

THE BLESSEDNESS OF THOSE WHO ARE PER-  
SECUTED FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS SAKE;

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A DISCOURSE, 9

DELIVERED AT THE

*First Meeting of the Congregation at Kingwood,*

SUBSEQUENT TO THE RIOTS:

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IN THE

Union Chapel, in Livery-street,  
BIRMINGHAM,

The Sunday before, — and in the  
CHAPEL, IN HIGH-STREET, WARWICK,  
The Sunday after, the Assizes at that Place.

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*By the Rev. J. Edwards.*

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MDCXCII.

## THE PREFACE.

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**T**HIS production is presented to the Public not as an exhibition of genius, or as containing any thing perfectly new. Sentiments will however be found in it suited to the times, and to the situation and peculiar circumstances of the Congregations for whose use it was designed. One of these Congregations, I mean that of Kingswood, to whom it was first delivered, had never before that period assembled together from the time of the demolition of their place of worship by the rioters of the 14th of July last. It was delivered to the Societies of the Old and New Meetings, who, though not exactly coinciding in religious opinion, have, by agreeing to differ in private and less general points of christian doctrine, and to meet and mingle with each other in the public worship of Him who is equally the God of Mohammedans, Jews, and Christians; afforded the world a specimen of the possibility of uniting christian charity with the full exercise of private judgment.

If any praise be due to the author of this Discourse, it is derived not from any claim it has to  
A 2 originality,

originality, but to the seasonable application of the principles it inculcates. And though they may be found in a thousand different authors, a thousand times better expressed, yet the occasion of their being repeated, was quite novel in this country. Till now we all thought that persecution had grown obsolete with the laws which countenanced it.

It is hoped that what is here given, will be found useful for every class of men, from the throne to the cottage. And though the peculiar dogmas of no sect are inculcated, it is presumed the genuine disciple of Jesus, whether he be of Calvin, of Luther, of Arius, or Socinus, will find the true principles of faith unfeigned, and of the purest christianity recommended and enforced. If all be true, useful, and important, and what ought to be again and again impressed upon the mind of every believer in the gospel, the author is little solicitous about any thing new and individual.

He is much more solicitous to have the public consider this as a specimen of what is delivered from the pulpit of the UNION CHAPEL, than about any thing else. That the societies which assemble in that place, are injured men, I think no impartial person of any description, will dispute. They have all the rights of injured men about them. Yet this is the spirit, and if possible, a spirit more mild than it is in the nature of this author to feel or to describe, it has been the uniform endeavour of  
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all the stated ministers of this place, to recommend and enforce with all the energy they were masters of. In proof of this, I appeal not merely to this Discourse, but to one delivered at Carr's-lane Meeting-house, August 7, 1791, by the Rev. R. Scholefield, and to another, not indeed printed, but which must be still fresh in the remembrance of all who heard it, and of which the author was himself a hearer, by the Rev. J. Coates, on the *subject of cultivating peace with all men.*

The author of this Discourse as he was not one of the sufferers in the late riots, must be a stranger to their feelings. What he has advanced pointing in any way to those fatal tumults, is the effect of sympathy not of experience. He stands perfectly amazed at the wickedness of mankind;—yet on the present occasion, knows not whether he is to laugh at their folly, or lament their depravity. In one respect, however, though it will be considered as a remote one, I am a sufferer; to what amount I know not, and therefore cannot bring an action for damages. Yet, though my property has not been destroyed, my person insulted, nor my reputation attacked by those who perpetrated, or by those who at this instant are giving their sanction to crimes which should not be named among the ministers and disciples of Christ, yet I have lost those assistances, and that advantage which I should have derived from personal intercourse with a man who, in the confession even of enmity itself, must rank among the greatest and most perfect of  
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our race. Whom not content with having driven from the habitation of his choice—and that was cruel enough, for the frost of age was gathering upon his head—Whom not content with having hunted forth, at the peril of his life, into the wide wilderness of a rude world, bereft of the accumulated labours of his youth, the fruits of which cannot be purchased with the coffers of the treasury; is now held up as the origin and fountain of all the corruption, disorders, and misfortunes of Ninety-one. To have acted cruelly was enough; to defend such conduct at the expence of honour and even of truth itself, is a pitch of unblushing profligacy which would not be supposed possible to be found in any other regions, than those of blackness and darkness.

In a preface to the first of the above-mentioned Discourses, a preface which does immortal honour to the composer; there is the following passage:—

“ Truly concerned for the honour of a church,  
 “ with whose officiating clergy he held the most in-  
 “ timate and friendly intercourse, for the first seven-  
 “ teen years of his own public ministry; a church,  
 “ from particular members of which he has received  
 “ many proofs and instances of marked and dis-  
 “ tinguished respect and kindness; the author has  
 “ waited, with a friendly impatience, to see a public  
 “ meeting of its clergy and laity called, and as public  
 “ a disavowal and abhorrence of the late riotous  
 “ measures (ostensibly exerted in their support) ex-  
 “ pressed.

“pressed. Hitherto he has waited in vain;—but  
 “was he allowed to argue the case with them, and  
 “was even a member of their own body, he should  
 “say, that till this is done, in the most open and  
 “unreserved manner, a lasting stain will remain upon  
 “the body at large. Every thinking mind will soon  
 “discover, that if the church stands in need of such  
 “defenders—it is weak; if the church approves,  
 “or even does not, in the most explicit terms, con-  
 “demn them---it is *wicked*.

