

T H R E E

OCCASIONAL SERMONS.

I.—ON THE COMMON SALVATION.

II.—THE GOOD MAN'S DESIRE FOR THE SUCCESS OF
GOD'S CAUSE.

III.—THE OBJECT AND ENCOURAGEMENT OF BE-
LIEVERS IN PRAYING FOR SPIRITUAL MIGHT.

To which are added,

TWO LETTERS,

On the Sickness and Death of a Christian Friend.

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PHILADELPHIA :

PRINTED BY CHARLES CIST, No. 104, NORTH SECOND-STREET :

.....
1805.

Sermon I.

J U D E 5.

Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you and exhort you, that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.

THE writer of this epistle was him who in the gospel is called *Judas not Iscariot*. The epistle itself is called *general*, not being addressed to any particular person or people; and may therefore be of more common concern. In the passage I have read we may notice, First, The *occasion* there was for writing: *it was needful*. The apostle did not write for writing sake; but to guard them against *certain men* who had crept into the churches *unawares*—*turning the grace of God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.* (ver. 4.)—Secondly, The *earnestness* with which he engaged in it: *He gave all diligence*. The word* signifies haste, forwardness, diligent care; somewhat like that which a parent would feel in pulling a child out of the fire. (ver. 23.)—Thirdly, The *subject* on which he wrote: *the common salvation*. This furnishes a reason for his being so much in earnest: the very vitals of christianity were struck at. Had not this been the case, it may be they would not have heard from him. When Haman had conspired against the Jews in Persia, you recollect the petition of Esther, and the manner in which it was addressed to the king. After inviting him to her banquet, and postponing the matter till she had whetted his desire to the uttermost, she at length uttered her request: *If I have found favour in thy sight, O king, and if it please the king, let my LIFE be given me at my petition, and my PEOPLE at my re*

* σπουδή.

quest! For we are sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be slain, and to perish: but if we had been sold for bondmen and bondwomen, I had held my peace, although the enemy could not countervail the king's damage! Something like this seems to be the spirit of this passage. It is as if the writer had said, If the enemy had levelled his weapon against any thing but the very heart of the gospel, I might have held my peace.

The amount is: THE COMMON DOCTRINES OF THE GOSPEL ARE OF THE FIRST IMPORTANCE TO BE TAUGHT BY US AS MINISTERS, AND RETAINED BY US AS CHRISTIANS.

In discoursing on the subject, I shall endeavour to ascertain wherein the common salvation consists; inquire why it is so called; and shew the importance of its being made the grand theme of our ministrations, and the first object of our attachment.

I. Let us endeavour to ascertain wherein the common salvation consists.

There can be no doubt, I think, that by this phrase is meant the gospel salvation. It is the same thing as *the faith once delivered to the saints; the common faith*, after which Titus is said to have been begotten.* In a word, it is that which in the New Testament is peculiarly denominated *the gospel*.

But the question returns: What is the gospel? Great diversity of opinion prevails on this subject. One denomination of professing christians tell you it is one thing, and another, another; and how shall we judge amidst such discordant accounts? If I were to tell you that such and such doctrines constitute the gospel, you might answer, This is only my opinion, which is subject to error, equally with that of other people. For this reason I shall not attempt to specify particulars, but mention certain scriptural mediums by which you yourselves may judge of it.

First: We may form a judgment wherein the gospel consists, by the *brief descriptions* which are given of it.—The New Testament abounds with these descriptions: it delights in epitome. For example: *God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever be-*

* Titus i. 4.

