

CHAPTER 11

In this chapter we have,

- I.** The constant and unwearied diligence of our Lord Jesus in his great work of preaching the gospel (v. 1).
- II.** His discourse with the disciples of John concerning his being the Messiah (v. 2-6).
- III.** The honourable testimony that Christ bore to John Baptist (v. 7-15).
- IV.** The sad account he gives of that generation in general, and of some particular places with reference to the success, both of John's ministry and of his own (v. 16-24).
- V.** His thanksgiving to his Father for the wise and gracious method he had taken in revealing the great mysteries of the gospel (v. 25, 26).
- VI.** His gracious call and invitation of poor sinners to come to him, and to be ruled, and taught, and saved by him (v. 27-30).
No Where have we more of the terror of gospel woes for warning to us, or of the sweetness of gospel grace for encouragement to us, than in this chapter, which sets before us life and death, the blessing and the curse.

◀III▶ MATTHEW 11:1-6

JOHN'S DISCIPLES COME TO CHRIST

The first verse of this chapter some join to the foregoing chapter, and make it (not unfitly) the close of that.

- 1.** The ordination sermon which Christ preached to his disciples in the foregoing chapter is here called his commanding them. Note, Christ's commissions imply commands. Their preaching of the gospel was not only permitted them, but it was enjoined them. It was not a thing respecting which they were left at their liberty, but *necessity was laid upon them*, ~~406~~1 Corinthians 9:16. The promises he made them are included in these

commands, for the covenant of grace is a *word which he hath commanded*, ^(~~DATE~~) Psalm 105:8. He *made an end of commanding*, *etelesendiatasson*. Note, The instructions Christ gives are full instructions. He goes through with his work.

2. When Christ had said what he had to say to his disciples, he *departed thence*. It should seem they were very loth to leave their Master, till *he departed* and separated himself from them; as the nurse withdraws the hand, that the child may learn to go by itself. Christ would now teach them how to live, and how to work, without his bodily presence. It was *expedient for them*, that Christ should thus go away for awhile, that they might be prepared for his long departure, and that, by the help of the Spirit, their own hands might be *sufficient for them* (^(~~DATE~~) Deuteronomy 33:7), and they might not be always children. We have little account of what they did now pursuant to their commission. They went abroad, no doubt; probably into Judea (for in Galilee the gospel had been mostly preached hitherto), publishing the doctrine of Christ, and working miracles in his name: but still in a more immediate dependence upon him, and not being long from him; and thus they were trained up, by degrees, for their great work.

3. Christ departed, *to teach and preach* in the cities whither he sent his disciples before him to *work miracles* (^(~~DATE~~) Matthew 10:1-8), and so to raise people's expectations, and to make way for his entertainment. Thus was *the way of the Lord prepared*; John prepared it by bringing people to *repentance*, but he did *no miracles*. The disciples go further, they *work miracles* for confirmation. Note, Repentance and faith prepare people for the blessings of the kingdom of heaven, which Christ gives. Observe, When Christ empowered them to *work miracles*, he employed himself in *teaching and preaching*, as if that were the more honourable of the two. That was but in order to do this. Healing the sick was the *saving of bodies*, but preaching the gospel was to the *saving of souls*. Christ had directed his disciples to *preach* (^(~~DATE~~) Matthew 10:7), yet he did not leave off preaching himself. He set them to work, not for his own ease, but for the ease of the country, and was not the less busy for employing them. How unlike are they to Christ, who yoke others only that they may themselves be idle! Note, the increase and multitude of labourers in the Lord's work should be made not an excuse for our negligence, but an encouragement to our diligence. The more busy others are, the more busy we should be, and all little enough, so much work is there to be done. Observe, he went to

preach *in their cities*, which were populous places; he cast the net of the gospel where there were most fish to be enclosed. Wisdom cries *in the cities* (^{<4012>}Proverbs 1:21), *at the entry of the city* (^{<4088>}Proverbs 8:3), *in the cities of the Jews*, even of them who made light of him, who notwithstanding had the first offer.

What he preached we are not told, but it was probably to the same purpose with his sermon on the mount. But here is next recorded a message which John Baptist sent to Christ, and his return to it, v. 2-6. We heard before that Jesus heard of John's sufferings, ^{<4012>}Matthew 4:12. Now we are told that John, in prison, hears of Christ's doings. He *heard in the prison the works of Christ*; and no doubt he was glad to hear of them, for he was a true friend of the Bridegroom, ^{<4129>}John 3:29. Note, When one useful instrument is laid aside, God knows how to raise up many others in the stead of it. The work went on, though John was in prison, and it added no affliction, but a great deal of consolation, to his bonds. Nothing more comfortable to God's people in distress, than to *hear of the works of Christ*; especially to experience them in their own souls. This turns a prison into a palace. Some way or other Christ will convey the notices of his love to those that are in trouble for conscience sake. John could not see the works of Christ, but he heard of them with pleasure. And blessed are they who *have not seen*, but only heard, and yet *have believed*.

Now John Baptist, hearing of Christ's works, sent two of his disciples to him; and what passed between them and him we have here an account of. Here is,

I. The question they had to propose to him: *Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?* This was a serious and important question; *Art thou the Messiah promised, or not? Art thou the Christ? Tell us.*

1. It is taken for granted that the Messiah should come. It was one of the names by which he was known to the Old-Testament saints, *he that cometh or shall come*, ^{<4129>}Psalm 118:26. He is now come, but there is another coming of his which we still expect.

2. They intimate, that if this be not *he*, they would *look for another*. Note, We must not be weary of looking for him that is to come, nor ever say, we will not more expect him till we come to enjoy him. Though he tarry, wait for him, for he that shall come will come, though not in our time.

3. They intimate likewise, that if they be convinced that this is he, they will not be sceptics, they will be satisfied, and will look *for no other*.

4. They therefore ask, *Art thou he?* John had said for his part, *I am not the Christ*, ^(~~RT~~)John 1:20. Now,

(1.) Some think that John sent this question for his own satisfaction. It is true he had borne a noble testimony to Christ; he had declared him to be the *Son of God* (^(~~RT~~)John 1:34), the Lamb of God (v. 29), and he that *should baptize with the Holy Ghost* (v. 33), and *sent of God* (^(~~RT~~)John 3:34), which were great things. But he desired to be further and more fully assured, that he was the Messiah that had been so long promised and expected. Note, In matters relating to Christ and our salvation by him, it is good to be sure. Christ appeared not in that external pomp and power in which it was expected he should appear; his own disciples stumbled at this, and perhaps John did so; Christ saw something of this at the bottom of this enquiry, when he said, *blessed is he who shall not be offended in me*. Note, It is hard, even for good men, to bear up against vulgar errors.

(2.) John's doubt might arise from his own present circumstances. He was a prisoner, and might be tempted to think, if Jesus be indeed the Messiah, whence is it that I, his friend and forerunner, am brought into this trouble, and am left to be so long in it, and he never looks after me, never visits me, nor sends to me, enquires not after me, does nothing either to sweeten my imprisonment or hasten my enlargement? Doubtless there was a good reason why our Lord Jesus did not go to John in prison, lest there should seem to have been a compact between them: but John construed it into a neglect, and it was perhaps a shock to his faith in Christ. Note,

[1.] Where there is true faith, yet there may be a mixture of unbelief. The best are not always alike strong.

[2.] Troubles for Christ, especially when they continue long unrelieved, are such trials of faith as sometimes prove too hard to be borne up against.

[3.] The remaining unbelief of good men may sometimes, in an hour of temptation, strike at the root, and call in question the most fundamental truths which were thought to be well settled. *Will the Lord cast off for ever?* But we will hope that John's faith did not fail in this matter, only he desired to have it strengthened and confirmed. Note, The best saints have need of the best helps they can get for the strengthening of their faith, and

the arming of themselves against temptations to infidelity. Abraham believed, and yet desired a sign (¹⁵⁶Genesis 15:6, 8), so did Gideon, ¹⁶⁶Judges 6:36, 37. But,

(3.) Others think that John sent his disciples to Christ with this question, not so much for his own satisfaction as for theirs. Observe, Though he was a prisoner they adhered to him, attended on him, and were ready to receive instructions from him; they loved him, and would not leave him. Now,

[1.] They were weak in knowledge, and wavering in their faith, and needed instruction and confirmation; and in this matter they were somewhat prejudiced; being jealous *for their* master, they were jealous *of our* Master; they were loth to acknowledge Jesus to be the Messiah, because he eclipsed John, and are loth to believe their own master when they think he speaks against himself and them. Good men are apt to have their judgments blessed by their interest. Now John would have their mistakes rectified, and wished them to be as well satisfied as he himself was. Note, The strong ought to consider the infirmities of the weak, and to do what they can to help them: and such as we cannot help ourselves we should send to those that can. *When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.*

[2.] John was all along industrious to turn over his disciples to Christ, as from the grammar-school to the academy. Perhaps he foresaw his death approaching, and therefore would bring his disciples to be better acquainted with Christ, under whose guardianship he must leave them. Note, Ministers' business is to direct every body to Christ. And those who would know the certainty of the doctrine of Christ, must apply themselves to him, who is come to give an understanding. They who would grow in grace must be inquisitive.