“Had any of the churches of the establishment  
 “been burnt by accident, or through age required  
 “being pulled down and rebuilt, the Dissenters (if  
 “necessary) would, even before this time, have fur-  
 “nished them with every accommodation in their  
 “power\*. And shall not one expression of con-  
 “dolance and sympathy come from a body, under  
 “whose apparent auspices, at least, the whole of  
 “this *horrid business* has been transacted.

“He would farther venture to forewarn them,  
 “without any gift of prophecy, that except a mea-  
 “sure of this kind is adopted, many of the wiser,  
 “more-moderate, and thinking part of the church,  
 “will be inclined for ever to leave its communion.  
 “Persecution, in the darkest ages of the church,  
 “wore always an unfriendly aspect to its interest;

“\* At Banbury, while the Church is rebuilding, the Dissen-  
 ters have offered the use of their Meeting to the members of the  
 Establishment; it has been accepted, and the author is informed,  
 they attend public service in it at this day.”

“but



“but the very idea of it (with the light which has now diffused itself through Europe) will strike many individuals with horror.”

Instead of attending to these excellent hints, and following the manly advice here given, we have seen a pamphlet, *“speaking the SENTIMENTS, and written with the GENERAL CONCURRENCE and APPROBATION of the CLERGY of BIRMINGHAM,”* in which one fact has already been proved to be without foundation, to the satisfaction of the person who permitted his name to appear in the title-page. The apology he has made, instead of giving us a better opinion of the remaining facts, is such as to render our suspicions more broad and general. We are ready to call them all *pretended* facts, and have little doubt of finding them to be so upon farther examination.

If any thing said by the author here, or in any other place, be deemed rash, he trusts it will be found to have flowed from the fervour of indignant honesty, or the exultations of benevolence. He flatters himself he is not infected with the cant of sects, or circumscribed in his principles by local notions; at least it has been his wish that every thing advanced in the following discourse should be general as the passions and the feelings of his race.

## *A Discourse, &c.*

MATTHEW V. 22.

BLESSED ARE THEY WHICH ARE PERSECUTED  
FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS SAKE, FOR THEIRS IS  
THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN.

**I**N circumstances of tribulation and distress, it becomes us with more than ordinary care to fortify our minds, and preserve them from dejection. It certainly is the part of a christian, like the first followers of his Master, to glory in suffering—to rejoice himself in tribulation—to exhort others to rejoice,—to remain firm and unmoved amidst every face of terror. For he of all men has not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but the spirit of love, of power, and of a sound mind. From the constant tenor of his

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Master's



Master's instructions, from the manner in which a world he came to rescue and to bless, rewarded his goodness, he is well aware that it is no strange thing that a man in this life should suffer for doing no wrong, or even for doing what is rightest and best. In such a case he is fully persuaded, that it is his privilege as well as duty to rejoice, inasmuch as he is then a partaker of Christ's sufferings, that when the glory of his heavenly leader is revealed, he may also be glad with exceeding joy. That if he be reproached for the name of Christ he is happy, for that then the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon him; for though on the part of his adversaries God may be evil spoken of, yet on his part he is glorified.

With peculiar propriety may the attention of many to whom I now address myself be called to the words just read. It is a fact that you have suffered both in your minds and in your estates. And for what? Your most implacable adversaries cannot prove that it was for the injurious treatment of your neighbours,

neighbours, or for any gross immorality in your conduct as individuals. The tongue of scandal has not gall enough to put out the lustre of your good name. The utmost efforts of defamation cannot avail to erase from the breasts of thousands you have served, the remembrance of your uprightnes, your candour, and your generosity. Every candid person, whatever description of political or theological sentiment he may have adopted, will readily confess that you have uniformly maintained the character of kind neighbours, good citizens, and faithful subjects. But I do not appear in this place on the one hand to read the panegyric of your virtues, nor on the other will I permit myself to launch out into any accusations against those who were the authors of your sufferings. I have higher ideas of the dignity of the office I sustain, than will permit me to descend so low as to return railing for railing, and opprobrium for injury. In this I will restrain myself, nor for a moment indulge in that invective to which my natural temper strongly prompts me. I hear the instructive voice of our divine Preceptor, sounding in lofty

accents those sublime commands—“*Love your enemies*”—“*Bless them that curse you*”—“*Do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use, and persecute you.*”

I am about to perform a far superior part to that of inflaming your minds with anger however just—a part which hypocrisy would hardly assume.—I am about to be the instrument of teaching you how to bear and forbear\*.

Permit me, then, on the present occasion, to turn to the passage just read, so full of

\* When preached to the society at Kingswood, the exordium ran thus; “It affords me, fellow christians, a satisfaction peculiarly pleasing and exalted, to have an opportunity given me of addressing you on the present occasion. This is the first time you have assembled together as a society of believers in Christ since the late unhappy and fatal tumults. Although you may not have suffered so deeply with respect to your possessions as some others; yet, no doubt, the alarm you experienced when the place in which you had long assembled was attacked and destroyed by the rude hands of barbarians; joined to the uneasiness of mind you must feel on account of your friends at a neighbouring town, and the consideration of the uncertain end of such disorders, with respect both to yourselves and others, must have made an impression on your minds so deep as cannot soon or easily be effaced.” When delivered in the Union-Chapel the exordium was the same with that which appears in the text.

animation and encouragement to each sufferer in the cause of truth and righteousness——  
*Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

I will not by a long explanation of these words detain you from the more important consideration of their truth. Every one here must know what it is to be blessed or happy; that it means being in a state of security and enjoyment. Every one knows what it is to be persecuted; that it is to be abused, outraged, treated with indignity or violence on account of adhering to the dictates of conscience, especially when they have respect to matters of religion. We know, and have seen, that this is no imaginary thing. In an age more enlightened than any that have preceded it, and in a country which boasts of higher refinement, of degrees of knowledge and of liberty superior to that of any other country existing in this age of superior light; I say we have seen, nay some of us have felt, that persecution is no phantom of the brain. We have experienced that innocence is no  
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protection

protection against injury—that a man for doing what every man ought to do, what every christian is by his principles bound to do, namely, to promote the diffusion of what he believes in his conscience to be moral and religious truth; I again repeat that we know from experience such a man may have his good name slandered, his property destroyed, his house, the sacred asylum of every British subject, invaded, profaned, and desolated, his domestic felicity and mental peace cruelly interrupted, if not for ever destroyed, and his very life brought into imminent danger. For a definition then of this term, I have only to refer you to what you yourselves, have in your own persons experienced.

