries after Christ. All creatures, the most excellent, the most dear, should be used as means, and but as means, to bring us into acquaintance with God in Christ. The angels asked her, *Why weepest thou?* I have cause enough to weep, says she, for *they have taken away my Lord*, and, like Micah, *What have I more?* Do you ask, *Why I weep?* *My beloved has withdrawn himself, and is gone*. Note, None know, but those who have experienced it, the sorrow of a deserted soul, that has had comfortable evidences of the love of God in Christ, and hopes of heaven, but has now lost them, and walks in darkness; such a *wounded spirit who can bear?*

III. Christ's appearing to her while she was talking with the angels, and telling them her case. Before they had given her any answer, Christ himself steps in, to satisfy her enquiries, for God now speaketh to us by his Son; none but he himself can direct us to himself. Mary would fain know where her Lord is, and behold he is at her right hand. Note,

1. Those that will be content with nothing short of a sight of Christ shall be put off with nothing less. He never said to the soul that sought him, *Seek in vain*. "Is it Christ that thou wouldest have? Christ thou shalt have."

2. Christ, in manifesting himself to those that seek him, often outdoes their expectations. Mary longs to see the dead body of Christ, and complains of the loss of that, and behold she sees him alive. Thus he does for his praying people more than they are able to ask or think. In this appearance of Christ to Mary observe,

(1.) How he did at first conceal himself from her.

[1.] He stood as a common person, and she looked upon him accordingly, v. 14. She stood expecting an answer to her complaint from the angels; and either seeing the shadow, or hearing the tread, of some person behind her, she *turned herself back* from talking with the angels, and *sees Jesus himself* standing, the very person she was looking for, and yet she *knew not that it was Jesus*. Note, *First, The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart* (⁴⁹¹⁸Psalm 34:18), nearer than they are aware. Those that seek Christ, though they do not see him, may yet be sure he is not far from them. *Secondly*, Those that diligently seek the Lord will turn every way in their enquiry after him. *Mary turned herself back*, in hopes of some discoveries. Several of the ancients suggest that Mary was directed to look behind her by the angels' rising up, and doing their obeisance to the Lord Jesus, whom they saw before Mary did; and that she looked back to see to whom it was they paid such a profound reverence. But, if so, it is not likely that she would have taken him for the gardener; rather, therefore, it was her earnest desire in seeking that made her turn every way. *Thirdly*, Christ is often near his people, and they are not aware of him. She *knew not that it was Jesus*; not that he appeared in any other likeness, but either it was a careless transient look she cast upon him, and, her eyes being full of care, she could not so well distinguish, or *they were holden, that she should not know him*, as those of the two disciples, ⁴²¹⁶Luke 24:16.

[2.] He asked her a common question, and she answered him accordingly, v. 15.

First, The question he asked her was natural enough, and what any one would have asked her: "*Woman, why weepest thou? Whom seekest thou? What business hast thou here in the garden so early? And what is all this noise and ado for?*" Perhaps it was spoken with some roughness, as Joseph spoke to his brethren when he made himself strange, before he made himself known to them. It should seem, this was the first word Christ spoke after his resurrection: "*Why weepest thou? I am risen.*" The resurrection of Christ has enough in it to ally all our sorrows, to check the streams, and dry up the fountains, of our tears. Observe here, Christ takes cognizance,

1. Of his people's griefs, and enquires, *Why weep you?* He bottles their tears, and records them in his book.

2. Of his people's cares and enquires, *Whom seek you, and what would you have?* When he knows they are seeking him, yet he will know it from them; they must tell him whom they seek.

Secondly, The reply she made him is natural enough; she does not give him a direct answer, but, as if she should say, "Why do you banter me, and upbraid me with my tears? You know why I weep, and whom I seek;" and therefore, *supposing him to be the gardener*, the person employed by Joseph to dress and keep his garden, who, she thought, was come thither thus early to his work, she said, *Sir, if thou hast carried him hence, pray tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away.* See here,

1. The error of her understanding. She supposed our Lord Jesus to be the gardener, perhaps because he asked what authority she had to be there. Note, Troubled spirits, in a cloudy and dark day, are apt to misrepresent Christ to themselves, and to put wrong constructions upon the methods of his providence and grace.

2. The truth of her affection. See how her heart was set upon finding Christ. She puts the question to every one she meets, like the careful spouse, *Saw you him whom my soul loveth?* She speaks respectfully to a gardener, and calls him *Sir*, in hopes to gain some intelligence from him concerning her beloved. When she speaks of Christ, she does not name him; but, *If thou have borne him hence*, taking it for granted that this gardener was full of thoughts concerning this Jesus as well as she, and therefore could not but know whom she meant. Another evidence of the strength of her affection was that, wherever he was laid, she would undertake to remove him. Such a body, with such a weight of spices about it, was much more than she could pretend to carry; but true love thinks it can do more than it can, and makes nothing of difficulties. She supposed this gardener grudged that the body of one that was ignominiously crucified should have the honour to be laid in his master's new tomb, and that therefore he had removed it to some sorry place, which he thought fitter for it. Yet Mary does not threaten to tell his master, and get him turned out of his place for it; but undertakes to find out some other sepulchre, to which he might be welcome. Christ needs not to stay where he is thought a burden.

(2.) How Christ at length made himself known to her, and, by a pleasing surprise, gave her infallible assurances of his resurrection. Joseph at length

said to his brethren, *I am Joseph*. So Christ here to Mary Magdalene, now that he is entered upon his exalted state. Observe,

[1.] How Christ discovered himself to this good woman that was seeking him in tears (v. 16): *Jesus saith unto her, Mary*. It was said with an emphasis, and the air of kindness and freedom with which he was wont to speak to her. Now he changed his voice, and spoke like himself, not like the gardener. Christ's way of making himself known to his people is by his word, his word applied to their souls, speaking to them in particular. When those whom God *knew by name* in the counsels of his love (^{<132>}Exodus 33:12) *are called by name* in the efficacy of his grace, then *he reveals his Son in them* as in Paul (^{<116>}Galatians 1:16), when Christ called to him by name, *Saul, Saul*. Christ's *sheep know his voice*, ^{<104>}John 10:4. This one word, *Mary*, was like that to the disciples in the storm, *It is I*. Then the word of Christ does us good when we put our names into the precepts and promises. "In this Christ calls to me, and speaks to me."