II. Here is Christ's answer to this question, v. 4-6. It was not so direct and express, as when he said, *I that speak unto thee am he;* but it was a real answer, an answer in fact. Christ will have us to spell out the convincing evidences of gospel truths, and to take pains in digging for knowledge.

1. He points them to what they heard and saw, which they must tell John, that he might from thence take occasion the more fully to instruct and convince them out of their own mouths. Go and tell him *what you hear and see.* Note, Our senses may and ought to be appealed to in those things that are their proper objects. Therefore the popish doctrine of the real

presence agrees not with the truth *as it is in Jesus*; for Christ refers us to the things we *hear and see*. *Go and tell John*,

(1.) *What you see of the power of Christ's miracles*; you see how, by the word of Jesus, *the blind receive their sight, the lame walk*, etc. Christ's miracles were done openly, and in the view of all; for they feared not the strongest and most impartial scrutiny. *Veritas no quaerit angulos — Truth seeks not concealment*. They are to be considered,

[1.] As the *acts of a divine power*. None but the God of nature could thus overrule and outdo the power of nature. It is particularly spoken of as God's prerogative to *open the eyes of the blind*, ~~288~~ Psalm 146:8. Miracles are therefore the broad seal of heaven, and the doctrine they are affixed to must be of God, for his power will never contradict his truth; nor can it be imagined that he should set his seal to a lie; however *lying wonders* may be vouched for in proof of *false doctrines*, *true miracles* evince a divine commission; such Christ's were, and they leave no room to doubt that he was sent of God, and that his doctrine was his that *sent him*.

[2.] As the *accomplishment of a divine prediction*. It was foretold (~~288~~ Isaiah 35:5, 6), that our God should come, and that then *the eyes of the blind should be opened*. Now if the works of Christ agree with the words of the prophet, as it is plain they do, then no doubt but this is our God whom we have waited for, who shall *come with a recompence*; this is he who is so much wanted.

(2.) Tell him *what you hear of the preaching of his gospel*, which accompanies his miracles. Faith, though confirmed by seeing, comes by hearing. Tell him,

[1.] That *the poor preach the gospel*; so some read it. It proves Christ's divine mission, that those whom he employed in founding his kingdom were poor men, destitute of all secular advantages, who, therefore, could never have carried their point, if they had not been carried on by a divine power.

[2.] That *the poor have the gospel preached to them*. Christ's auditory is made up of such as the scribes and Pharisees despised, and looked upon with contempt, and the *rabbies* would not instruct, because they were notable to pay them. The *Old-Testament* prophets were sent mostly to kings and princes, but Christ preached to the *congregations of the poor*. It

was foretold that the *poor of the flock* should *wait upon him*, ^{<3111>}Zechariah 11:11. Note, Christ's gracious condescensions and compassions to the *poor*, are an evidence that it was he that should bring to the world the tender mercies of our God. It was foretold that the *Son of David* should be the *poor man's King*, ^{<3112>}Psalms 72:2, 4, 12, 13. Or we may understand it, not so much of the *poor of the world*, as the *poor in spirit*, and so that scripture is fulfilled, ^{<3113>}Isaiah 61:1, *He hath anointed me to preach glad tidings to the meek*. Note, It is a proof of Christ's divine mission that his doctrine is gospel indeed; good news to those who are truly humbled in sorrow for their sins, and truly humble in the denial of self; to them it is accommodated, for whom God always declared he had mercy in store.

[3.] That the *poor receive the gospel*, and are wrought upon by it, they are evangelized, they receive and entertain the gospel, are leavened by it, and delivered into it as into a mould. Note, The wonderful efficacy of the gospel is a proof of its divine original. The poor are *wrought upon* by it. The prophets complained of the *poor*, that they *knew not the way of the Lord*, ^{<3114>}Jeremiah 5:4. They could do no good upon them; but the gospel of Christ made its way into their untutored minds.

2. He pronounces a *blessing* on those that *were not offended in him*, v. 6. So clear are these evidences of Christ's mission, that they who are not wilfully prejudiced against him, and scandalized in him (so the word is), cannot but receive his doctrine, and so be *blessed in him*. Note,

(1.) There are many things in Christ which they who are ignorant and unthinking are apt to be offended at, some circumstances for the sake of which they reject the substance of his gospel. The meanness of his appearance, his education at Nazareth, the poverty of his life, the despicableness of his followers, the slights which the great men put upon him, the strictness of his doctrine, the contradiction it gives to flesh and blood, and the sufferings that attend the profession of his name; these are things that keep many from him, who otherwise cannot but see much of God in him. Thus he is set *for the fall of many*, even in Israel (^{<3115>}Luke 2:34), a *Rock of offence*, ^{<3116>}1 Peter 2:8.

(2.) They are happy who get over these offences. *Blessed are they*. The expression intimates, that it is a difficult thing to conquer these prejudices, and a dangerous thing not to conquer them; but as to those, who, notwithstanding this opposition, to believe in Christ, their faith will be found so much the more, to *praise, and honour, and glory*.

◀117▶ MATTHEW 11:7-15

CHRIST'S TESTIMONY OF JOHN

We have here the high encomium which our Lord Jesus gave of John the Baptist; not only to revive his honour, but to revive his work. Some of Christ's disciples might perhaps take occasion from the question John sent, to reflect upon him, as weak and wavering, and inconsistent with himself, to prevent which Christ gives him this character. Note, It is our duty to consult the reputation of our brethren, and not only to remove, but to obviate and prevent, jealousies and ill thoughts of them; and we must take all occasions, especially such as discover any thing of infirmity, to speak well of those who are praiseworthy, and to give them that *fruit of their hands*. John the Baptist, when he was upon the stage, and Christ in privacy and retirement, bore testimony to Christ; and now that Christ appeared publicly, and John was under a cloud, he bore testimony to John. Note, They who have a confirmed interest themselves, should improve it for the helping of the credit and reputation of others, whose character claims it, but whose temper or present circumstances put them out of the way of it. This is giving honour to whom honour is due. John had abased himself to honour Christ (◀488▶ John 3:20, 30, ◀491▶ Matthew 3:11), had made himself nothing, that Christ might be All, and now Christ dignifies him with this character. Note, They who humble themselves shall be exalted, and those that honour Christ he will honour; those that confess him before men, he will confess, and sometimes *before men* too, even in this world. John had now *finished his testimony*, and now Christ commends him. Note, Christ reserves honour for his servants when they *have done their work*, ◀492▶ John 12:26.

Now concerning this commendation of John, observe,

I. That Christ spoke thus honourably of John, not in the hearing of John's disciples, but *as they departed*, just after they were gone, ◀492▶ Luke 7:24. He would not so much as seem to flatter John, nor have these praises of him reported to him. Note, Though we must be forward to give to all their due praise for their encouragement, yet we must avoid every thing that looks like flattery, or may be in danger of puffing them up. They who in other things are mortified to the world, yet cannot well bear their own praise.

Pride is a corrupt humour, which we must not feed either in others or in ourselves.

II. That what Christ said concerning John, was intended not only for his praise, but for the people's profit, to revive the remembrance of John's ministry, which had been well attended, but which was now (as other such things used to be) strangely forgotten: they did for a season, and but *for a season, rejoice in his light,* ~~455~~ John 5:35. "Now, consider, *what went ye out into the wilderness to see?* Put this question to yourselves."

1. John preached *in the wilderness*, and thither people flocked in crowds to him, though in a *remote* place, and an *inconvenient* one. If teachers be removed into corners, it is better to go after them than to be without them. Now if his preaching was worth taking so much pains to hear it, surely it was worth taking some care to recollect it. The greater the difficulties we have broken through to hear the word, the more we are concerned to profit by it.

2. They went out to him to see him; rather to feed their eyes with the unusual appearance of his person, than to feed their souls with his wholesome instructions; rather for curiosity than for conscience. Note, Many that attend on the word come rather to see and be seen, than to learn and be taught, to have something to talk of, than to be made wise to salvation. Christ puts it to them, *what went ye out to see?* Note, They who attend on the word will be called to an account, what their intentions and what their improvements were. We think when the sermon is done, the care is over; no, then the greatest of the care begins. It will shortly be asked, "What business had you such a time at such an ordinance? *What brought you thither?* Was it custom or company, or was it a desire to honour God and get good? *What have you brought thence?* What knowledge, and grace, and comfort? *What went you to see?*" Note, When we go to read and hear the word, we should see that we aim right in what we do.

III. Let us see what the commendation of John was. They know not what answer to make to Christ's question; well, says Christ, "I will tell you what a man John the Baptist was."

1. "He was a firm, resolute man, and not *a reed shaken with the wind*; you have been so in your thoughts of him, but *he* was not so. He was not wavering in his principles, nor uneven in his conversation; but was

remarkable for his steadiness and constant consistency with himself.” They who are *weak* as reeds will be *shaken* as reeds; but John was *strong in spirit*, ⁴⁰⁰⁴Ephesians 4:14. When the wind of popular applause on the one hand blew fresh and fair, when the storm of Herod's rage on the other hand grew fierce and blustering, John was still the same, the same in all weathers. The testimony he had borne to Christ was not the testimony of a *reed*, of a man who was of one mind to-day, and of another to-morrow; it was not a weather-cock testimony; no, his constancy in it is intimated (⁴⁰⁰⁵John 1:20); he *confessed and denied not, but confessed*, and stood to it afterwards, ⁴⁰⁰⁶John 3:28. And therefore this question sent by his disciples was not to be construed into any suspicion of the truth of what he had formerly said: therefore the people flocked to him, because he was not as a reed. Note, There is nothing lost in the long run by an unshaken resolution to go on with our work, neither courting the smiles, nor fearing the frowns of men.