What our text affirms is, that those who are thus persecuted for righteousness sake are blessed, because theirs is the kingdom of heaven. That is to say, they either possess that conscious superiority of mind which is sufficient to elevate them above every earthly joy, and every earthly sorrow, to fill them with that heavenly peace which passeth all understanding,



standing, and anticipates the bliss of futurity, (for our master's words are *theirs is*, not *theirs shall be*, &c.) or, their virtue is sufficient to give them an indisputable and undoubted title to those immortal rewards, to that everlasting joy of God, which is the portion of all those who are the objects of his divine approbation.

Supposing then, that every one perfectly understands the import of these words, without wasting any of your time in further explaining them, let us immediately proceed to enquire into their truth.

Blessed are they which are persecuted?— (methinks I hear some one say)—why that is impossible! You tell us blessed, means happy; and how can that man be said to be happy whose property is considered as the lawful prey of any son of violence and of plunder that shall please to seize upon or destroy it? How can *he* be happy who is every moment liable to be burnt out of house and home, who knows not whether he shall be able to secure his wife and children from the rapacious invader of



his peace, and who is himself uncertain where he can find safety?

Metinks the objector to this doctrine proceeds and asks—Can a man look on his mansion, the abode of peace, because it was the abode of order and of innocence, can he see it dismantled, ruined, levelled with the ground? Can he behold the spot where once his garden smiled, the orchard, whose trees at once afforded him fruit and shelter, can he contemplate upon the little paradise the labours of his youth had planted, and those of his riper years matured;—behold it deformed or destroyed by the savage inroad of ruffians, and yet be happy? Can he find himself driven and excluded from the place where every rustling breeze bade him welcome;—from the mansion whose very doors as they turned on their hinges hailed his arrival—every room and every corner of which were remembrancers of blessing, which contained the total of his temporal treasures, at least the chief sums in their amount—every thing that gave the liveliest zest, the highest relish to his present existence,—can he behold these dis-  
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figured and demolished, presenting a picture of ruin, a scene of silent horror, and rendered so for no crime of his own, and yet be happy? Can a man, proceeds he, be immured in the dark walls of a prison, be loaded with fetters, plunged into the depth of a gloomy cell; or finally be unjustly arraigned at the partial bar of his enemies, by an iniquitous sentence condemned to suffer, can he be led to torments and to death, and yet account himself blessed? I should conceive, therefore, the doctrine you are endeavouring to establish, quite contrary to truth and reason. For I should esteem him the happy man who is tranquil, easy in his circumstances, secure with respect to his person and property, beloved by his family, and honoured by his neighbours and acquaintance, prosperous in his undertakings, and at peace with all the world. Should you pronounce *such* an one to be blessed, I should perfectly and with ease comprehend your meaning. But the connection between *blessedness* and *persecution*, I confess myself to be destitute of organs to discover. In affirming that it is a very happy thing for men to be grieved and afflicted without any just cause,

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to be loaded with reproach, and driven from their habitations; to have their property destroyed, their peace of mind broken, and their very lives endangered is, to me, language a little paradoxical. It is like telling me, If I wish to know what true enjoyment is, I must seek it by submitting to undergo the tortures of the inquisition,—or if I would sleep with peculiar pleasure, instead of sinking in heaps of down, or reclining on beds of roses, to get myself stretched on the rack, or broken on the wheel. Or by way of heightening my pleasure, of making the happiness more complete by a more general diffusion of it, to contrive that my friends and relations together with myself should fall the the victims of intolerance in a repetition of the massacres of France or of Ireland, the burnings of Smithfield, or the executions at Thorne. In short, to affirm, Blessed are they which are persecuted, appears to me little better than saying, though not exactly in so many words, *Pain is Pleasure, Misery is Happiness, and Death, Life.*

Now though something like this might be supposed the dictate of the moment in the  
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mind of one who had never attended to the subject, a more attentive examination of this doctrine of our Saviour will abundantly satisfy each impartial enquirer, of its truth and reasonableness.

*Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*—Yes, let them be persecuted so as to lose every thing that is accounted valuable in this life, and to the loss even of life itself, and our Master's words will be found literally true in every circumstance and degree.

The doctrine of our text must however be taken up upon principles purely christian; since on any other grounds it might be difficult to establish and support its truth. This is one of the peculiarities of the christian faith. And it is most devoutly to be wished that the tribe of those who are so hot about dogmas and doctrines no where to be discovered in the writings of evangelists and apostles, would with the same degree of warmth take up this, which is really peculiar to christianity. And  
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then by consequence, instead of persecuting others, they would be employed in learning how to endure persecution themselves.

In proving this harsh doctrine, I shall content myself with enlarging a little upon the three following heads of discourse.