[2.] How readily she received this discovery. When Christ said, "Mary, dost thou not know me? are you and I grown such strangers?" she was presently aware who it was, as the spouse (^{<218>}Song of Solomon 2:8), *It is the voice of my beloved*. She turned herself, and said, *Rabboni, My Master*. It might properly be read with an interrogation, "*Rabboni? Is it my master? Nay, but is it indeed?*" Observe, *First*, The title of respect she gives Him: *My Master*; *didaskale* — *a teaching master*. The Jews called their doctors *Rabbies*, great men. Their critics tell us that *Rabbon* was with them a more honourable title than *Rabbi*; and therefore Mary chooses that, and adds a note of appropriation, *My great Master*. Note, Notwithstanding the freedom of communion which Christ is pleased to admit us to with himself, we must remember that he is our *Master*, and to be approached with a *godly fear*. *Secondly*, With what liveliness of affection she gives this title to Christ. *She turned* from the angels, whom she had in her eye, to look unto Jesus. We must take off our regards from all creatures, even the brightest and best, to fix them upon Christ, from whom nothing must divert us, and with whom nothing must interfere. When *she thought it had been the gardener*, she looked another way while speaking to him; but now that she knew the voice of Christ *she turned herself*. The soul that hears Christ's voice, and is turned to him, calls him, with joy and triumph, *My Master*. See with what pleasure those who love Christ speak of his authority over them. *My Master, my great Master*.

[3.] The further instructions that Christ gave her (v. 17): “*Touch me not, but go and carry the news to the disciples.*”

First, He diverts her from the expectation of familiar society and conversation with him at this time: *Touch me not, for I am not yet ascended*. Mary was so transported with the sight of her dear Master that she forgot herself, and that state of glory into which he was now entering, and was ready to express her joy by affectionate embraces of him, which Christ here forbids at this time.

1. *Touch me not* thus at all, for I am to ascend to heaven. He bade the disciples touch him, for the confirmation of their faith; he allowed the women to take hold of his feet, and worship him (⁴⁸⁹Matthew 28:9); but Mary, supposing that he was risen, as Lazarus was, to live among them constantly, and converse with them freely as he had done, upon that presumption was about to take hold of his hand with her usual freedom. This mistake Christ rectified; she must believe him, and adore him, as exalted, but must not expect to be familiar with him as formerly. See ⁴⁸⁶2 Corinthians 5:16. He forbids her to dote upon his bodily presence, to set her heart on this, or expect its continuance, and leads her to the spiritual converse and communion which she should have with him after he was ascended to his Father; for the greatest joy of his resurrection was that it was a step towards his ascension. Mary thought, now that her Master was risen, he would presently set up a temporal kingdom, such as they had long promised themselves. “No,” says Christ, “touch me not, with any such thought; think not to lay hold on me, so as to detain me here; for, though *I am not yet ascended, go to my brethren, and tell them, I am to ascend.*” As before his death, so now after his resurrection, he still harps upon this, that he was going away, was *no more in the world*; and therefore they must look higher than his bodily presence, and look further than the present state of things.

2. “*Touch me not*, do not stay to touch me now, stay not now to make any further enquiries, or give any further expressions of joy, for *I am not yet ascended*, I shall not depart immediately, it may as well be done another time; the best service thou canst do now is to carry the tidings to the disciples; lose no time therefore, but go away with all speed.” Note, Public service ought to be preferred before private satisfaction. *It is more blessed to give than to receive*. Jacob must let

an angel go, when the day breaks, and it is time for him to look after his family. Mary must not stay to talk with her Master, but must carry his message; for it is a day of good tidings, which she must not engross the comfort of, but hand it to others. See that story, ^{<1719>}2 Kings 7:9.

Secondly, He directs her what message to carry to his disciples: *But go to my brethren, and tell them*, not only that I am risen (she could have told them that of herself, for she had seen him), but that *I ascend*. Observe,

a. To whom this message is sent: *Go to my brethren* with it; for he is not ashamed to call them so.

(a.) He was now entering upon his glory, and was *declared to be the Son of God with greater power* than ever, yet he owns his disciples as his brethren, and expresses himself with more tender affection to them than before; he had called them friends, but never brethren till now. Though Christ be high, yet he is not haughty. Notwithstanding his elevation, he disdains not to own his poor relations.

(b.) His disciples had lately carried themselves very disingenuously towards him; he had never seen them together since *they all forsook him and fled*, when he was apprehended; justly might he now have sent them an angry message: “Go to yonder treacherous deserters, and tell them, I will never trust them any more, or have any thing more to do with them.” No, he forgives, he forgets, and does not upbraid.

b. By whom it is sent: by *Mary Magdalene, out of whom had been cast seven devils*, yet now thus favoured. This was her reward for her constancy in adhering to Christ, and enquiring after him; and a tacit rebuke to the apostles, who had not been so close as she was in attending on the dying Jesus, nor so early as she was in meeting the rising Jesus; she becomes an apostle to the apostles.

c. What the message itself is: *I ascend to my Father*. Two full breasts of consolation are here in these words: —

(a.) Our joint-relation to God, resulting from our union with Christ, is an unspeakable comfort. Speaking of that inexhaustible spring of light, life, and bliss, he says, *He is my Father, and our Father; my God, and your God*. This is very expressive of the near relation that subsists between Christ and believers: *he that sanctifieth, and those that are sanctified, are both one; for they agree in one*, ^{<321>}Hebrews 2:11. Here

we have such an advancement of Christians, and such a condescension of Christ, as bring them very near together, so admirably well is the matter contrived, in order to their union.

[a.] It is the great dignity of believers that *the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ* is, in him, *their Father*. A vast difference indeed there is between the respective foundations of the relation; he is Christ's Father by eternal generation, ours by a gracious adoption; yet even this warrants us to call him, as Christ did, *Abba, Father*. This gives a reason why Christ called them brethren, because his Father was their Father. Christ was now ascending to appear as an *advocate with the Father* — with *his Father*, and therefore we may hope he will prevail for any thing — with *our Father*, and therefore we may hope he will prevail for us.

[b.] It is the great condescension of Christ that he is pleased to own the believer's God for his God: *My God, and your God*; mine, that he may be yours; the God of the Redeemer, to support him (¹⁹²⁶ Psalm 89:26), that he might be the God of the redeemed, to save them. The summary of the new covenant is that *God will be to us a God*; and therefore Christ being the surety and head of the covenant, who is primarily dealt with, and believers only through him as his spiritual seed, this covenant-relation fastens first upon him, God becomes his God, and so ours; we partaking of a divine nature, Christ's Father is our Father; and, he partaking of the human nature, our God is his God.