2. He was a *self-denying* man, and *mortified* to this world. “Was he a man clothed in soft raiment? If so, you would not have gone *into the wilderness* to see him, but to the *court*. You went to see one that had *his raiment of camel's hair*, and a *leathern girdle about his loins*; his mien and habit showed that he was dead to all the pomps of the world and the pleasures of sense; his clothing agreed with the *wilderness* he lived in, and the doctrine he preached there, that of repentance. Now you cannot think that he who was such a stranger to the pleasures of a court, should be brought to change his mind by the terrors of a prison, and now to question whether Jesus be the Messiah or not!” Note, they who have lived a life of mortification, are least likely to be driven off from their religion by persecution. He was not a man clothed in *soft raiment*; such *there are*, but they are *in kings' houses*. Note, It becomes people in all their appearances to be consistent with their character and their situation. They who are preachers must not affect to look like courtiers; nor must they whose lot is cast in common dwellings, be ambitious of the soft clothing which they wear who are in kings' houses. Prudence teaches us to be *of a piece*. John appeared rough and unpleasant, yet they flocked after him. Note, The remembrance of our former zeal in attending on the word of God, should quicken us to, and in, our present work: let it not be said that we have done and suffered so many things *in vain*, have *run in vain* and *laboured in vain*.

3. His greatest commendation of all was his office and ministry, which was more his honour than any personal endowments or qualifications could be; and therefore this is most enlarged upon in a full encomium.

(1.) He was *a prophet, yea, and more than a prophet* (v. 9); so he said of him who was the great Prophet, to whom all the prophets bear witness. John said of himself, he was not *that prophet*, that great prophet, the Messiah himself; and now Christ (a very competent Judge) says of him, that he was *more than a prophet*. He owned himself inferior to Christ, and Christ owned him superior to all other prophets. Observe, The forerunner of Christ was not a king, but a prophet, lest it should seem that the kingdom of the Messiah had been laid in earthly power; but his immediate forerunner was, as such, a *transcendent* prophet, more than an *Old-Testament prophet*; they all *did virtuously*, but John excelled them all; they *saw Christ's day* at a distance, and their vision was yet for a great while to come; but John saw the day dawn, he saw the sun rise, and told the people of the Messiah, as one that stood among them. They spake of Christ, but he pointed to him; they said, *A virgin shall conceive*: he said, *Behold the Lamb of God!*

(2.) He was the same that was predicted to be Christ's forerunner (v. 10); *This is he of whom it is written*. He was prophesied of by the other prophets, and therefore was greater than they. Malachi prophesied concerning John, *Behold, I send my messenger before thy face*. Herein some of Christ's honour was put upon him, that the *Old-Testament* prophets spake and wrote of him; and this honour have all the saints, that their *names are written in the Lamb's book of life*. It was great preferment to John above all the prophets, that he was Christ's harbinger. He was a *messenger* sent on a great errand; a messenger, *one among a thousand*, deriving his honour from his whose messenger he was: he is *my messenger sent of God*. His business was to *prepare Christ's way*, to dispose people to receive the Saviour, by discovering to them their sin and misery, and their need of a Saviour. This he had said of himself (~~412~~ John 1:23) and now Christ said it of him; intending hereby not only to put an honour upon John's ministry, but to revive people's regard to it, as making way for the Messiah. Note, Much of the beauty of God's dispensations lies in their mutual connection and coherence, and the reference they have one to another. That which advanced John above the *Old-Testament* prophets was, that he went immediately before Christ. Note, The nearer any are to Christ, the more truly honourable they are.

(3.) There was not a greater born of women than John the Baptist, v. 11. Christ knew how to value persons according to the degrees of their worth, and he prefers John before all that went before him, before all that were *born of women* by ordinary generation. Of all that God had raised up and called to any service in his church, John is the most eminent, even beyond Moses himself; for he began to preach the gospel doctrine of remission of sins to those who are truly penitent; and he had more signal revelations from heaven than any of them had; for he *saw heaven opened*, and the *Holy Ghost descend*. He also had great success in his ministry; almost the whole nation flocked to him: none rose on so great a design, or came on so noble an errand, as John did, or had such claims to a welcome reception. Many had been born of women that made a great figure in the world, but Christ prefers John before them. Note, Greatness is not to be measured by appearances and outward splendour, but they are the greatest men who are the greatest saints, and the greatest blessings, who are, as John was, *great in the sight of the Lord*, ^{<4115>}Luke 1:15.

Yet this high encomium of John has a surprising limitation, *notwithstanding, he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he*.

[1.] In the kingdom of *glory*. John was a *great* and *good* man, but he was yet in a state of infirmity and imperfection, and therefore came short of glorified saints, and the *spirits of just men made perfect*. Note, First, There are degrees of glory in heaven, some that are less than others there; though every vessel is alike full, all are not alike large and capacious. Secondly, The least saint in heaven is *greater*, and knows more, and loves more, and does more in praising God, and receives more from him, than the greatest in this world. The saints on earth are excellent ones (^{<4163>}Psalm 16:3), but those in heaven are much more excellent; the best in this world are *lower than the angels* (^{<4165>}Psalm 8:5), the least there are *equal with the angels*, which should make us long for that blessed state, where the *weak shall be as David*, ^{<4128>}Zechariah 12:8.

[2.] By the *kingdom of heaven* here, is rather to be understood the *kingdom of grace*, the gospel dispensation in the perfection of its power and purity; and *ho mikroteros* — *he that is less* in that is *greater than John*. Some understand it of Christ himself, who was younger than John, and, in the opinion of some, less than John, who always spoke diminishingly of himself; *I am a worm, and no man*, yet greater than John; so it agrees with

what John the Baptist said (⁴¹⁵John 1:15), *He that cometh after me is preferred before me*. But it is rather to be understood of the apostles and ministers of the *New Testament*, the evangelical prophets; and the comparison between them and John is not with respect to their personal sanctity, but to their office; John preached Christ coming, but they preached Christ not only come, but *crucified* and *glorified*. John came to the dawning of the gospel-day, and therein excelled the foregoing prophets, but he was taken off before the noon of that day, before the rending of the veil, before Christ's death and resurrection, and the pouring out of the Spirit; so that the least of the apostles and evangelists, having greater discoveries made to them, and being employed in a greater embassy, is *greater than John*. John did no miracles; the apostles wrought many. The ground of this preference is laid in the preference of the *New-Testament* dispensation to that of the *Old Testament*. Ministers of the *New Testament* therefore excel, because their ministration does so, ⁴¹⁶2 Corinthians 3:6, etc. John was a *maximum quod sic* — *the greatest of his order*; he went to the utmost that the dispensation he was under would allow; but *minimum maximi est majus maximo minimi* — *the least of the highest order is superior to the first of the lowest*; a dwarf upon a mountain sees further than a giant in the valley. Note, All the true greatness of men is derived from, and denominated by, the gracious manifestation of Christ to them. The best men are no better than he is pleased to make them. What reason have we to be thankful that our lot is cast in the days of the *kingdom of heaven*, under such advantages of light and love! And the greater the advantages, the greater will the account be, if we *receive the grace of God in vain*.

(4.) The great commendation of John the Baptist was, that God owned his ministry, and made it wonderfully successful for the breaking of the ice, and the preparing of people for the *kingdom of heaven*. *From the days of the first appearing of John the Baptist*, until now (which was not much above two years), a great deal of good was done; so quick was the motion when it came near to Christ the Centre; *The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence* — *biazetai* — *vim patitur*, like the violence of an army taking a city by storm, or of a crowd bursting into a house, so the *violent take it by force*. The meaning of this we have in the parallel place, ⁴¹⁶Luke 16:16. Since that time *the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it*. Multitudes are wrought upon by the ministry of John, and become his disciples. And it is

[1.] An *improbable* multitude. Those strove for a place in this kingdom, that one would think had no right nor title to it, and so seemed to be intruders, and to make a *tortuous* entry, as our law calls it, a wrongful and forcible one. When the *children of the kingdom* are excluded out of it, and many come into it *from the east and the west*, then it *suffers violence*. Compare this with ^{<103>}Matthew 21:31, 32. The publicans and harlots believed John, whom the scribes and Pharisees rejected, and so went into the kingdom of God before them, *took it over their heads*, while they trifled. Note, It is no breach of good manners to go to heaven before our betters: and it is a great commendation of the gospel from the days of its infancy, that it has brought many to holiness that were very unlikely.