I. That nothing either in man or that belongs to man, is valuable any farther, than as it is connected with Virtue; or as our text styles it, Righteousness.

II. That therefore every thing which belongs to man, is to be given up rather than his Virtue. That he ought to part with his very life rather than desert the cause of truth and right;—that by consequence what our Lord here affirms must be literally true. For he who is persecuted for righteousness sake, must be righteous. Hypocrisy would not endure it. He must be righteous in an eminent and distinguishing degree, or he would scarcely be marked out as a victim by the foes of righteousness.

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III. Now granting that we are blessed in proportion to our virtue or righteousness, and that he who is most persecuted for righteousness sake, has made the highest attainments in virtue, it follows that he must be blessed and blest above the lot of those whose virtues, though estimable, are not of that higher order which excite the persecuting spirit. This will strike the mind still more forcibly when we reflect, that Christ who had authority to make declarations respecting that future state which he came to reveal, expressly saith that *theirs is the kingdom of heaven*.

What we first affirm is, that nothing either in Man, or that belongs to Man, is valuable any farther than as it is connected with Virtue or Righteousness.

It will on all hands be allowed that there is nothing valuable to us but only as it is a means either mediately or immediately of making us more happy. We set no store by things which contribute nothing to our enjoyment, which are neither beneficial in their own nature

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ture nor in our esteem. For instance, you do not cherish the weeds which grow on your soil. You do not make hot-beds for nettles and thistles. You do not fill your barns with pebbles, and your granaries with sand. You take no pains to get or to preserve those things which are, which can be of no service to you; which you neither eat, nor wear, nor use. And you value things in exact proportion to the benefit or pleasure which you actually derive, or expect to derive from their possession. You value the grain more than you do the chaff or the straw that is connected with it. You prefer the rich and fertile soil to the barren and unproductive heath. You will not part with the fatted ox so cheaply as the lean calf. And I ask, If you were obliged by the oppression of some powerful and head-strong oppressor to part with a portion of your property in order to preserve the whole, what would you soonest chuse to sacrifice, and what would you longest keep? You would willingly give up your straw and your chaff in order to keep your grain. You would suffer your old and lean, and lame cattle to be taken from you, if that  
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would preserve your young and strong, and well-fed. Provided the estate were your own, you would suffer the buildings on it to be destroyed, rather than that the estate itself should be taken from you. And all your possessions of every kind to be wrested from you and destroyed, if that would preserve your own life, and that of your wife's and children. And why would you do these things; but because in all these cases that which you would chuse to preserve, is most valuable to you; and it is therefore most valuable, because it contributes most to your happiness.

It is clear that in all the instances above-cited, you would act a wise part if you acted in the manner just mentioned.

Now carry this mode of reasoning and acting a little farther, and suppose yourselves called upon to sacrifice your principles of virtue and religion, or give up your earthly possessions—to act basely and wickedly or lose your lives—what would you do? If you acted agreeably to reason and conscience, which measure would you adopt? Why you would  
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give up your goods, your friends, your wives, your children, aye, and your own *lives* too.— For I presume if, from principle you could give up the former, you could find no difficulty in doing the latter. And why would you do this? but because none of these things, neither our land, your money, your friends, your wives, your children, nor even your life itself would be of any value to you, if you gave up your integrity, if you renounced your virtue, if you lost all regard to righteousness?

For let us but consider a little what virtue or righteousness is, and we shall quickly discern the wisdom of such conduct. It is the highest exercise and improvement of reason. The integrity, the harmony, and just balance of the affections. The health, strength, and beauty of the mind. It is the only secure possession of man. It bids defiance to ruin and to death. The sweeping whirlwind, the outrageous storm, pale famine, wasting pestilence, and all the thousands ills to which weeping humanity is liable, cannot deprive us of this eternal possession. It is a precious jewel which cannot be destroyed, or even injured,

injured by the total destruction of the casket which contains it.

Whoever then parts with this, parts with every thing that is peaceful and happy. He parts with that, the place of which nothing else can supply. He parts with that which is of all other things most valuable; and without which no other thing is of intrinsic worth, however costly.

Besides, every christian will allow there is no secure or permanent happiness in any thing but in the favour of that eternal God, who is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever, without variableness or shadow of turning. And every christian must know that only by the practice of righteousness is the favour of the Almighty to be secured.

In his perfections alone can we find a sure refuge and resting place. Every thing else which we possess, or can possibly obtain, is vain and fluctuating, and unsatisfactory. Riches make to themselves wings and flee away.

Honour and applause are equally uncertain, empty as a puff of wind, as easily dissipated as the light clouds of morning. Power, attended at the best with anxiety and trouble, can afford no solid pleasure unless it be virtuously exercised, and then not invariably. It is kept at the expence of much exposure to envy, and hatred, and revenge, is a grand source of temptation and corruption, and by a sudden reverse of fortune, is easily taken from us. Sensual pleasure, in its best form, is momentary, if indulged into excess, never fails to induce disease and infamy.

The impotency of the world considered as an auxiliary has been too often discovered, to need at this time, any formal demonstration. We may with greater certainty expect it to be our foe, than to be assisted, especially in an hour of extremity, by the access of its support. Indeed, we can put no trust in princes, nor in any child of man; because, whether friend, brother, wife, or parent, there is no help in them; or if there be, that help is vain. But, unsupported by any human power, he  
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that doeth the will of God, shall abide for ever,—shall secure the unspeakable blessings of immortality. And compared with this, every other acquisition must appear infinitely little, must dwindle into nothing—into less than nothing. Righteousness then, which in fact, consists in the performance of the will of God, must be esteemed the most valuable of all the possessions of man.