(b.) Christ's ascension into heaven, in further prosecution of his undertaking for us, is likewise an unspeakable comfort: "Tell them I must shortly ascend; that is the next step I am to take." Now this was intended to be,

[a.] A word of caution to these disciples, not to expect the continuance of his bodily presence on earth, nor the setting up of his temporal kingdom among men, which they dreamed of. "No, tell them, I am risen, not to stay with them, but to go on their errand to heaven." Thus those who are raised to a spiritual life, in conformity to Christ's resurrection, must reckon that they rise to ascend; *they are quickened with Christ that they may sit with him in heavenly places*, ⁴⁰¹⁵ Ephesians 2:5, 6. Let them not think that this earth is to be their home and rest; no, being born from heaven, they are bound for heaven; their eye and

aim must be upon another world, and this must be ever upon their hearts, I ascend, therefore must I seek things above.

[b.] A word of comfort to them, and to all *that shall believe in him through their word*; he was then ascending, he is now *ascended to his Father, and our Father*. This was his advancement; he ascended to receive those honours and powers which were to be the recompence of his humiliation; he says it with triumph, that those who love him may rejoice. This is our advantage; for he ascended as a conqueror, *leading captivity captive* for us (⁴⁹⁸Psalm 68:18), he ascended as our forerunner, *to prepare a place for us*, and to be ready to receive us. This message was like that which Joseph's brethren brought to Jacob concerning him (⁴⁵⁶Genesis 45:26), *Joseph is yet alive*, and not only so, *vivit imo, et in senatum venit — he lives, and comes into the senate too; he is governor over all the land of Egypt*; all power is his.

Some make those words, *I ascend to my God and your God*, to include a promise of our resurrection, in the virtue of Christ's resurrection; for Christ had proved the resurrection of the dead from these words, *I am the God of Abraham*, ⁴²³Matthew 22:32. So that Christ here insinuates, "As he is my God, and hath therefore raised me, so he is your God, and will therefore raise you, and be your God," ⁶²⁸Revelation 21:3. *Because I live, you shall live also*. I now ascend, to honour my God, and you shall ascend to him as your God.

IV. Here is Mary Magdalene's faithful report of what she had seen and heard to the disciples (v. 18): *She came and told the disciples*, whom she found together, *that she had seen the Lord*. Peter and John had left her seeking him carefully with tears, and would not stay to seek him with her; and now she comes to tell them that she had found him, and to rectify the mistake she had led them into by enquiring after the dead body, for now she found it was a living body and a glorified one; so that she found what she sought, and, what was infinitely better, she had joy in her sight of the Master herself, and was willing to communicate of her joy, for she knew it would be good news to them. When God comforts us, it is with this design, that we may comfort others. And as she told them what she had seen, so also what she had heard; she had seen the Lord alive, of which this was a token (and a good token it was) *that he had spoken these things unto her* as a message to be delivered to them, and she delivered it faithfully. Those that are acquainted with the word of Christ themselves

should communicate their knowledge for the good of others, and not grudge that others should know as much as they do.

JOHN 20:19-25

CHRIST WITH HIS DISCIPLES

The infallible proof of Christ's resurrection was his *showing himself alive*, Acts 1:3. In these verses, we have an account of his first appearance to the college of the disciples, on the day on which he rose. He had sent them the tidings of his resurrection by trusty and credible messengers; but to show his love to them, and confirm their faith in him, he came himself, and gave them all the assurances they could desire of the truth of it, that they might not have it by hearsay only, and at second hand, but might themselves be eye-witnesses of his being alive, because they must attest it to the world, and build the church upon that testimony. Now observe here,

I. When and where this appearance was, v. 19. It was *the same day* that he rose, *being the first day of the week*, the day after the Jewish sabbath, at a private meeting of the disciples, ten of them, and some more of their friends with them, Luke 24:33.

There are three secondary ordinances (as I may call them) instituted by our Lord Jesus, to continue in his church, for the support of it, and for the due administration of the principal ordinances — the word, sacraments, and prayer; these are, the Lord's day, solemn assemblies, and standing ministry. The mind of Christ concerning each of these is plainly intimated to us in these verses; of the first two, here, in the circumstances of this appearance, the other v. 21. Christ's kingdom was to be set up among men, immediately upon his resurrection; and accordingly we find the very day he arose, though but a day of small things, yet graced with those solemnities which should help to keep up a face of religion throughout all the ages of the church.

1. Here is a Christian sabbath observed by the disciples, and owned by our Lord Jesus. The visit Christ made to his disciples was on *the first day of the week*. And the first day of the week is (I think) the only day of the week, or month, or year, that is ever mentioned by number in all the New Testament; and this is several times spoken of as a day religiously

observed. Though it was said here expressly (v. 1) that Christ arose on *the first day of the week*, and it might have been sufficient to say here (v. 19), he appeared the same day at evening; yet, to put an honour upon the day, it is repeated, *being the first day of the week*; not that the apostles designed to put honour upon the day (they were yet in doubt concerning the occasion of it), but God designed to put honour upon it, by ordering it that they should be altogether, to receive Christ's first visit on that day. Thus, in effect, he blessed and sanctified that day, because in it the Redeemer rested.

2. Here is a Christian assembly solemnized by the disciples, and also owned by the Lord Jesus. Probably the disciples met here for some religious exercise, to pray together; or, perhaps, they met to compare notes, and consider whether they had sufficient evidence of their Master's resurrection, and to consult what was now to be done, whether they should keep together or scatter; they met to know one another's minds, strengthen one another's hands, and concert proper measures to be taken in the present critical juncture. This meeting was private, because they durst not appear publicly, especially in a body. They met in a house, but they kept the door shut, that they might not be seen together, and that no one might come among them but such as they knew; for they feared the Jews, who would prosecute the disciples as criminals, that they might seem to believe the lie they would deceive the world with, that his *disciples came by night, and stole him away*. Note,

(1.) The disciples of Christ, even in difficult times, must not *forsake the assembling of themselves together*, ^{<3025>}Hebrews 10:25. Those *sheep of the flock were scattered* in the storm; but sheep are sociable, and will come together again. It is no new thing for the assemblies of Christ's disciples to be driven into corners, and forced into the wilderness, ^{<6124>}Revelation 12:14; ^{<182>}Proverbs 28:12.

(2.) God's people have been often obliged to *enter into their chambers, and shut their doors*, as here, *for fear of the Jews*. Persecution is allotted them, and retirement from persecution is allowed them; and then where shall we look for them but in *dens and caves of the earth*. It is a real grief, but no real reproach, to Christ's disciples, thus to abscond.