[2.] An *importunate* multitude. This violence denotes a strength, and vigour, and earnestness of desire and endeavour, in those who followed John's ministry, else they would not have come so far to attend upon it. It shows us also, what fervency and zeal are required of all those who design to make heaven of their religion. Note, They who would *enter into the kingdom of heaven* must *strive to enter*; that kingdom suffers a holy violence; self must be denied, the bent and bias, the frame and temper, of the mind must be altered; there are hard sufferings to be undergone, a force to be put upon the corrupt nature; we must run, and wrestle, and fight, and be *in an agony*, and all little enough to win such a prize, and to get over such opposition from without and from within. *The violent take it by force*. They who will have an interest in the great salvation are carried out towards it with a strong desire, will have it *upon any terms*, and not think them hard, nor quit their hold without a blessing, ^{<102>}Genesis 32:26. They who will make their calling and election sure must give diligence. The kingdom of heaven was never intended to indulge the ease of triflers, but to be the rest of them that labour. It is a blessed sight; Oh that we could see a greater number, not with an *angry* contention thrusting others out of the kingdom of heaven, but with a *holy* contention thrusting themselves into it!

(5.) The ministry of John was the *beginning of the gospel*, as it is reckoned, ^{<101>}Mark 1:1; ^{<102>}Acts 1:22. This is shown here in two things:

[1.] In John the Old Testament dispensation began to die, v. 13. So long that ministration continued in full force and virtue, but then it began to decline. Though the obligation of the law of Moses was not removed till Christ's death, yet the discoveries of the Old Testament began to be

superseded by the more clear manifestation of the *kingdom of heaven as at hand*. Because the *light of the gospel* (as that of nature) was to precede and make way for its *law*, therefore the prophecies of the Old Testament came to an end (*finis perficiens*, not *interficiens* — *an end of completion, not of duration*), before the precepts of it; so that when Christ says, *all the prophets and the law prophesied until John*, he shows us, First, How the light of the Old Testament was set up; it was set up in *the law and the prophets*, who spoke, though darkly, of Christ and his kingdom. Observe, The *law* is said to prophesy, as well as the *prophets*, concerning him that was to come. Christ *began at Moses* (^{<4247>}Luke 24:27); Christ was foretold by the dumb signs of the Mosaic work, as well as by the more articulate voices of the prophets, and was exhibited, not only in the verbal predictions, but in the personal and real types. Blessed be God that we have both the New-Testament doctrine to explain the Old-Testament prophecies, and the Old-Testament prophecies to confirm and illustrate the New-Testament doctrine (^{<3011>}Hebrews 1:1); like the two cherubim, they look at each other. The law was given by Moses long ago, and there had been no prophets for three hundred years before John, and yet they are both said to *prophecy until John*, because the law was still observed, and Moses and the prophets still read. Note, The scripture is teaching to this day, though the penmen of it are gone. Moses and the prophets are dead; the apostles and evangelists are dead (^{<3015>}Zechariah 1:5), but the *word of the Lord endures for ever* (^{<4015>}1 Peter 1:25); the *scripture is speaking expressly*, though the writers are silent in the dust. Secondly, How this light was *laid aside*: when he says, *they prophesied until John*, he intimates, that their glory was eclipsed by the glory which excelled; their predictions superseded by John's testimony, *Behold the Lamb of God!* Even before the sun rises, the morning light makes candles to shine dim. Their prophecies of a Christ to come became out of date, when John said, *He is come*.

[2.] In him the New-Testament day began to dawn; for (v. 14) *This is Elias, that was for to come*. John was as the loop that coupled the two Testaments; as Noah was *Fibula utriusque mundi* — *the link connecting both worlds*, so was he *utriusque Testamenti* — *the link connecting both Testaments*. The concluding prophecy of the Old Testament was, *Behold, I will send you Elijah*, ^{<3015>}Malachi 4:5, 6. Those words prophesied until John, and then, being turned into a history, they ceased to prophecy. First, Christ speaks of it as a great truth, that John the Baptist is the Elias of the

New Testament; not Elias *in propria persona* — *in his own person*, as the carnal Jews expected; he denied that (~~John~~ John 1:21), but one that should come in the spirit and power of Elias (~~Luke~~ Luke 1:17), like him in temper and conversation, that should press repentance with terrors, and especially as it is in the prophecy, that should *turn the hearts of the fathers to the children*. Secondly, He speaks of it as a truth, which would not be easily apprehended by those whose expectations fastened upon the temporal kingdom of the Messiah, and introductions to it agreeable. Christ suspects the welcome of it, *if ye will receive it*. Not but that it was true, whether they would receive it or not, but he upbraids them with their prejudices, that they were backward to receive the greatest truths that were opposed to their sentiments, though never so favourable to their interests. Or, “If *you will receive him*, or if you will receive the ministry of John as that of the promised Elias, he will be an Elias to you, to turn you and prepare you for the Lord,” Note, Gospel truths are as they are received, a savour of life or death. Christ is a Saviour, and John an Elias, to those who will receive the truth concerning them.

Lastly, Our Lord Jesus closes this discourse with a solemn demand of attention (v. 15): *He that hath ears to hear, let him hear*; which intimates, that those things were dark and hard to be understood, and therefore needed attention, but of great concern and consequence, and therefore well deserved it. “Let all people take notice of this, if John be the Elias prophesied of, then certainly here is a great revolution on foot, the Messiah's kingdom is at the door, and the world will shortly be surprised into a happy change. These are things which require your serious consideration, and therefore you are all concerned to hearken to what I say.” Note, The things of God are of great and common concern: every one that has *ears to hear* any thing, is concerned to hear this. It intimates, that God requires no more from us but the right use and improvement of the faculties he has already given us. He requires those to hear that have ears, those to use their reason that have reason. Therefore people are ignorant, not because they want power, but because they want will; therefore they do not hear, because, like the deaf adder, they *stop their ears*.

CHRIST REPROACHES CHORAZIN, ETC.

Christ was going on in the praise of John the Baptist and his ministry, but here stops on a sudden, and turns that to the reproach of those who enjoyed both that, and the ministry of Christ and his apostles too, in vain. As to that generation, we may observe to whom he *compares them* (v. 16-19), and as to the particular places he instances in, we may observe with whom he *compares them*, v. 20-24.

I. As to that *generation*, the body of the Jewish people at that time. There were many indeed that pressed into the kingdom of heaven; but the generality continued in unbelief and obstinacy. John was a great and good man, but the generation in which his lot was cast was as barren and unprofitable as could be, and unworthy of him. Note, The badness of the places where good ministers live serves for a foil to their beauty. It was Noah's praise that he was *righteous in his generation*. Having commended John, he condemns those who had him among them, and did not profit by his ministry. Note, The more praise-worthy the people are, if they slight him, and so it will be found in the day of account.

This our Lord Jesus here sets forth in a parable, yet speaks as if he were at a loss to find out a similitude proper to represent this, *Whereunto shall I liken this generation?* Note, There is not a greater absurdity than that which they are guilty of who have good preaching among them, and are never the better for it. It is hard to say *what they are like*. The similitude is taken from some common custom among the Jewish children at their play, who, as is usual with children, imitated the fashions of grown people at their marriages and funerals, *rejoicing and lamenting*; but being all a jest, it made no impression; no more did the ministry either of John the Baptist or of Christ upon that generation. He especially reflects on the scribes and Pharisees, who had a proud conceit of themselves; therefore to humble them he compares them to children, and their behaviour to children's play.

The parable will be best explained by opening it and the illustration of it together in these five observations.

Note,

1. The God of heaven uses a variety of proper means and methods for the conversion and salvation of poor souls; he would *have all men to be saved*, and therefore leaves no stone unturned in order to it. The great thing he aims at, is the *melting* of our *wills* into a compliance with the will of God, and in order to this the affecting of us with the discoveries he has made of himself. Having various affections to be wrought upon, he uses various ways of working upon them, which though differing one from another, all tend to the same thing, and God is in them all carrying on the same design. In the parable, this is called his *piping* to us, and his *mourning* to us; he hath *piped to us* in the precious promises of the gospel, proper to work upon hope, and mourned to us in the dreadful threatenings of the law, proper to work upon fear, that he might frighten us out of our sins and allure us to himself. He had *piped to us* in gracious and merciful providences, *mourned to us* in calamitous, afflicting providences, and has set the one over against the other. He has taught his ministers to *change their voice* (^{<400>}Galatians 4:20); sometimes to speak in thunder from *mount Sinai*, sometimes in a still small voice from *mount Sion*.

In the explanation of the parable is set forth the different temper of John's ministry and of Christ's, who were the two great lights of that generation.

(1.) On the one hand, John came *mourning to them, neither eating nor drinking*; not conversing familiarly with people, nor ordinarily eating in company, but alone, in his cell in the wilderness, where *his meat was locusts and wild honey*. Now this, one would think, should work upon them; for such an austere, mortified life as this, was very agreeable to the doctrine he preached: and that minister is most likely to do good, whose conversation is according to his doctrine; and yet the preaching even of such a minister is not always effectual.