II. Our second position which immediately follows from our first, was, That every thing which belongs to man, to his very life, is to be hazarded and given up, rather than he should desert the cause of truth and right.

This is a sentiment so clearly founded in reason, that unless my memory fails me, it was adopted by the wise and virtuous among the heathens. But viewed in the light of christianity, nothing can be more clear.

The gospel of Christ hath brought life and immortality to light. It proclaims a day of future retribution, in which God will judge



the secrets of all hearts by the man whom he hath appointed, that every one shall then receive according to the deeds done in the body, whether they have been good, or whether they have been evil. That the wicked shall, without respect of person, be punished; and the righteous only rewarded.

Now, my friends, I address myself to you, as to christians, who ought always to view things in the light which christianity affords. I ask then, If you only followed the dictates of a rational self-interest; which is to be preferred, mortality, or immortality—death, or life—misery or happiness? Which is most to be esteemed, Corruption, or incorruption—the company of the foolish and the wicked, or that of the wise and the just—everlasting shame and contempt, or that crown of glory which shall never fade away. If you prefer the latter to the former, I ask again, How are they to be secured? What qualification must he possess who would obtain them? Certainly, Righteousness. Without *holiness*, which is the same thing, *no man* shall see the Lord. None  
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of the practisers of fraud, cruelty, and revenge, —none of the abettors of unrighteousness, if they die impenitent, shall be admitted citizens of the New Jerusalem, wherein dwelleth righteousness, and into which any thing that defileth shall in no wise enter. If then, righteousness will make us happy for ever, and only righteousness, is it not plain, that we had better forfeit every thing sooner than that?

For is misery (I would make this quite satisfactory, if I could, to the meanest understanding) is misery, in point of value, to be compared with happiness—is death to be compared with life—is the favour of man to be compared with the favour of God—is time, a short, quick fleeting moment of time, to be compared with the countless years of the endless ages of eternity? Is darkness to be compared with light—pain and anguish with ease and enjoyment—weeping and wailing, and gnashing of teeth in the company of fiends and fiend-like men, to the participation of those exquisite delights which flow from the fountain of bliss, in an unceasing and perpetually swelling  
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flood,

flood, and that in the happy company of angels and just men made perfect, with Christ, the mediator of the new covenant, and the general assembly of the church of the first-born, triumphant in heaven, full of knowledge, benevolence, purity and integrity; there to dwell for ever and ever. If any one of these things will bear a comparison in point of value with the other, then is not righteousness that most excellent and precious possession we just now proved it to be. In that case, sacrifice your conscience to quietness, your religious principles to the opinions of the world. Then gratify your lusts at the expence of your virtue. Then be more afraid of what *man* can do unto you, than of the just vengeance of Almighty God. Then keep your lands, and your possessions, and your riches, and your fame, and give up your God, your Saviour, and your soul. Shun the generous conduct of prophets, apostles, confessors and martyrs—and be ashamed of Jesus Christ and of his gospel, and be afraid of a little persecution. But though I thus speak, I will not believe you guilty of such, not merely *unchristian* but *unmanly*

*manly* conduct. I am very sure you have not so learned Christ, as not to think that this world and this life, and every thing they can bestow, are unworthy of a thought when they come in competition with that eternal weight of glory, which will be the inheritance of each genuine disciple of his, in those mansions he is gone to prepare. And believing this, you are convinced that every thing is, without the smallest demur, to be hazarded—to be cheerfully given up rather than part with our integrity, or desert the cause of truth. Since if we depart from truth and right, we exclude ourselves from the participation of that life and immortality which Christ will never bestow upon those who relinquish his cause.

III. Our third position follows directly from the second, namely, that the words of our Master must be true; and he must be happy, or blessed, who is persecuted for righteousness sake.

Not however that we should consider it as a pleasant and agreeable thing to be  
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persecuted;

persecuted; for then we should provoke persecution, which by another command, we are obliged to take all proper means to avoid.

No; the blessedness of those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, consists in their possessing a degree of virtue so eminent as to excite persecution, and by doing a more substantial piece of service to the cause of truth and religion, in the chearful endurance of that persecution which they suffer, purely from their attachment to righteousness, and which by relaxing from the strictness of their integrity, they might have avoided.

We have fully demonstrated that righteousness is incomparably the most valuable of all human possessions. Nothing can be plainer, than that he who is persecuted for righteousness sake, must be in possession of righteousness. It is not in the nature of a hypocrite to endure persecution. It is the highest and most sublime kind of virtue that provokes persecution. Of this no laboured proof is necessary. It is what every history will tell us.

us. It is what any attentive observer of what daily passes before his eyes, must have often witnessed. Most certainly you are not now to be told of this, as though it were a strange and novel occurrence. In this case there may be a defect in judgment; but it appears to me, that those who are persecuted on account of their virtue, and at the same time chearfully endure that persecution, are in the possession of the highest kind of virtue; because it is plainly disinterested. For there is good reason for thinking that every kind of goodness would not excite persecution; nor every degree of virtue endure it. Even in the garden of God there are some fair flowers that flourish, and look pleasant to the eye, which would shrink away and utterly perish beneath the cold blasts of persecution. There are men of such sort, as in times of peace and tranquillity, appear, and perhaps are, very earnest in the cause of truth and virtue, and still for a time they so continue, till some persecution or trouble shall arise for the same, and then they are gone, they will no longer abide by it. If they lose a little, and are  
likely,