II. What was said and done in this visit Christ made to his disciples, and his interview between them. When they were assembled, Jesus came

among them, in his own likeness, yet drawing a veil over the brightness of his body, now begun to be glorified, else it would have dazzled their eyes, as in his transfiguration. Christ came among them, to give them a specimen of the performance of his promise, that, *where two or three are gathered together in his name, he will be in the midst of them*. He came, though *the doors were shut*. This does not at all weaken the evidence of his having a real human body after his resurrection; though the doors were shut, he knew how to open them without any noise, and come in so that they might not hear him, as formerly he had walked on the water, and yet had a true body. It is a comfort to Christ's disciples, when their solemn assemblies are reduced to privacy, that no doors can shut out Christ's presence from them. We have five things in this appearance of Christ: —

(1.) His kind and familiar salutation of his disciples: *He said, Peace be unto you*. This was not a word of course, though commonly used so at the meeting of friends, but a solemn, uncommon benediction, conferring upon them all the blessed fruits and effects of his death and resurrection. The phrase was common, but the sense was now peculiar. *Peace be unto you* is as much as, All good be to you, all peace always by all means. Christ had left them his peace for their legacy, ~~John~~ John 14:27. By the death of the testator the testament was become of force, and he was now risen from the dead, to prove the will, and to be himself the executor of it. Accordingly, he here makes prompt payment of the legacy: *Peace be unto you*. His speaking peace makes peace, *creates the fruit of the lips, peace*; peace with God, peace in your own consciences, peace with one another; all this peace be with you; not peace with the world, but peace in Christ. His sudden appearing in *the midst of them* when they were full of doubts concerning him, full of fears concerning themselves, could not but put them into some disorder and consternation, the noise of which waves he stills with this word, *Peace be unto you*.

(2.) His clear and undeniable manifestation of himself to them, v. 20. And here observe,

[1.] The method he took to convince them of the truth of his resurrection, They now saw him alive whom multitudes had seen dead two or three days before. Now the only doubt was whether this that they saw alive was the same individual body that had been seen dead; and none could desire a further proof that it was so than the scars or marks of the wounds in the body. Now, *First*, The marks of the wounds, and very deep marks (though

without any pain or soreness), remained in the body of the Lord Jesus even after his resurrection, that they might be demonstrations of the truth of it. Conquerors glory in the marks of their wounds. Christ's wounds were to speak on earth that it was he himself, and therefore he arose with them; they were to speak in heaven, in the intercession he must ever live to make, and therefore he ascended with them, and appeared in the midst of *the throne, a Lamb as it had been slain, and bleeding afresh,*

⁽⁴⁸⁶⁾ Revelation 5:6. Nay, it should seem, he will come again with his scars, that *they may look on him whom they pierced. Secondly,* These marks he showed to his disciples, for their conviction. They had not only the satisfaction of seeing him look with the same countenance, and hearing him speak with the same voice they had been so long accustomed to, *Sic oculos, sic ille manus, sic ora, ferebat — Such were his gestures, such his eyes and hands!* but they had the further evidence of these peculiar marks: he opened his hands to them, that they might see the marks of the wounds on them; he opened his breast, as the nurse hers to the child, to show them the wound there. Note, The exalted Redeemer will ever show himself open-handed and open-hearted to all his faithful friends and followers. When Christ manifests his love to believers by the comforts of his Spirit, assures them that *because he lives they shall live also,* then *he shows them his hands and his side.*

[2.] The impression it made upon them, and the good it did them. *First,* They were convinced that they saw the Lord: so was their faith confirmed. At first, they thought they saw an apparition only, a phantasm; but now they knew it was the Lord himself. Thus many true believers, who, while they were weak, feared their comforts were but imaginary, afterwards find them, through grace, real and substantial. They ask not, Is it the Lord? but are assured, it is he. *Secondly, Then they were glad;* that which strengthened their faith raised their joy; *believing they rejoice.* The evangelist seems to write it with somewhat of transport and triumph. *Then! then! were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord,* If it revived *the spirit of Jacob* to hear that *Joseph was yet alive,* how would it revive the heart of these disciples to hear that Jesus is again alive? It is life from the dead to them. Now that word of Christ was fulfilled (⁽⁴⁸⁷⁾John 16:22), *I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice.* This wiped away all tears from their eyes. Note, A sight of Christ will gladden the heart of a disciple at any time; the more we see of Christ, the more we shall rejoice in him;

and our joy will never be perfect till we come *where we shall see him as he is.*

(3.) The honourable and ample commission he gave them to be his agents in the planting of his church, v. 21. Here is,

[1.] The preface to their commission, which was the solemn repetition of the salutation before: *Peace be unto you.* This was intended, either, *First,* To raise their attention to the commission he was about to give them. The former salutation was to still the tumult of their fear, that they might calmly attend to the proofs of his resurrection; this was to reduce the transport of their joy, that they might sedately hear what he had further to say to them; or, *Secondly,* To encourage them to accept of the commission he was giving them. Though it would involve them in a great deal of trouble, yet he designed their honour and comfort in it, and, in the issue, it would be peace to them. Gideon received his commission with this word, *Peace be unto thee,* ^{<0162>}Judges 6:22, 23. Christ is our Peace; if he is with us, peace is to us. Christ was now sending the disciples to publish peace to the world (^{<2811>}Isaiah 52:7), and he here not only confers it upon them for their own satisfaction, but commits it to them as a trust to be by them transmitted to all the sons of peace, ^{<0165>}Luke 10:5, 6.

[2.] The commission itself, which sounds very great: *As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you.*

First, It is easy to understand how Christ sent them; he appointed them to go on with his work upon earth, and to lay out themselves for the spreading of his gospel, and the setting up of his kingdom, among men. He sent them authorized with a divine warrant, armed with a divine power, — sent them as ambassadors to treat of peace, and as heralds to proclaim it, — sent them as servants to bid to the marriage. Hence they were called *apostles — men sent.*

Secondly, But how Christ sent them as the Father sent him is not so easily understood; certainly their commissions and powers were infinitely inferior to his; but,

1. Their work was of the same kind with his, and they were to go on where he left off. They were not sent to be priests and kings, like him, but only prophets. As he was sent to bear witness to the truth, so were they; not to be mediators of the reconciliation, but only preachers and

publishers of it. Was he sent, *not to be ministered to, but to minister? not to do his own will, but the will of him that sent him? not to destroy the law and the prophets, but to fill them up?* So were they. As the Father sent him *to the lost sheep of the house of Israel*, so he sent them into all the world.