(2.) On the other hand, *the Son of man came eating and drinking*, and so he *piped unto them*. Christ conversed familiarly with all sorts of people, not affecting any peculiar strictness or austerity; he was affable and easy of access, not shy of any company, was often at feasts, both with Pharisees and publicans, to try if this would win upon those who were not wrought upon by John's reservedness: those who were not awed by John's frowns, would be allured by Christ's smiles; from whom St. Paul learned to be *come all things to all men*, ^{<402>}1 Corinthians 9:22. Now our Lord Jesus, by his freedom, did not at all condemn John, any more than John did condemn him, though their deportment was so very different. Note,

Though we are never so clear in the goodness of our own practice, yet we must not judge of others by it. There may be a *great diversity of operations*, where *it is the same God that worketh all in all* (^{411b}1 Corinthians 12:6), and this *various manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal*, v. 7. Observe especially, that God's ministers are variously gifted: the ability and genius of some lie one way, of others, another way: some are Boanerges — *sons of thunder*; others, Barnabeses — *sons of consolation*; yet *all these worketh that one and the self-same Spirit* (^{412b}1 Corinthians 12:11), and therefore we ought not to condemn either, but to praise both, and praise God for both, who thus tries various ways of dealing with persons of various tempers, that sinners may be either made pliable or left inexcusable, so that, whatever the issue is, God will be glorified.

Note,

2. The various methods which God takes for the conversion of sinners, are with many fruitless and ineffectual: “*Ye have not danced, ye have not lamented*; you have not been suitably affected either with the one or with the other.” Particular means have, as in medicine, their particular intentions, which must be answered, particular impressions, which must be submitted to, in order to the success of the great and general design; now if people will be neither bound by laws, nor invited by promises, nor frightened by threatenings, will neither be awakened by the *greatest* things, nor allured by the *sweetest* things, nor startled by the most *terrible* things, nor be made sensible by the *plainest* things; if they will hearken to the voice neither of scripture, nor reason, nor experience, nor providence, nor conscience, nor interest, what more can be done? *The bellows are burned, the lead is consumed, the founder melteth in vain; reprobate silver shall men call them*, ^{413b}Jeremiah 6:29. Ministers' labour is bestowed in vain (^{414b}Isaiah 49:4), and, which is a much greater loss, *the grace of God received in vain*, ^{415b}2 Corinthians 6:1. Note, It is some comfort to faithful ministers, when they see little success of their labours, that it is no new thing for the best preachers and the best preaching in the world to come short of the desired end. *Who has believed our report?* If from *the blood of the slain*, from *the fat of the mighty*, the bow of those great commanders, Christ and John, returned so often empty (^{416b}2 Samuel 1:22), no marvel if ours do so, and we prophecy to so little purpose upon dry bones.

Note,

3. That commonly those persons who do not profit by the means of grace, are perverse, and reflect upon the ministers by whom they enjoy those means; and because they do not get good themselves, they do all the hurt they can to others, by raising and propagating prejudices against the word, and the faithful preachers of it. Those who will not comply with God, and walk after him, confront him, and walk contrary to him. So *this generation* did; because they were resolved not to believe Christ and John, and to own them, as they ought to have done, for the best of men, they set themselves to abuse them, and to represent them as the worst.

(1.) As for John the Baptist, they say, *He has a devil*. They imputed his strictness and reservedness to melancholy, and some kind or degree of a possession of Satan. “Why should we heed him? he is a poor hypochondriacal man, full of fancies, and under the power of a crazed imagination.”

(2.) As for Jesus Christ, they imputed his free and obliging conversation to the more vicious habit of luxury and flesh-pleasing: *Behold a gluttonous man and a wine-bibber*. No reflection could be more foul and invidious; it is the charge against the rebellious son (^{<BIB>}Deuteronomy 21:20), *He is a glutton and a drunkard*; yet none could be more false and unjust; for Christ *pleased not himself* (^{<BIB>}Romans 15:3), nor did ever any man live such a life of self-denial, mortification, and contempt of the world, as Christ lived: he that was *undefiled, and separate from sinners*, is here represented as in league with them, and polluted by them. Note, The most unspotted innocency, and the most unparalleled excellency, will not always be a fence *against the reproach of tongues*: nay, a man's best gifts and best actions, which are both well intended and well calculated for edification, may be made the matter of his reproach. The best of our actions may become the worst of our accusations, as David's fasting, ^{<BIB>}Psalms 69:10. It was true in some sense, that Christ was *a Friend to publicans and sinners*, the best Friend they ever had, for he *came into the world to save sinners*, great sinners, even the chief; so he said very feelingly, who had been himself not a *publican and sinner*, but a Pharisee and sinner; but this is, and will be to eternity, Christ's praise, and they forfeited the benefit of it who thus turned it to his reproach.

Note,

4. That the cause of this great unfruitfulness and perverseness of people under the means of grace, is that they are *like children sitting in the*

markets; they are foolish as children, froward as children, mindless and playful as children; would they but *show themselves men* in understanding, there would be some hopes of them. *The market-place they sit in* is to some a place of idleness (^{<410B>}Matthew 20:3); to others a place of worldly business (^{<504B>}James 4:13); to all a place of noise or diversion; so that if you ask the reason why people get so little good by the means of grace, you will find it is because they are slothful and trifling, and do not love to take pains; or because their heads, and hands, and hearts are full of the world, the cares of which *choke the word*, and choke their souls at last (^{<233B>}Ezekiel 33:31; ^{<108B>}Amos 8:5); and they study to divert their own thoughts from every thing that is serious. Thus *in the markets* they are, and there they *sit*; in these things their hearts rest, and by them they resolve to abide.

Note,

5. Though the means of grace be thus slighted and abused by many, by the most, yet there is a remnant that through grace do improve them, and answer the designs of them, to the glory of God, and the good of their own souls. *But wisdom is justified of her children.* Christ is *Wisdom*; in him *are hid treasures of wisdom*; the saints are the *children God has given him*, ^{<82B>}Hebrews 2:13. The gospel is *wisdom*, it is *the wisdom from above*: true believers are begotten again by it, and born from above too; they are wise *children*, wise for themselves, and their true interests; not *like the foolish children that sat in the markets*. These *children of wisdom justify wisdom*; they comply with the designs of Christ's grace, answer the intentions of it, and are suitably affected with, and impressed by, the various methods it takes, and so evidence the wisdom of Christ in taking these methods. This is explained, ^{<409B>}Luke 7:29. *The publicans justified God, being baptized with the baptism of John*, and afterwards embracing the gospel of Christ. Note, The success of the means of grace justifies the wisdom of God in the choice of these means, against those who charge him with folly therein. The cure of every patient, that observes the physician's orders, justifies the wisdom of the physician: and therefore Paul is *not ashamed of the gospel of Christ*, because, whatever it is to others, *to them that believe it is the power of God unto salvation*, ^{<816B>}Romans 1:16. When *the cross of Christ*, which to others is *foolishness and a stumbling-block*, is *to them that are called the wisdom of God and the power of God* (^{<403B>}1 Corinthians 1:23, 24), so that they make the knowledge of that the summit of their ambition (^{<410B>}1 Corinthians 2:2), and the efficacy of that the crown of their glorying

(~~404~~ Galatians 6:14), here is *wisdom justified of her children*. *Wisdom's children* are *wisdom's* witnesses in the world (~~280~~ Isaiah 43:10), and shall be produced as witnesses in that day, when *wisdom*, that is now *justified by the saints*, shall be *glorified in the saints*, and *admired in all them that believe*, ~~500~~ 2 Thessalonians 1:10. If the unbelief of some reproach Christ by giving him the lie, the faith of others shall honour him by setting to its seal that he is true, and that *he also is wise*, ~~405~~ 1 Corinthians 1:25. Whether we do it or not, it will be done; not only God's equity, but his *wisdom*, will be *justified when he speaks, when he judges*.

Well, this is the account Christ gives of that *generation*, and that *generation is not passed away*, but remains in a succession of the like; for as it was then, it has been since and is still; *some believe the things which are spoken, and some believe not*, ~~402~~ Acts 28:24.

II. As to the particular *places* in which Christ was most conversant. What he said in general of that *generation*, he applied in particular to those *places*, to affect them. *Then began he to upbraid them*, v. 20. He began to preach to them long before (~~407~~ Matthew 4:17), but he did not *begin to upbraid* till now. Note, Rough and displeasing methods must not be taken, till gentler means have first been used. Christ is not apt *to upbraid*; *he gives liberally, and upbraideth not*, till sinners by their obstinacy extort it from him. *Wisdom* first invites, but when her invitations are slighted, then she *upbraids*, ~~300~~ Proverbs 1:20, 24. Those do not go in Christ's method, who begin with upbraidings. Now observe,

1. The sin charged upon them; not any against the moral law, then an appeal would have lain to the gospel, which would have relieved, but a sin against the gospel, the remedial law, and that is impenitency: this was it he upbraided them with, or reproached them for, as the most shameful, ungrateful thing that could be, that *they repented not*. Note, Wilful impenitency is the great damning sin of multitudes that enjoy the gospel, and which (more than any other) sinners will be upbraided with to eternity. The great doctrine that both John the Baptist, and Christ, and the apostles preached, was repentance; the great thing designed, both in the *piping* and in the *mourning*, was to prevail with people to change their minds and ways, to leave their sins and turn to God; and this they would not be brought to. He does not say, because they *believed* not (for some kind of faith many of them had) that Christ was a *Teacher come from God*; but because *they repented not*: their faith did not prevail to the transforming of

their hearts, and the reforming of their lives. Christ reproved them for their other sins, that he might *lead them to repentance*; but when *they repented not*, He *upbraided them* with that, as their refusal *to be healed*: He *upbraided them* with it, that they might upbraid themselves, and might at length see the folly of it, as that which alone makes the sad case a desperate one, and the wound incurable.