likely, by continuing zealous and resolute to lose more, a man of this kind straightway yieldeth. He will not stand against it, but immediately will follow, and go forwards with the greatest number. But the true and genuine friends of righteousness, do not so. They better know its value and importance, from the very circumstance of their being actually in possession of it. These, therefore, at all hazards abide by their principles. Are content to lose their riches, wife, children, friends, and reputation, yea, and their own lives also for the sake of God, and his most holy word. Now this firm and unaccommodating temper, these features of hardihood, which cannot be abashed, appalled, or soothed, by the flatteries or the terrors of their persecutors, is often found to produce no other effect, than that of inflaming their adversaries the more, and rendering the violence of their persecution the greater. So that in such times, the more eminent a man is in virtue, the more violent and inflamed will be the rage of his persecutors. So that as nothing can be plainer than that every man who is  
persecuted

persecuted for righteousness sake must be blessed, being in possession of that most valuable of all things on account of which he is persecuted—and that since in bearing it with cheerfulness and fortitude, he performs the best service to the best of causes, and practises the highest and most disinterested virtue, and by that means secures that glory and reward which will not be given to inferior characters; so we may in general affirm, that the more he is persecuted on the score of righteousness, the more blessed he must be. For righteousness being the most valuable of all things, and the only means of obtaining permanent happiness, he who has the most eminent degree of it, although it may expose him to much greater sufferings in his life, than ever did befall the most miserable of our kind, and which by relaxing a little in his duty, he might have escaped, must be of all men the most blessed, taking the whole of his existence into consideration. It therefore follows that our Lords words, *Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness sake* are true, and  
that

that in every circumstance that can be mentioned, or even conceived. Indeed it cannot admit of a doubt that truth and righteousness, must in the end, overpower and annihilate every opponent, and gain the compleatest victory over sin, and death, and misery.

The number of righteous men in the world is, we hope, by no means so small as appearances may suggest. But all good men are not equally eminent in that highest order of the virtues, by which self is annihilated, and the man with all his powers becomes devoted to the glory of his maker, and the disinterested love of his kind. Nor ought we to wonder that there should be different degrees of goodness (I mention this, because some good men use a kind of language, which leads the hearer to suppose a man may from the vilest sinner, instantly become the most eminent saint, by what they call conversion) in different men, any more than in others of the works of God. You have for instance, a considerable quantity of good land, but some even of that  
good

good land is richer, and more fertile than others. You have many good fruit trees, but some of them excel the rest in higher flavour, or greater quantity of the fruit they produce. In a bright night we may observe one star to differ from another star in glory. And thus, though there are many righteous men, yet some are distinguished above others by their greater excellence and higher attainments. This distinction of characters is pointed out by our Lord, and in this very chapter, though not in express terms. The benedictions he here delivers may be considered as an ascending scale of excellence. They constitute the ladder of Jacob, every stave of which brings us so much nearer heaven, or so much higher in it.

Our Saviour here gives us no less than eight different descriptions of blessed people. He first pronounces the poor in spirit to be among the happy. Meaning, most probably, such as are content with a little, or who being rich, are devoid of all haughtiness; capable of  
condescending

condescending to the poor, and of sympathizing with them, as being touched with the feeling of their infirmities. He then blesses those that mourn; i. e. who are full of pity and compassion for the pains, the weakneses, and failings of others, or of regret for their own sins and imperfections. The meek—those that hunger and thirst after righteousness. The merciful—The pure in heart—and the peace-makers, are all severally pronounced blessed or happy. But still he seems to have considered all of these (and if there were time reasons might be assigned for it) I say by his expressions respecting the character in our text, he seems to have considered all these foregoing ones as inferior to it in point of moral and religious excellence. He places this at the top of his scale. It is that end of the ladder which hides itself in the skies.

16

Jesus Christ not only saith, “Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” That does not with sufficient force express the  
 greatness

greatness of his conceptions with regard to the character of confessors and martyrs. He addresses himself to his disciples as to persons particularly interested in this part of his discourse, and saith, *Blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake.* He reiterates this sentiment—there is a discernible swell in his style—his language assumes a higher tone of elevation and spirit, when he proceeds to say, *Rejoice and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.* As though to be persecuted for righteousness sake, were the highest pitch of dignity to be attained on earth, the very top and summit of human glory.

Thus have we shewn, it is hoped, to the satisfaction of all, the truth of this apparently strange doctrine of our Saviour. We are all then, by consequence, fully persuaded that it is a privilege and not a disadvantage, to suffer in the cause of truth and of religion. There are, indeed, two other lights in which these words  
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of our Saviour may very properly be regarded, namely, as a prophecy, and as a promise. But on these we have not at present time to insist. We will therefore close this Discourse with a few remarks applicable to the subject.

I. While we live in this world, it is plainly necessary that we bestow a reasonable attention upon the body, in order to provide whatever may be useful for its health and support. To think of eradicating or destroying the appetites, would be to make sure of the destruction of our bodies. They often serve as indexes to point out our way through the wilderness of life. Much useful information may be derived from them. The point we ought therefore to have in view, is so to conduct and regulate them as best to answer the wise ends for which they were generated in our nature; in such a manner as that we may not desire houses or land, or riches, or power, or honour, or any other temporal good more than the promotion of the glory of God, and the good of our neighbours.

That

That every living creature should have in its make a strong desire to preserve life, was necessary. But in rational beings, all natural instincts are to be under the controul of reason. The superior faculty is to govern the inferior.