2. He had a power to send them equal to that which the Father had to send him. Here the force of the comparison seems to lie. By the same authority that the Father sent me do I send you. This proves the Godhead of Christ; the commissions he gave were of equal authority with those which the Father gave, and as valid and effectual to all intents and purposes, equal with those he gave to the Old-Testament prophets in visions. The commissions of Peter and John, by the plain word of Christ, are as good as those of Isaiah and Ezekiel, by *the Lord sitting on his throne*; nay, equal with that which was given to the Mediator himself for his work. Had he an incontestable authority, and an irresistible ability, for his work? so had they for theirs. Or thus, *As the Father hath sent me* is, as it were, the recital of his power; by virtue of the authority given him as a Mediator, he gave authority to them, as his ministers, to act for him, and in his name, with the children of men; so that those who received them, or rejected them, received or rejected him, and him that sent him, ^{}John 13:20.

(4.) The qualifying of them for the discharge of the trust reposed in them by their commission (v. 22): *He breathed on them, and said, Receive ye the Holy Ghost.* Observe,

[1.] The sign he used to assure them of, and affect them with, the gift he was now about to bestow upon them: *He breathed on them*; not only to show them, by this breath of life, that he himself was really alive, but to signify to them the spiritual life and power which they should receive from him for all the services that lay before them. Probably he breathed upon them all together, not upon each severally and, though Thomas was not with them, yet the Spirit of the Lord knew where to find him, as he did Eldad and Medad, ^{}Numbers 11:26. Christ here seems to refer to the creation of man at first, by the breathing of the breath of life into him (^{}Genesis 2:7), and to intimate that he himself was the author of that work, and that the spiritual life and strength of ministers and Christians are derived from him, and depend upon him, as much as the natural life of Adam and his seed. As *the breath of the Almighty* gave life to man and

began the old world, so the breath of the mighty Saviour gave life to his ministers, and began a new world, ^{<18304>}Job 33:4. Now this intimates to us, *First*, That the Spirit is the breath of Christ, *proceeding from the Son*. The Spirit, in the Old Testament, is compared to breath (^{<2570>}Ezekiel 37:9), *Come, O breath*; but the New Testament tells us it is Christ's breath. *The breath of God* is put for the power of his wrath (^{<29104>}Isaiah 11:4; 30:33); but the breath of Christ signifies the power of his grace; the breathing of threatenings is changed into the breathings of love by the mediation of Christ. Our words are uttered by our breath, so the word of Christ *is spirit and life*. The word comes from the Spirit, and the Spirit comes along with the word. *Secondly*, That the Spirit is the gift of Christ. The apostles communicated the Holy Ghost by the laying on of hands, those hands being first lifted up in prayer, for they could only beg this blessing, and carry it as messengers; but Christ conferred the Holy Ghost by breathing, for he is the author of the gift, and from him it comes originally. Moses could not give his Spirit, God did it (^{<04117>}Numbers 11:17); but Christ did it himself.

[2.] The solemn grant he made, signified by this sign, *Receive ye the Holy Ghost*, in part now, as an earnest of what you shall further receive *not many days hence*." They now received more of the Holy Ghost than they had yet received. Thus spiritual blessings are given gradually; to him that has shall be given. Now that Jesus began to be glorified more of the Spirit began to be given: see ^{<4175>}John 7:39. Let us see what is contained in this grant. *First*, Christ hereby gives them assurance of the Spirit's aid in their future work, in the execution of the commission now given them: "*I send you, and you shall have the Spirit to go along with you*." Now the *Spirit of the Lord rested upon them* to qualify them for all the services that lay before them. Whom Christ employs he will clothe with his Spirit, and furnish with all needful powers. *Secondly*, He hereby gives them experience of the Spirit's influences in their present case. He had shown them his hands and his side, to convince them of the truth of his resurrection; but the plainest evidences will not of themselves work faith, witness the infidelity of the soldiers, who were the only eye-witnesses of the resurrection. "Therefore *receive ye the Holy Ghost*, to work faith in you, and to open your understandings." They were now in danger of the Jews: "Therefore *receive ye the Holy Ghost*, to work courage in you." What Christ said to them he says to all true believers, *Receive ye the Holy Ghost*, ^{<4113>}Ephesians 1:13. What Christ gives we must receive, must

submit ourselves and our whole souls to the quickening, sanctifying, influences of the blessed Spirit — receive his motions, and comply with them — receive his powers and make use of them: and those who thus obey this word as a precept shall have the benefit of it as a promise; they shall receive the Holy Ghost as the guide of their way and the earnest of their inheritance.

(5.) One particular branch of the power given them by their commission particularized (v. 23): “*Whosoever sins you remit*, in the due execution of the powers you are entrusted with, they are remitted to them, and they may take the comfort of it; *and whosoever sins you retain*, that is, pronounce unpardoned and the guilt of them bound on, *they are retained*, and the sinner may be sure of it, to his sorrow.” Now this follows upon their receiving the Holy Ghost; for, if they had not had an extraordinary spirit of discerning, they had not been fit to be entrusted with such an authority; for, in the strictest sense, this is a special commission to the apostles themselves and the first preachers of the gospel, who could distinguish who were in the *gall of bitterness and bond of iniquity*, and who were not. By virtue of this power, Peter struck Ananias and Sapphira dead, and Paul struck Elymas blind. Yet it must be understood as a general charter to the church and her ministers, not securing an infallibility of judgment to any man or company of men in the world, but encouraging the faithful stewards of the mysteries of God to stand to the gospel they were sent to preach, for that God himself will stand to it. The apostles, in preaching remission, must begin at Jerusalem, though she had lately brought upon herself the guilt of Christ's blood: “Yet you may declare their sins remitted upon gospel terms.” And Peter did so, ~~428~~ Acts 2:38; 3:19. Christ, being risen for our justification, sends his gospel heralds to proclaim the jubilee begun, the act of indemnity now passed; and by this rule men shall be judged, ~~426~~ John 12:48; ~~426~~ Romans 2:16; ~~312~~ James 2:12. God will never alter this rule of judgment, nor vary from it; those whom the gospel acquits shall be acquitted, and those whom the gospel condemns shall be condemned, which puts immense honour upon the ministry, and should put immense courage into ministers. Two ways the apostles and ministers of Christ remit and retain sin, and both as having authority: —

[1.] By sound doctrine. They are commissioned to tell the world that salvation is to be had upon gospel terms, and no other, and they shall find God will say *Amen* to it; so shall their doom be.

[2.] By a strict discipline, applying the general rule of the gospel to particular persons. “Whom you admit into communion with you, according to the rules of the gospel, God will admit into communion with himself; and whom you cast out of communion as impenitent, and obstinate in scandalous and infectious sins, shall be bound over to the righteous judgment of God.”