2. The aggravation of the sin; they were *the cities in which most of his mighty works were done*; for thereabouts his principal residence had been for some time. Note, Some places enjoy the means of grace in greater plenty, power, and purity, than other places. God is a free agent, and acts so in all his disposals, both as the God of nature and as the God of grace, common and distinguishing grace. By Christ's *mighty works* they should have been prevailed with, not only to receive his doctrine, but to obey his law; the curing of bodily diseases should have been the healing of their souls, but it had not that effect. Note, The stronger inducements we have to repent, the more heinous is the impenitency and the severer will the reckoning be, for Christ keeps account of the *mighty works done* among us, and of the gracious works done for us too, by which also we should be *led to repentance*, ~~411~~ Romans 2:4.

(1.) Chorazin and Bethsaida are here instanced (v. 21, 22), they have each of them their woe: *Woe unto thee, Chorazin, woe unto thee, Bethsaida*. Christ came *into the world to bless us*; but if that blessing be slighted, he has woes in reserve, and his woes are of all others the most terrible. These two cities were situate upon *the sea of Galilee*, the former on the east side, and the latter on the west, rich and populous places; Bethsaida was lately advanced to a city by Philip the tetrarch; out of it Christ took at least three of his apostles: thus highly were these places favoured! Yet because they *knew not the day of their visitation*, they fell under these woes, which stuck so close to them, that soon after this they decayed, and dwindled into mean, obscure villages. So fatally does sin ruin cities, and so certainly does the word of Christ take place!

Now Chorazin and Bethsaida are here compared with Tyre and Sidon, two maritime cities we read much of in the Old Testament, that had been brought to ruin, but began to flourish again; these cities bordered upon Galilee, but were in a very ill name among the Jews for idolatry and other wickedness. Christ sometimes went *into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon* (~~412~~ Matthew 15:21), but never thither; the Jews would have taken it very

heinously if he had; therefore Christ, to convince and humble them, here shows,

[1.] That Tyre and Sidon would not have been so bad as Chorazin and Bethsaida. If they had had the same word preached, and the same miracles wrought among them, *they would have repented*, and that *long ago*, as Nineveh did, in *sackcloth and ashes*. Christ, who knows the hearts of all, knew that if he had gone and lived among them, and preached among them, he should have done more good there than where he was; yet he continued where he was for some time, to encourage his ministers to do so, though they see not the success they desire. Note, Among the children of disobedience, some are more easily wrought upon than others; and it is a great aggravation of the impenitency of those who plentifully enjoy the means of grace, not only that there are many who sit under the same means that are wrought upon, but that there are many more that would have been wrought upon, if they had enjoyed the same means. See ^{<XIII>}Ezekiel 3:6, 7. Our repentance is slow and delayed, but theirs would have been speedy; they would have repented long ago. Ours has been slight and superficial; theirs would have been deep and serious, in *sackcloth and ashes*. Yet we must observe, with an awful adoration of the divine sovereignty, that the Tyrians and Sidonians will justly perish in their sin, though, if they had had the means of grace, they would have repented; for God is a *debtor to no man*.

[2.] That therefore Tyre and Sidon shall not be so miserable as Chorazin and Bethsaida, but it shall be *more tolerable* for them in the *day of judgment*, v. 22. Note, First, At the *day of judgment* the everlasting state of the children of men will, by an unerring and unalterable doom, be determined; happiness or misery, and the several degrees of each. Therefore it is called the *eternal judgment* (^{<XIII>}Hebrews 6:2), because decisive of the eternal state. Secondly, In that judgment, all the means of grace that were enjoyed in the state of probation will certainly come into the account, and it will be enquired, not only how bad we were, but how much better we might have been, had it not been our own fault, ^{<XIII>}Isaiah 5:3, 4. Thirdly, Though the damnation of all that perish will be intolerable, yet the damnation of those who had the fullest and clearest discoveries made them of the power and grace of Christ, and yet repented not, will be of all others the most intolerable. The gospel light and sound open the faculties, and enlarge the capacities of all that see and hear it, either to receive the riches of *divine grace*, or (if that grace be slighted) to take in

the more plentiful effusions of *divine wrath*. If self-reproach be the torture of hell, it must needs be hell indeed to those who had such a fair opportunity of getting to heaven. *Son, remember that.*

(2.) Capernaum is here condemned with an emphasis (v. 23), “*And thou, Capernaum, hold up thy hand, and hear they doom,*” Capernaum, above all the cities of Israel, was dignified with Christ's most usual residence; it was like Shiloh of old, the place which he chose, to put his name there, and it fared with it as with Shiloh, ^{<2472>}Jeremiah 7:12, 14. Christ's miracles here were *daily bread*, and therefore, as the manna of old, were despised and called light bread. Many a sweet and comfortable lecture of grace Christ had read them to little purpose, and therefore he reads them a dreadful lecture of wrath: those who will not hear the former shall be made to feel the latter.

We have here Capernaum's doom,

[1.] Put absolutely; Thou *which art exalted to heaven shalt be brought down to hell* Note, First, Those who enjoy the gospel in power and purity, are thereby *exalted to heaven*; they have therein a great honour for the present, and a great advantage for eternity; they are lifted up toward *heaven*; but if, notwithstanding, they still *cleave to the earth*, they may thank themselves that they are not lifted up *into heaven*. Secondly, Gospel advantages and advancements abused will sink sinners so much lower into hell. Our external privileges will be so far from saving us, that if our hearts and lives be not agreeable to them, they will but inflame the reckoning: the higher the precipice is, the more fatal is the fall from it: Let us *not therefore be high-minded, but fear*; not slothful, but diligent. See ^{<3016>}Job 20:6, 7.

[2.] We have it here put in comparison with the doom of Sodom — a place more remarkable, both for sin and ruin, than perhaps any other; and yet Christ here tells us,

First, That Capernaum's means would have saved Sodom. If these miracles had been done among the Sodomites, as bad as they were, they would have repented, and *their city would have remained unto this day* a monument of sparing mercy, as now it is of destroying justice, ^{<3117>}Jude 1:7. Note, Upon true repentance through Christ, even the greatest sin shall be pardoned and the greatest ruin prevented, that of Sodom not excepted. Angels were sent to Sodom, and yet it remained not; but if Christ had been

sent thither, it *would have remained*; how well is it for us, then, that the world to come is *put in subjection to Christ, and not to angels!*

^{<4015>}Hebrews 2:5. Lot would not have *seemed as one that mocked*, if he had wrought miracles.

Secondly, That Sodom's ruin will therefore be less at the great day than Capernaum's. Sodom will have many things to answer for, but not the sin of neglecting Christ, as Capernaum will. If the gospel prove *a savour of death*, a killing savour, it is doubly so; it is *of death unto death*, so great a death (^{<4016>}2 Corinthians 2:16); Christ had said the same of all other places that receive not his ministers nor bid his gospel welcome (^{<4015>}Matthew 10:15); *It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom than for that city*. We that have now the written word in our hands, the gospel preached, and the gospel ordinances administered to us, and live under the dispensation of the Spirit, have advantages not inferior to those of Chorazin, and Bethsaida, and Capernaum, and the account in the great day will be accordingly. It has therefore been justly said, that the professors of this age, whether they go to heaven or hell, will be the greatest debtors in either of these places; if to heaven, the greatest debtors to divine mercy for those rich means that brought them thither; if to hell, the greatest debtors to divine justice, for those rich means that would have kept them from thence.

^{<4015>}MATTHEW 11:25-30

CHRIST'S INVITATION TO BURDENED SOULS

In these verses we have Christ looking up to heaven, with thanksgiving to his Father for the sovereignty and security of the covenant of redemption; and looking around him upon this earth, with an offer to all the children of men, to whom these presents shall come, of the privileges and benefits of the covenant of grace.

I. Christ here returns thanks to God for his favour to those *babes* who had the mysteries of the gospel *revealed to them* (v. 25, 26). *Jesus answered and said*. It is called an answer, though no other words are before recorded but his own, because it is so comfortable a reply to the melancholy considerations preceding, and is aptly set in the balance against them. The sin and ruin of those woeful cities, no doubt, was a grief to the Lord Jesus;

he could not but *weep over* them, as he did *over Jerusalem* (²⁰⁴Luke 19:41); with this thought therefore he refreshes himself; and to make it the more refreshing, he puts it into a thanksgiving; that for all this, *there is a remnant*, though but *babes*, to whom the things of the gospel are *revealed*. *Though Israel be not gathered, yet shall he be glorious*. Note, We may take great encouragement in looking upward to God, when round about us we see nothing but what is discouraging. It is sad to see how regardless most men are of their own happiness, but it is comfortable to think that the wise and faithful God will, however, effectually secure the interests of his own glory. *Jesus answered and said, I thank thee*. Note, Thanksgiving is a proper answer to dark and disquieting thoughts, and may be an effectual means to silence them. Songs of praise are sovereign cordials to drooping souls, and will help to cure melancholy. When we have no other answer ready to the suggestions of grief and fear, we may have recourse to this, *I thank thee, O Father*; let us bless God that it is not worse with us than it is.