Now it is evident from what has been said, that there may be many cases, in which rectitude and propriety may require us to get over the instinctive love of life, as well as to conquer the influence of the other natural affections. Whoever loves life more than virtue, religion, or his country, is guilty of a gross absurdity, in preferring that which is of less consequence to that which is of greater. We should always make it our endeavour, to view things in the light they may be supposed to appear in to the all comprehensive mind, knowing, that the nearer we approach to this, the more exact will be our apprehensions. But I cannot bring myself to believe that my life appears to the supreme mind of such vast importance, that it ought to be preserved to the prejudice of sacred and eternal truth. That it is better the people should perish for one man, than one man for the people.

If the heroes and sages among the heathens, who had no such certain prospect of a future state as we have, or at least may have, if they, whose views of an existence to come, were rather strong desires than sure and well founded hopes; if they could show such a contempt of the present life as to give it up with joy and triumph for the service of their country, and for the sake of truth, of which history furnishes us with instances almost innumerable; it were to be expected, that in the contempt of life we should greatly exceed them. But this to our shame, is far from being the case, at least in general. Many individuals have given glorious proofs of the contrary. And if none of us have as yet attained to this height in our progress towards christian perfection, let us still strive after it—let it be our endeavour continually to preserve our minds in such a state, as shall enable us to bear with christian patience and christian joy, all that the ill-will of our adversaries dare inflict upon us.

II. From the blessedness and reward of bearing persecution well, we may learn the folly of entertaining any thing like a revengeful

ful temper against those, who at any time, on account of our principles, evilly entreat us. In persecuting us, our enemies do us a favour—give us an opportunity of performing the highest of all duties, that of forgiving and loving our enemies, and of doing good in return for evil. This indeed must be acknowledged the noblest revenge that can be taken.—it is the only revenge I recommend to you, my friends. For would you punish the spiteful, shew him that you are superior to his malice;—the dart he threw at you, will then rebound and pierce himself to the heart.

III. Would we find support under circumstances of calamity and affliction, let us study the religion of Jesus. The only rational ground of consolation amid the various distresses of life, is the consideration that our religion proposes a positive reward for bearing with dignity and improving by affliction—and at the same time, furnishes the mind with sufficient grounds for the belief that afflictions are in truth our greatest blessings, and proofs

as certain of the divine favour, as more palatable gifts.

IV. If persecution, fellow christians, be a privilege— if it be the highest honour we can in this life attain, to be thought worthy of enduring it, then let no persecution we have hitherto met with, damp our zeal---let it rather, since it cannot be directed to higher objects, be rendered more active and fervent. Are not TRUTH, and LIBERTY, and RELIGION, the dearest of all things---more valuable than life and all its joys? Ought we not then, to arm ourselves with fortitude, and a sound mind? *To put on the whole armour of God, that we may be able to stand in the evil day? And having done all, to stand?* Surely we ought.

Let us remember that the condescension of our God is wonderful. That his goodness knows no bounds. That if we will be his servants, he will be our God. If we honour him, he will honour us. That as fast as we engage ourselves to him, so fast will he bind himself

himself to us. His favours increase with our zeal and service. Let the world think and say what it will of us---he will be pleased with our honest endeavours to serve his cause; and will abundantly reward them. For though we disclaim, as much as any, all merit, though our best services are nothing but what we ought to perform, and although we must even, when we have fulfilled every command, acknowledge ourselves very unprofitable servants; yet while we continue to pay an unre-served obedience to the precepts of the gospel, we shall not be neglected and despised, nor go disowned and unrewarded; probably not even in this life, certainly not in that which is to come. While we thus do our duty, the per-fections of God are to all intents and purposes our own. They are continually employed on our behalf. His veracity is pledged for the performance of the grant, that he will do and give all that is necessary for our support and safety, for our comfort and blessedness.

If our religion be purer than that of others, and we have suffered in consequence  
of



of having stood forth in its support—let us remember, that zeal and faithfulness will be honoured in a distinguishing manner by the Almighty; especially when these are pure and unmixed with pride and selfishness; when love to God, and goodness is the reigning passion, and other principles are strictly guarded against and carefully suppressed. You ought to rejoice in the opportunities that are now given you, and which are given, not for nothing, but to be improved, of exercising and displaying the excellence of your faith, the trial of which is abundantly more precious than that of silver or of gold, which perishes. And thus, you will recommend more effectually, than in any other way, the principles which you have adopted, in preference to those which are more popular and reputable. For there is a beautiful simplicity in religion unadulterated. It is an amiable, it is a venerable thing, and hardly ever fails of commanding respect even from persons of the worst character, especially when the wisdom of the serpent is joined with the innocence of the dove. Such a spirit and conversation, will bear a strong and convincing testimony

testimony to the reality of religion. And however this *may* be, as we have lately seen, it *has* been traduced by the false, misrepresented by the artful, and run down by the violence and malignity of the times; yet depend upon it, steadiness and resolution in the cause of religion, arising from genuine principles of love and zeal for the glory of our heavenly Parent, will have their effect. They cannot fail to strike the minds of many, and force them to give religion its just praise.

Lastly. Let us endeavour to imbibe more and more of the true spirit of christianity. Let us call to remembrance the times of the years that are past. Let us ask, Where is that spirit and energy, which appeared so wonderfully in the purity and zeal of prophets and apostles; which refined their spirits and exalted them to so near a resemblance of the blessed and all perfect God;—that made them so entirely and absolutely devoted to the cause of truth and of religion:—that warmed their breasts with universal love, and made them so busy, active, zealous, and faithful;—which  
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rendered them so chearful and unwearied in their work, that they seemed all life, vigour, and energy;—which caused them so to act, as though they had nothing else to do, but honour to their creator, and service to their kind?