III. The incredulity of Thomas, when the report of this was made to him, which introduced Christ's second appearance.

1. Here is Thomas's absence from this meeting, v. 24. He is said to be *one of the twelve*, one of the college of the apostles, who, though now eleven, had been twelve, and were to be so again. They were but eleven, and one of them was missing: Christ's disciples will never be all together till the general assembly at the great day. Perhaps it was Thomas's unhappiness that he was absent — either he was not well, or had not notice; or perhaps it was his sin and folly — either he was diverted by business or company, which he preferred before this opportunity, or he durst not come for *fear of the Jews*; and he called that his prudence and caution which was his cowardice. However, by his absence he missed the satisfaction of seeing his Master risen, and of sharing with the disciples in their joy upon that occasion. Note, Those know not what they lose who carelessly absent themselves from the stated solemn assemblies of Christians.

2. The account which the other disciples gave him of the visit their Master had made them, v. 25. The next time they saw him they *said unto him*, with joy enough, *We have seen the Lord*; and no doubt they related to him all that had passed, particularly the satisfaction he had given them by showing them his hands and his side. It seems, though Thomas was then from them, he was not long from them; absentees for a time must not be condemned as apostates for ever: Thomas is not Judas. Observe with what exultation and triumph they speak it: “*We have seen the Lord*, the most comfortable sight we ever saw.” This they said to Thomas,

(1.) To upbraid him with his absence: “*We have seen the Lord*, but thou hast not.” Or rather,

(2.) To inform him: “*We have seen the Lord*, and we wish thou hadst been here, to see him too, for thou wouldest have seen enough to satisfy thee.” Note, The disciples of Christ should endeavour to *build up one another in their most holy faith*, both by repeating what they have heard to those that

were absent, that they may hear it at second hand, and also by communicating what they have experienced. Those that by faith have seen the Lord, and tasted that he is gracious, should tell others what God has done for their souls; only let boasting be excluded.

3. The objections Thomas raised against the evidence, to justify himself in his unwillingness to admit it. “Tell me not that you have seen the Lord alive; you are too credulous; somebody has made fools of you. For my part, *except I shall not only see in his hands the print of the nails, but put my finger into it, and thrust my hand into the wound in his side, I am resolved I will not believe.*” Some, by comparing this with what he said (~~4116~~ John 11:16; 14:5), conjecture him to have been a man of a rough, morose temper, apt to speak peevishly; for all good people are not alike happy in their temper. However, there was certainly much amiss in his conduct at this time.

(1.) He had either not heeded, or not duly regarded, what Christ had so often said, and that too according to the Old Testament, that he would *rise again the third day*; so that he ought to have said, *He is risen*, though he had not seen him, nor spoken with any that had.

(2.) He did not pay a just deference to the testimony of his fellow-disciples, who were men of wisdom and integrity, and ought to have been credited. He knew them to be honest men; they all ten of them concurred in the testimony with great assurance; and yet he could not persuade himself to say that *their record was true*. Christ had chosen them to be his witnesses of this very thing to all nations; and yet Thomas, one of their own fraternity, would not allow them to be competent witnesses, nor trust them further than he could see them. It was not, however, their veracity that he questioned, but their prudence; he feared they were too credulous.

(3.) He tempted Christ, and *limited the Holy One of Israel*, when he would be convinced by his own method, or not at all. He could not be sure that the print of the nails, which the apostles told him they had seen, would admit the putting of his finger into it, or the wound in his side the thrusting in of his hand; nor was it fit to deal so roughly with a living body; yet Thomas ties up his faith to this evidence. Either he will be humoured, and have his fancy gratified, or he will not believe; see ~~4116~~ Matthew 16:1; 27:42.

(4.) The open avowal of this in the presence of the disciples was an offence and discouragement to them. It was not only a sin, but a scandal. As one coward makes many, so does one believer, one sceptic, *making his brethren's heart to faint like his heart*, ~~408~~ Deuteronomy 20:8. Had he only thought this evil, and then laid his hand upon his mouth, to suppress it, his error had remained with himself; but his proclaiming his infidelity, and that so peremptorily, might be of ill consequence to the rest, who were as yet but weak and wavering.

~~410~~ JOHN 20:26-31

THE INCREDULITY OF THOMAS

We have here an account of another appearance of Christ to his disciples, after his resurrection, when Thomas was now with them. And concerning this we may observe,

I. When it was that Christ repeated his visit to his disciples: *After eight days*, that day seven-night after he rose, which must therefore be, as that was, *the first day of the week*.

1. He deferred his next appearance for some time, to show his disciples that he was not risen to such a life as he had formerly lived, to converse constantly with them but was as one that belonged to another world, and visited this only as angels do, now and then, when there was occasion. Where Christ was during these eight days, and the rest of the time of his abode on earth, it is folly to enquire, and presumption to determine. Wherever he was, no doubt *angels ministered unto him*. In the beginning of his ministry he had been forty days unseen, tempted by the evil spirit, ~~409~~ Matthew 4:1, 2. And now in the beginning of his glory he was forty days, for the most part unseen, attended by good spirits.

2. He deferred it so long as seven days. And why so?

(1.) That he might put a rebuke upon Thomas for his incredulity. He had neglected the former meeting of the disciples; and, to teach him to prize those seasons of grace better for the future, he cannot have such another opportunity for several days. He that slips one tide must stay a good while for another. A very melancholy week, we have reason to think Thomas

had of it, drooping, and in suspense, while the other disciples were full of joy; and it was owing to himself and his own folly.

(2.) That he might try the faith and patience of the rest of the disciples. They had gained a great point when they were satisfied that they had seen the Lord. *Then were the disciples glad;* but he would try whether they could keep the ground they had got, when they saw no more of him for some days. And thus he would gradually wean them from his bodily presence, which they had doted and depended too much upon.

(3.) That he might put an honour upon the first day of the week, and give a plain intimation of his will, that it should be observed in his church as the Christian sabbath, the weekly day of holy rest and holy convocations. That one day in seven should be religiously observed was an appointment from the beginning, as old as innocency; and that in the kingdom of the Messiah the first day of the week should be that solemn day this was indication enough, that Christ on that day once and again met his disciples in a religious assembly. It is highly probable that in his former appearance to them he appointed them that day seven-night to be together again, and promised to meet them; and also that he appeared to them every first day of the week, besides other times, during the forty days. The religious observance of that day has been thence transmitted down to us through every age of the church. This therefore is *the day which the Lord has made*.