Now in this thanksgiving of Christ, we may observe,

1. The titles he gives to God; *O Father, Lord of heaven and earth*. Note,

(1.) In all our approaches to God, by praise as well as by prayer, it is good for us to eye him as a Father, and to fasten on that relation, not only when we ask for the mercies we want, but when we give thanks for the mercies we have received. Mercies are then doubly sweet, and powerful to enlarge the heart in praise, when they are received as tokens of a Father's love, and gifts of a Father's hand; *Giving thanks to the Father*, ²⁰⁵Colossians 1:12. It becomes children to be grateful, and to say, *Thank you, father*, as readily as, *Pray, father*.

(2.) When we come to God as a Father, we must withal remember, that he is *Lord of heaven and earth*; which obliges us to come to him with reverence, as to the sovereign Lord of all, and yet with confidence, as one able to do for us whatever we need or can desire; to defend us from all evil and to supply us with all good. Christ, in Melchizedec, had long since *blessed God* as the Possessor, or *Lord of heaven and earth*; and in all our thanksgivings for mercies in the stream, we must give him the glory of the all-sufficiency that is in the fountain.

2. The thing he gives thanks for: *Because thou has hid these things from the wise and prudent, and yet revealed them to babes*. *These things*; he

does not say what things, but means the great things of the gospel, *the things that belong to our peace*, ^{<494>}Luke 19:42. he spoke thus emphatically of them, *these things*, because they were things that filled him, and should fill us: all other things are as nothing to *these things*.

Note

(1.) The great things of the everlasting gospel have been and are hid from many that were *wise and prudent*, that were eminent for learning and worldly policy; some of the greatest scholars and the greatest statesmen have been the greatest strangers to gospel mysteries. *The world by wisdom knew not God*, ^{<412>}1 Corinthians 1:21. Nay, there is an opposition given to the gospel, by a *science falsely so called*, ^{<547>}1 Timothy 6:20. Those who are most expert in things sensible and secular, are commonly least experienced in spiritual things. Men may dive deeply into the mysteries of nature and into the mysteries of state, and yet be ignorant of, and mistake about, the mysteries of *the kingdom of heaven*, for want of an experience of the power of them.

(2.) While *the wise and prudent men* of the world are in the dark about gospel mysteries, even the *babes in Christ* have the sanctifying saving knowledge of them: *Thou hast revealed them unto babes*. Such the disciples of Christ were; men of mean birth and education; no scholars, no artists, no politicians, unlearned and ignorant men, ^{<404>}Acts 4:13. Thus are the secrets of wisdom, which are double to that which is (^{<816>}Job 11:6), made known *to babes and sucklings*, that *out of their mouth strength might be ordained* (^{<492>}Psalms 8:2), and God's *praise thereby perfected*. The learned men of the world were not made choice of to be the preachers of the gospel, but *the foolish things of the world* (^{<416>}1 Corinthians 2:6, 8, 10).

(3.) This difference between *the prudent* and the *babes* is of God's own making.

[1.] It is he that has *hid these things from the wise and prudent*; he gave them parts, and learning, and much of human understanding above others, and they were proud of that, and rested in it, and looked no further; and therefore God justly denies them the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, and then, though they hear the sound of the gospel tidings, they are to them as a *strange thing*. God is not the Author of their ignorance and error, but he leaves them to themselves, and their sin becomes their punishment, and the Lord is righteous in it. See ^{<429>}John 12:39, 40; ^{<511>}Romans 11:7, 8;

^{<485>}Acts 28:26, 27. Had they honoured God with the wisdom and prudence they had, he would have given them the knowledge of these better things; but because they served their lusts with them, he has *hid their hearts from this understanding*.

[2.] It is he that has *revealed them unto babes*. Things revealed belong to our children (^{<629>}Deuteronomy 29:29), and to them he *gives an understanding* to receive these things, and the impressions of them. Thus *he resists the proud, and gives grace to the humble*, ^{<506>}James 4:6.

(4.) This dispensation must be resolved into the divine sovereignty. Christ himself referred it to that; *Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight*. Christ here subscribes to the will of his Father in this matter; *Even so*. Let God take what ways he pleases to glorify himself, and make us of what instruments he pleases for the carrying on of his own work; his grace is his own, and he may give or withhold it as he pleases. We can give no reason why Peter, a fisherman, should be made an apostle, and not Nicodemus, a Pharisee, and a ruler of the Jews, though he also believed in Christ; but *so it seemed good in God's sight*. Christ said this in the hearing of his disciples, to show them that it was not for any merit of their own that they were thus dignified and distinguished, but purely from God's good pleasure; he made them to differ.

(5.) This way of dispensing divine grace is to be acknowledged by us, as it was by our Lord Jesus, with all thankfulness. We must thank God,

[1.] That *these things* are *revealed*; the mystery hid from ages and generations is manifested; that they are *revealed*, not to a few, but to be published to all the world.

[2.] That they are *revealed to babes*; that the meek and humble are beautified with this salvation; and this honour put upon those whom the world pours contempt upon.

[3.] It magnifies the mercy to them, that *these things* are *hid from the wise and prudent*: distinguishing favours are the most obliging. As Job adored *the name of the Lord in taking away* as well as in *giving*, so may we in *hiding these things from the wise and prudent*, as well as in *revealing them unto babes*; not as it is their misery, but as it is a method by which self is abased, proud thoughts brought down, all flesh silenced, and divine power and wisdom made to shine the more bright. See ^{<417>}1 Corinthians 1:27, 31.

II. Christ here makes a gracious offer of the benefits of the gospel to all, and these are the things which are *revealed to babes*, v. 25, etc. Observe here,

1. The solemn preface which ushers in this call or invitation, both to command our attention to it, and to encourage our compliance with it. That we *might have strong consolation*, in flying for refuge to this *hope set before us*, Christ prefixes his authority, produces his credentials; we shall see he is empowered to make this offer.

Two things he here lays before us, v. 27.

(1.) His commission from the Father: *All things are delivered unto me of my Father*. Christ, as God, is equal in power and glory with the Father; but as Mediator he receives his power and glory from the Father; has *all judgment committed to him*. He is authorized to settle a new covenant between God and man, and to offer peace and happiness to the apostate world, upon such terms as he should think fit: he was sanctified and sealed to be the sole Plenipotentiary, to concert and establish this great affair. In order to this, he has *all power both in heaven and in earth*, (^{<4283>}Matthew 28:18); power over all flesh (^{<4317>}John 17:2); authority to execute judgment, ^{<4352>}John 5:22, 27. This encourages us to come to Christ, that he is commissioned to receive us, and to give us what we come for, and has *all things delivered to him* for that purpose, by him who is *Lord of all*. All powers, all treasures are in his hand. Observe, The Father has delivered his all into the hands of the Lord Jesus; let us but deliver our all into his hand and the work is done; God has made him the great Referee, the blessed Daysman, to lay his hand upon us both; that which we have to do is to agree to the reference, to submit to the arbitration of the Lord Jesus, for the taking up of this unhappy controversy, and to enter into bonds to stand to his award.

(2.) His intimacy with the Father: *No man knoweth the Son but the Father, Neither knoweth any man the Father save the Son*. This gives us a further satisfaction, and an abundant one. Ambassadors use to have not only their commissions, which they produce, but their instructions, which they reserve to themselves, to be made use of as there is occasion in their negotiations; our Lord Jesus had both, not only authority, but ability, for his undertaking. In transacting the great business of our redemption, the Father and the Son are the parties principally concerned; *the counsel of*

peace is between them, ^{<3183>}Zechariah 6:13. It must therefore be a great encouragement to us to be assured, that they understood one another very well in this affair; that the Father knew the Son, and the Son knew the Father, and both perfectly (a mutual consciousness we may call it, between the Father and the Son), so that there could be no mistake in the settling of this matter; as often there is among men, to the overthrow of contracts, and the breaking of the measures taken, through their misunderstanding one another. The Son had *lain in the bosom of the Father* from eternity; he was *a secretioribus* — *of the cabinet-council*, John 50:18. He was *by him, as one brought up with him* (^{<3180>}Proverbs 8:30), so that *none knows the Father save the Son*, he adds, *and he to whom the Son will reveal him*.
Note,

[1.] The happiness of men lies in an acquaintance with God; *it is life eternal*, it is the perfection of rational beings.

[2.] Those who would have an acquaintance with God, must apply themselves to Jesus Christ; for the light of the knowledge of the glory of God shines in the face of Christ, ^{<3016>}2 Corinthians 4:6. We are obliged to Christ for all the revelation we have of God the Father's will and love, ever since Adam sinned; there is no comfortable intercourse between a holy God and sinful man, but in and by a Mediator, ^{<3146>}John 14:6.

2. Here is the offer itself that is made to us, and an invitation to accept of it. After so solemn a preface, we may well expect something very great; and it is *a faithful saying*, and well *worthy of all acceptation; words whereby we may be saved*. We are here invited to Christ as our Priest, Prince, and Prophet, to be saved, and, in order to that, to be ruled and taught by him.