However, let not pride and passion bias us on the one hand; neither self-love nor the fear of man on the other. Far be it from us, to be afraid of censure and reproach. Ever let us value peace and purity in our consciences, the honour and approbation of God, and the good, especially the everlasting good, of our neighbours more than all worldly considerations whatever. Let us be concerned to possess our minds with a belief in the existence and perfections of God, in the genuineness of the gospel and the validity of its promises, so strong as shall enable us to bear up in every tempest that may arise, and keep us from being afraid or ashamed of bearing our public testimony in behalf of liberty, truth, and religion; against tyranny, falsehood, and vice, in every circumstance and situation.

Then,

Then, as a rock, may we stand fast against all opposition. Then, through our whole course, we may support with decency, with dignity, the honour of the christian character. Thus, immoveable in our purpose, undaunted by any face of danger, let us persevere to the end of our course, rejoicing in tribulation, till at length, when the messenger of death shall summon us from the arduous strife, we may die like good servants of God, and faithful soldiers of Jesus Christ, with our arms in our hands, I mean those of sound reason and well-grounded faith, and a conscience void of offence;---sure of receiving an ample reward among the defenders of virtue and liberty, on the other side of the grave.---Strive, then, fellow citizens, from this moment,---strive to do all you can to recover the dying cause of goodness, if it be dying;---to stem this inundation of bigotry, falsehood, and wickedness, which is burst forth in a flood, which not stopped or diverted in time, will overwhelm and desolate our miserable country. Arise, ye friends of truth:—Stand forth:—Exert yourselves,

yourselfes,——let the world know that you are on the side of truth: and let the world be obliged to confess, that the courage of the good is more formidable than the impudence of the wicked. Paint virtue in your conduct and with your actions, just as she is. Let her heavenly form be personified in every character to which I now address myself. Fetch down departing religion, sacred, venerable, pure, and undefiled.---Stop her, in her ascension to her native skies:---give her a local habitation, and a name honourable in the mind of all. I am convinced you are not discouraged, but confirmed by what has happened to you and to your neighbours. Be zealous and be wise. Be firm and vigorous. Come what, come may, God reigneth, and nothing wrong can take place. All is rightly ordered, and all will end well. None can eventually suffer but the foolish and the impenitent.

And what if we should any of us (a thing at present very unlikely) what, I say, if we  
should

should even die in the struggle;—how beautiful is death when earned by virtue! How glorious, how triumphant, when he is the harbringer of immortality. For, shall we meanly tremble, when on account of the words of truth, troubles arise? Shall we shrink, like corrupt and degenerate plants, before the blasts of persecution?—The traveller journeying through the damp forest, the cold and dreary waste, or over the bleak and snow-clad mountain,—by how much the more the winds howl around, and the inclement elements distress him, by so much the closer he girds his garments about him.—When the bark labours in a stormy sea, the mariners only exert a greater degree of skill, of vigilance, and activity ;---knowing, that though for a short time she may seem to be overwhelmed by the frantic fury of the accumulated billows, that soon she will rise again, and in the face of the conflicting skies, ride triumphant on the foaming backs of her assailants.

Thus



Thus should it be with thee, O christian.—  
 Fear not danger and danger will fear thee.---  
 Oppose thyself to difficulties, and they will  
 vanish.---Smile at the approach of tribulation,  
 of distress, and of even death itself, and in-  
 stantly they are thy friends,—bid them wel-  
 come and they will love thee. Though thou  
 fallest in the conflict, thou fallest but to rise.  
 For of him who suffers in the cause of truth  
 and virtue, with peculiar propriety may it be  
 said, that the same moment in which he so  
 illustriously expires, he is born to an immor-  
 tality of glory. He shall ask no pomp of  
 marble;—no honours created by the chizel  
 of the statuary.---No memorials shall he re-  
 quire deeply engraven on monumental brass.--  
 His name is written in the book of life;  
 his fame shall remain when the heavens are  
 no more; and great and everlasting shall  
 be his reward. The solid stone of which  
 the towering pyramid is composed, which  
 forms the triumphal arch: the rock-founded  
 monument, and whatever more durable has  
 been contrived to preserve the honoured  
 names

names of the Hero and the Chief, shall be effaced by relentless ruin, shall fall down low into the dust, shall moulder away, and vanish; their place shall be fought for, but shall not be found. But to the honour of the christian martyr, a memorial is written in the everlasting remembrance of God, beyond the reach of time's all devouring scythe; which nothing can ever obliterate. For him, let no weak drop be shed. For the virgin snatched on her bridal day by the hand of death, from the husband of her choice; for the youth falling in the midst of his strength; for the darling child whose opening blossom promised in maturity, the richest fruits of wisdom and of virtue; for these, let the tears of pity fall, and the strains of elegy be heard.

But the tears of pity would ill accord with a fate like his. The harmony of the scene would be disturbed, and its greatness debased by grief and lamentation. No, rather let the most exulting notes of gratulation be sounded over their ashes; for *blessed are the dead which die in the Lord, for they rest from their labours*  
*and*

*and their works do follow them. Yea, saith the spirit, for they rest from their labours. Let posterity be called upon to eye their glories, while in expectance of a second life, in those brighter scenes which shall be disclosed when Time, like the hero of Gaza, shall pluck down the pillars which support this globe; their sacred dust sleeps with greater dignity than that of kings and heroes in their tombs of grandeur. And let each christian inspired with these sentiments of genuine nobility listen to the animating voice of the Captain of our salvation, and let full conviction accompany his words, when he saith,*

**BLESSED ARE THEY WHICH ARE PERSECUTED FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS SAKE, FOR THEIRS IS THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN.**