II. Where, and how, Christ made them this visit. It was at Jerusalem, for the doors were shut now, as before, for fear of the Jews. There they staid, to keep the feast of unleavened bread seven days, which expired the day before this; yet they would not set out on their journey to Galilee on the first day of the week, because it was the Christian sabbath, but staid till the day after. Now observe,

1. That Thomas was with them; though he had withdrawn himself once, yet not a second time. When we have lost one opportunity, we should give the more earnest heed to lay hold on the next, that we may recover our losses. It is a good sign if such a loss whet our desires, and a bad sign if it cool them. The disciples admitted him among them, and did not insist upon his believing the resurrection of Christ, as they did, because as yet it was but darkly revealed; they did not receive him to doubtful disputation, but bade him welcome to come and see. But observe, Christ did not appear

to Thomas, for his satisfaction, till he found him in society with the rest of his disciples, because he would countenance the meetings of Christians and ministers, for there will he be *in the midst of them*. And, besides, he would have all the disciples witnesses of the rebuke he gave to Thomas, and yet withal of the tender care he had of him.

2. That Christ *came* in among them, and *stood in the midst*, and they all knew him, for he showed himself now, just as he had shown himself before (v. 19), still the same, and no changeling. See the condescension of our Lord Jesus. The gates of heaven were ready to be opened to him, and there he might have been in the midst of the adorations of a world of angels; yet, for the benefit of his church, he lingered on earth, and visited the little private meetings of his poor disciples, and is in the midst of them.

3. He saluted them all in a friendly manner, as he had done before; he said, *Peace be unto you*. This was no vain repetition, but significant of the abundant and assured peace which Christ gives, and of the continuance of his blessings upon his people, for they *fail not*, but are *new every morning*, new every meeting.

III. What passed between Christ and Thomas at this meeting; and that only is recorded, though we may suppose he said a great deal to the rest of them. Here is,

1. Christ's gracious condescension to Thomas, v. 27. He singled him out from the rest, and applied himself particularly to him: "*Reach hither thy finger*, and, since thou wilt have it so, *behold my hands*, and satisfy thy curiosity to the utmost about the *print of the nails*; *reach hither thy hand*, and, if nothing less will convince thee, *thrust it into my side*." Here we have,

(1.) An implicit rebuke of Thomas's incredulity, in the plain reference which is here had to what Thomas had said, answering it word for word, for he had heard it, though unseen; and one would think that his telling him of it should put him to the blush. Note, There is not an unbelieving word on our tongues, no, nor thought in our minds, at any time, but it is known to the Lord Jesus. ^{<1982>} Psalm 78:21.

(2.) An express condescension to this weakness, which appears in two things: —

[1.] That he suffers his wisdom to be prescribed to. Great spirits will not be dictated to by their inferiors, especially in their acts of grace; yet Christ is pleased here to accommodate himself even to Thomas's fancy in a needless thing, rather than break with him, and leave him in his unbelief. He will not *break the bruised reed*, but, as a good shepherd, *gathers that which was driven away*, ^{25:16} Ezekiel 34:16. We ought thus to *bear the infirmities of the weak*, ^{15:1} Romans 15:1, 2.

[2.] He suffers his wounds to be raked into, allows Thomas even to thrust his hand into his side, if then at last he would believe. Thus, for the confirmation of our faith, he has instituted an ordinance on purpose to keep his death in remembrance, though it was an ignominious, shameful death, and one would think should rather have been forgotten, and no more said of it; yet, because it was such an evidence of his love as would be an encouragement to our faith, he appoints the memorial of it to be celebrated. And in that ordinance where in we *show the Lord's death* we are called, as it were, to put our finger *into the print of the nails*. *Reach hither thy hand* to him, who reacheth forth his helping, inviting, giving hand to thee.

It is an affecting word with which Christ closes up what he had to say to Thomas: *Be not faithless but believing; me ginou apistos* — *do not thou become an unbeliever*; as if he would have been sealed up under unbelief, had he not yielded now. This warning is given to us all: *Be not faithless*; for, if we are faithless, we are Christless and graceless, hopeless and joyless; let us therefore say, *Lord, I believe, help thou my unbelief*.

2. Thomas's believing consent to Jesus Christ. He is now ashamed of his incredulity, and cries out, *My Lord and my God*, v. 28. We are not told whether he did put his finger into the print of the nails; it should seem, he did not, for Christ says (v. 29), *Thou hast seem, and believed*; seeing sufficed. And now faith comes off a conqueror, after a struggle with unbelief.

(1.) Thomas is now fully satisfied of the truth of Christ's resurrection — that the same Jesus that was crucified is now alive, and this is he. His slowness and backwardness to believe may help to strengthen our faith; for hereby it appears that the witnesses of Christ's resurrection, who attested it to the world, and pawned their lives upon it, were not easy credulous men, but cautious enough, and suspended their belief of it till

they saw the utmost evidence of it they could desire. Thus *out of the eater came forth meat*.

(2.) He therefore believed him to be Lord and God, and we are to believe him so.

[1.] We must believe his deity — that he is God; not a man made God, but God made man, as this evangelist had laid down his thesis at first, ^{<400>}John 1:1. The author and head of our holy religion has the wisdom, power, sovereignty, and unchangeableness of God, which was necessary, because he was to be not only the founder of it, but the foundation of it for its constant support, and the fountain of life for its supply.

[2.] His mediation — that he is Lord, the one Lord, ^{<406>}1 Corinthians 8:6; ^{<505>}1 Timothy 2:5. He is sufficiently authorized, as pleni-potentiary, to settle the great concerns that lie between God and man, to take up the controversy which would inevitably have been our ruin, and to establish the correspondence that was necessary to our happiness; see ^{<405>}Acts 2:36; ^{<549>}Romans 14:9.

(3.) He consented to him as his Lord and his God. In faith there must be the consent of the will to gospel terms, as well as the assent of the understanding to gospel truths. We must accept of Christ to be that to us which the Father hath appointed him. *My Lord* refers to *Adonai* — my foundation and stay; *my God* to *Elohim* — my prince and judge. God having constituted him the umpire and referee, we must approve the choice, and entirely refer ourselves to him. This is the vital act of faith, He is mine, ^{<279>}Song of Solomon 2:16.

(4.) He made an open profession of this, before those that had been the witnesses of his unbelieving doubts. He says it to Christ, and, to complete the sense, we must read it, *Thou art* my Lord and my God; or, speaking to his brethren, *This is* my Lord and my God. Do we accept of Christ as our *Lord God*? We must go to him, and tell him so, as David (^{<302>}Psalm 16:2), deliver the surrender to him as *our act and deed*, tell others so, as those that triumph in our relation to Christ: *This is my beloved*. Thomas speaks with an ardency of affection, as one that took hold of Christ with all his might, *My Lord* and *my God*.