(1.) We must come to Jesus Christ as our Rest, and repose ourselves in him (v. 28), *Come unto me all ye that labour*. Observe,

[1.] The character of the persons invited; *all that labour, and are heavy laden*. This is a word in season to him that is weary, ^{<2304>}Isaiah 50:4. Those who complain of the burthen of the ceremonial law, which was an intolerable yoke, and was made much more so by the tradition of the elders (^{<3146>}Luke 11:46), let them come to Christ, and they shall be made easy; he came to free his church from this yoke, to cancel the imposition of those carnal ordinances, and to introduce a purer and more spiritual way of worship; but it is rather to be understood of the burthen of sin, both the

guilt and the power of it. Note, All those, and those only, are invited to rest in Christ, that are sensible of sin as a burthen, and groan under it; that are not only convinced of the evil of sin, of their own sin, but are contrite in soul for it; that are really sick of their sins, weary of the service of the world and of the flesh; that see their state sad and dangerous by reason of sin, and are in pain and fear about it, as Ephraim (^{<2418>}Jeremiah 31:18-20), the prodigal (^{<4257>}Luke 15:17), the publican (^{<4283>}Luke 18:13), Peter's hearers (^{<4427>}Acts 2:37), Paul (^{<4404>}Acts 9:4, 6, 9), the jailor (^{<4462>}Acts 16:29, 30). This is a necessary preparative for pardon and peace. The Comforter must first convince (^{<4308>}John 16:8); I have torn and then will heal.

[2.] The invitation itself: *Come unto me*. That glorious display of Christ's greatness which we had (v. 27), as Lord of all, might frighten us from him, but see here how he holds out *the golden sceptre*, that we may touch the top of it and may live. Note, It is the duty and interest of weary *and heavy laden* sinners to *come to Jesus Christ*. Renouncing all those things which stand in opposition to him, or in competition with him, we must accept of him, as our Physician and Advocate, and give up ourselves to his conduct and government; freely willing to be saved by him, in his own way, and upon his own terms. *Come and cast that burden upon him*, under which thou art *heavy laden*. This is the gospel call, *The Spirit saith, Come; and the bride saith, Come; let him that is athirst come; Whoever will, let him come*.

[3.] The blessing promised to those that do come: *I will give you rest*. Christ is our Noah, whose name signifies *rest*, for *this same shall give us rest*. (^{<1052>}Genesis 5:29; 8:9. Truly *rest is good* (^{<1045>}Genesis 49:15), especially to those *that labour and are heavy laden*, (^{<2152>}Ecclesiastes 5:12. Note, Jesus Christ will give assured rest to those weary souls, that by a lively faith come to him for it; *rest* from the terror of sin, in a well-grounded peace of conscience; *rest* from the power of sin, in a regular order of the soul, and its due government of itself; a *rest* in God, and a complacency of soul, in his love. (^{<1116>}Psalm 11:6, 7. This is that *rest which remains for the people of God* (^{<3409>}Hebrews 4:9), begun in grace, and perfected in glory.

(2.) We must come to Jesus Christ as our Ruler, and submit ourselves to him (v. 29). *Take my yoke upon you*. This must go along with the former, for Christ is exalted to be both a *Prince and a Saviour, a Priest upon his throne*. The *rest* he promises is a release from the drudgery of sin, not

from the service of God, but an obligation to the duty we owe to him. Note, Christ has a *yoke* for our necks, as well as a *crown* for our heads, and this *yoke* he expects we should *take upon* us and draw in. To call those who are weary *and heavy laden*, to *take a yoke upon* them, looks like adding *affliction to the afflicted*; but the pertinency of it lies in the word *my*: “You are under a *yoke* which makes you weary: shake that off and try mine, which will make you easy.” Servants are said to be *under the yoke* (^{506E}1 Timothy 6:1), and subjects, ^{412D}1 Kings 12:10. To take Christ's *yoke upon* us, is to put ourselves into the relation to servants and subjects to him, and then of conduct ourselves accordingly, in a conscientious obedience to all his commands, and a cheerful submission to all his disposals: it is to *obey the gospel of Christ, to yield ourselves to the Lord*: it is Christ's *yoke*; the *yoke* he has appointed; a *yoke* he has himself drawn in before us, for *he learned obedience*, and which he does by his Spirit draw in with us, for *he helpeth our infirmities*, ^{481B}Romans 8:26. A *yoke* speaks some hardship, but if the beast must draw, the *yoke* helps him. Christ's commands are all in our favour: we must take this *yoke upon* us to draw in it. We are yoked to work, and therefore must be diligent; we are yoked to submit, and therefore must be humble and patient: we are yoked together with our fellow-servants, and therefore must keep up the communion of saints: and *the words of the wise are as goads*, to those who are thus yoked.

Now this is the hardest part of our lesson, and therefore it is qualified (v. 30). *My yoke is easy and my burden is light*; you need not be afraid of it.

[1.] The *yoke* of Christ's commands is an *easy yoke*; it is *chrestos*, not only *easy*, but gracious, so the word signifies; it is sweet and pleasant; there is nothing in it to gall the yielding neck, nothing to hurt us, but, on the contrary, must to refresh us. It is a *yoke* that is lined with love. Such is the nature of all Christ's commands, so reasonable in themselves, so profitable to us, and all summed up in one word, and that a sweet word, love. So powerful are the assistances he gives us, so suitable the encouragements, and so strong the consolations, that are to be found in the way of duty, that we may truly say, it is a *yoke* of pleasantness. It is easy to the new nature, very *easy to him that understandeth*, ^{414B}Proverbs 14:6. It may be a little hard at first, but it is easy afterwards; the love of God and the hope of heaven will make it *easy*.

[2.] The *burden* of Christ's cross is a *light burden*, very *light*: afflictions from Christ, which befall us as men; afflictions for Christ, which befall us as Christians; the latter are especially meant. This *burden* in itself is *not joyous, but grievous*; yet as it is Christ's, it is *light*. Paul knew as much of it as any man, and he calls it a *light affliction*, ⁽⁴⁰⁴⁷⁾2 Corinthians 4:17. God's presence (^(384D)Isaiah 43:2), Christ's sympathy (Isaiah 73:9, ⁽²⁰⁸⁵⁾Daniel 3:25), and especially the Spirit's aids and comforts (⁽⁴⁰⁰⁵⁾2 Corinthians 1:5), make suffering for Christ *light* and *easy*. As afflictions abound, and are prolonged, consolations abound, and are prolonged too. Let this therefore reconcile us to the difficulties, and help us over the discouragements, we may meet with, both in doing work and suffering work; though we may lose *for* Christ, we shall not lose *by* him.

(3.) We must come to Jesus Christ as our Teacher, and set ourselves to learn of him, v. 29. Christ has erected a great school, and has invited us to be his scholars. We must enter ourselves, associate with his scholars, and daily attend the instructions he gives by his word and Spirit. We must converse much with what he said, and have it ready to use upon all occasions; we must conform to what he did, and follow his steps, ⁽⁴⁰²¹⁾1 Peter 2:21. Some make the following words, *for I am meek and lowly in heart*, to be the particular lesson we are required to learn from the example of Christ. We must learn of him to be *meek* and *lowly*, and must mortify our pride and passion, which render us so unlike to him. We must so *learn of Christ* as to *learn Christ* (⁽⁴⁰⁰⁾Ephesians 4:20), for he is both Teacher and Lesson, Guide and Way, and All in All.

Two reasons are given why we must *learn of Christ*.

[1.] *I am meek and lowly in heart*, and therefore fit to teach you.

First, He is *meek*, and can have *compassion on the ignorant*, whom others would be in a passion with. Many able teachers are hot and hasty, which is a great discouragement to those who are dull and slow; but Christ knows how to bear with such, and to open their understandings. His carriage towards his twelve disciples was a specimen of this; he was mild and gentle with them, and made the best of them; though they were heedless and forgetful, he was not extreme to mark their follies. Secondly, *He is lowly in heart*. He condescends to teach poor scholars, to teach novices; he chose disciples, not from the court, nor the schools, but from the seaside. He teaches the first principles, such things as are milk for babes; he stoops to the meanest capacities; he taught Ephraim to go, ^(381D)Hosea 11:3. Who

teaches like him? It is an encouragement to us to put ourselves to school to such a Teacher. This humility and meekness, as it qualifies him to be a Teacher, so it will be the best qualification of those who are to be taught by him; *for the meek will he guide in judgment,* ~~xxxv~~ Psalm 25:9.

[2.] *You shall find rest to your souls.* This promise is borrowed from ~~xxxvi~~ Jeremiah 6:16, for Christ delighted to express himself in the language of the prophets, to show the harmony between the two Testaments. Note, First, Rest for the soul is the most desirable rest; to have the soul to *dwell at ease*. Secondly, The only way, and a sure way to find *rest for our souls* is, to sit at Christ's feet and hear his word. The way of duty is the way of rest. The *understanding* finds *rest* in the *knowledge of God and Jesus Christ*, and is there abundantly satisfied, finding *that wisdom in the gospel* which has been sought for in vain throughout the whole creation, ~~xxxvii~~ Job 28:12. The truths Christ teaches are such as we may venture our souls upon. The affections find rest in the love of God and Jesus Christ, and meet with that in them which gives them an abundant satisfaction; quietness and assurance for ever. And those satisfactions will be perfected and perpetuated in heaven, where we shall see and enjoy God immediately, shall see him as he is, and enjoy him as he is ours. This rest is to be had with Christ for all those who learn of him.

Well, this is the sum and substance of the gospel call and offer: we are here told, in a few words, what the Lord Jesus requires of us, and it agrees with what God said of him once and again. *This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, hear ye him.*