3. The judgment of Christ upon the whole (v. 29): “*Thomas because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed, and it is well thou art brought to it at last*

upon any terms; but *blessed are those that have not seen, and yet have believed.*” Here,

(1.) Christ owns Thomas a believer. Sound and sincere believers, though they be slow and weak, shall be graciously accepted of the Lord Jesus. Those who have long stood it out, if at last they yield, shall find him ready to forgive. No sooner did Thomas consent to Christ than Christ gives him the comfort of it, and lets him know that he believes.

(2.) He upbraids him with his former incredulity. He might well be ashamed to think,

[1.] That he had been so backward to believe, and came so slowly to his own comforts. Those that in sincerity have closed with Christ see a great deal of reason to lament that they did not do it sooner.

[2.] That it was not without much ado that he was brought to believe at last: “If thou hadst not seen me alive, thou wouldst not have believed;” but if no evidence must be admitted but that of our own senses, and we must believe nothing but what we ourselves are eye-witnesses of, farewell all commerce and conversation. If this must be the only method of proof, how must the world be converted to the faith of Christ? He is therefore justly blamed for laying so much stress upon this.

(3.) He commends the faith of those who believe upon easier terms. Thomas, as a believer, was truly blessed; but rather *blessed are those that have not seen*. It is not meant of not seeing the objects of faith (for these are invisible, ³⁰¹¹Hebrews 11:1; ⁴⁰¹⁸2 Corinthians 4:18), but the motives of faith — Christ’s miracles, and especially his resurrection; blessed are those that see not these, and yet believe in Christ. This may look, either backward, upon the Old-Testament saints, who had not seen the things which they saw, and yet believed the promise made unto the father, and lived by that faith; or forward, upon those who should afterwards believe, the Gentiles, who had never seen Christ in the flesh, as the Jews had. This faith is more laudable and praise-worthy than theirs who saw and believed; for,

[1.] It evidences a better temper of mind in those that do believe. Not to see and yet to believe argues greater industry in searching after truth, and greater ingenuousness of mind in embracing it. He that believes upon that

sight has his resistance conquered by a sort of violence; but he that believes without it, like the Bereans, is more noble.

[2.] It is a greater instance of the power of divine grace. The less sensible the evidence is the more does the work of faith appear to be the Lord's doing. Peter is blessed in his faith, because flesh and blood have not revealed it to him, ^{<467>}Matthew 16:17. Flesh and blood contribute more to their faith that see and believe, than to theirs who see not and yet believe. Dr. Lightfoot quotes a saying of one of the rabbins, "That one proselyte is more acceptable to God than all the thousands of Israel that stood before mount Sinai; for they saw and received the law, but a proselyte sees not, and yet receives it."

IV. The remark which the evangelist makes upon his narrative, like an historian drawing towards a conclusion, v. 30, 31. And here,

1. He assures us that many other things occurred, which were all worthy to be recorded, but are *not written in the book: many signs*. Some refer this to all the signs that Jesus did during his whole life, all the wondrous words he spoke, and all the wondrous works he did. But it seems rather to be confined to the signs he did after his resurrection, for these were in the presence of the disciples only, who are here spoken of, ^{<401>}Acts 10:41. Divers of his appearances are not recorded, as appears, ^{<435>}1 Corinthians 15:5-7. See ^{<403>}Acts 1:3. Now,

(1.) We may here improve this general attestation, that there were other signs, many others, for the confirmation of our faith; and, being added to the particular narratives, they very much strengthen the evidence. Those that recorded the resurrection of Christ were not put to fish for evidence, to take up such short and scanty proofs as they could find, and make up the rest with conjecture. No, they had evidence enough and to spare, and more witnesses to produce than they had occasion for. The disciples, in whose presence these other signs were done, were to be preachers of Christ's resurrection to others, and therefore it was requisite they should have proofs of it *ex abundantia* — *in abundance*, that they might have a strong consolation, who ventured life and all upon it.

(2.) We need not ask why they were not all written, or why not more than these, or others than these; for it is enough for us that so it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, by whose inspiration this was given. Had this history been a mere human composition, it had been swelled with a multitude of

depositions and affidavits, to prove the contested truth of Christ's resurrection and long argument drawn up for the demonstration of it; but, being a divine history, the penmen write with a noble security, relating what amounted to a competent proof, sufficient to convince those that were willing to be taught and to condemn those that were obstinate in their unbelief; and, if this satisfy not, more would not. Men produce all they have to say, that they may gain credit; but God does not, for he can give faith. Had this history been written for the entertainment of the curious, it would have been more copious, or every circumstance would have brightened and embellished the story; but it was written to bring men to believe, and enough is said to answer that intention, whether men will hear or whether they will forbear.

2. He instructs us in the design of recording what we do find here (v. 31): “These accounts are given in this and the following chapter, *that you might believe* upon these evidences; that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, declared with power to be so by his resurrection.”

(1.) Here is the design of those that wrote the gospel. Some write books for their diversion, and publish them for their profit or applause, others to oblige the Athenian humour, others to instruct the world in arts and sciences for their secular advantage; but the evangelists wrote without any view of temporal benefit to themselves or others, but to bring men to Christ and heaven, and, in order to this, to persuade men to believe; and for this they took the most fitting methods, they brought to the world a divine revelation, supported with its due evidences.

(2.) The duty of those that read and hear the gospel. It is their duty to believe, to embrace, the doctrine of Christ, and that record given concerning him ^{<GNT>}1 John 5:11.

[1.] We are here told what the great gospel truth is which we are to believe — that *Jesus is that Christ, that Son of God. First*, That he is the Christ, the person who, under the title of the Messiah, was promised to, and expected by, the Old-Testament saints, and who, according to the signification of the name, is *anointed* of God to be a prince and a Saviour. *Secondly*, That he is the Son of God; not only as Mediator (for then he had not been greater than Moses, who was a prophet, intercessor, and lawgiver), but antecedent to his being the Mediator; for if he had not been a divine person, endued with the power of God and entitled to the glory of

God, he had not been qualified for the undertaking — not fit either to do the Redeemer's work or to wear the Redeemer's crown.

[2.] What the great gospel blessedness is which we are to hope for — *That believing we shall have life through his name.* This is, *First*, To direct our faith; it must have an eye to the life, the crown of life, the tree of life set before us. Life through Christ's name, the life proposed in the covenant which is made with us in Christ, is what we must propose to ourselves as the fulness of our joy and the abundant recompence of all our services and sufferings. *Secondly*, To encourage our faith, and invite us to believe. Upon the prospect of some great advantage, men will venture far; and greater advantage there cannot be than that which is offered by the *words of this life*, as the gospel is called, ^{<4R1>}Acts 5:20. It includes both spiritual life, in conformity to God and communion with him, and eternal life, in the vision and fruition of him. Both are through Christ's name, by his merit and power, and both indefeasibly sure to all true believers.