lieth in him should not perish but have everlasting life. This is the common salvation : and surely I need not ask whether the doctrine which denies the *perishing* condition of sinners by nature, and supposes the unspeakable *gift* of heaven to be a mere fellow-creature, sent only to instruct us, and to set us a good example, can comport with this representation.—Again : *The Jews require a sign, or miracle, and the Greeks seek after wisdom : but we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness ; but unto them that are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.* This is the common salvation. We hear of preachers knowing their auditors, and preaching accordingly : but Paul went straight forward, regardless of the desires of men.—Again ; *I determined not to know any thing among you but Jesus Christ and him crucified.* In each of these passages, the gospel is supposed to be summarily comprehended in what relates to the person and work of Christ. This is the foundation which God hath laid in Zion : this is the common salvation.—Again ; *I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand ; by which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory, or hold fast, what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all, that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures : and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day, according to the scriptures.* Here also we see what is *the gospel*, and what that is on which the *present standing*, and *final salvation* of christians depend : and I appeal to every thing that is candid and impartial in my hearers, whether such importance can be attached to the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ upon any other principle than that of his dying in our stead, and rising again as our forerunner?—Finally ; *This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.** This language supposes, that in coming into the world, our Lord was *voluntary*, or that it was with *design*, which supposes his pre-existence ; and that this design was to *save sinners, the chief of sinners.* In calling it a faithful or true *saying*, it is intimated that it was so much

* John iii. 16. 1 Cor. i. 22—24. 1 Cor. ii. 4. 1 Cor. xv. 1—4.
1 Tim. i. 15.

the theme of the apostle's ministry, and so well known amongst christians, as to become proverbial. *A saying grown into credit by experience of its truth*, is the definition which has been given of a proverb; and such was the true saying of Paul. This therefore must be the gospel—the common salvation.

Secondly: We may judge wherein the common salvation consists, by the *brief descriptions which are given of the faith of primitive christians*. This, as well as the gospel, is frequently epitomized in the New Testament; and it may be expected that the one will agree with the other. *So we preach, and so ye believed*. The creed of the first believers, it has often been remarked, was very simple. *I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God—Whoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ, is born of God—Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God? Believing is called receiving the witness, or record, of God—And this is the record that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.** There are many other important truths, no doubt, the belief of which is necessary to salvation; such as, the being and perfections of God, the evil of sin, &c.; but they are all involved in the doctrine of *Christ and him crucified*. This all-important principle is a golden link, which if laid hold of, draws with it the whole train of evangelical truth. Let a man cordially embrace this, and you may trust him for the rest.

There are, I conceive, four things which essentially belong to the common salvation; its *necessity*, its *vicarious medium*, its *freeness* to the chief of sinners, and its *holy efficacy*. If we doubt whether we stand in need of salvation, or overlook the atonement, or hope for an interest in it any otherwise than as unworthy, or rest in a mere speculative opinion which has no effectual influence on our spirit and conduct, we are at present unbelievers, and have every thing to learn.

II. Inquire wherefore it is called the common salvation?

Three reasons may perhaps be assigned for this.

First: It is that in which *all the sacred writers*, notwithstanding their diversity of ages and gifts, *are agreed in*

* Acts viii. 37. John v. 1, 5, 9, 11.

teaching. The Old Testament writers understood it much less than the New; but they all *died in the faith of it.* They *testified of the sufferings of Christ, and of the glory that should follow—To him give all the prophets witness.* The New Testament writers differed widely as to talents. *Paul* reasoned; but Christ and him crucified was his theme. *John* had more of the affectionate: he was baptized, as it were, in love; but the Lamb that was slain was the great object of it. There is no other name, said *Peter*, given under heaven, or among men, whereby we must be saved; and *John* stood by his side and assented. If any of the New Testament writers could be supposed to dissent, it would be *James*, who wrote fully upon the necessity of good works: but he was of the same *faith*, and only pleaded for *showing it* by his works.

Secondly: It is that which is *addressed to sinners in common*, without distinction of character or nation. The messages of grace under the Old Testament were principally addressed to a single nation: but under the gospel they are addressed to all nations, to every creature. The promises of mercy are indeed made only to believers; but its invitations are addressed to sinners. The gospel feast is spread, and all are pressed to partake of it, whatever has been their previous character.

Thirdly: It is that in which *all believers*, notwithstanding their different attainments and advantages, *are in substance agreed.* It is fitly compared to milk, which is the natural food of children. There may be great darkness, imperfections, and error; and many prejudices for and against distinctive names: but let the doctrine of the Cross be stated simply, and it must approve itself to a renewed heart. A real christian cannot object to either of those four things which were considered as belonging to the common salvation:—to the necessity of it, the vicarious medium of it, the freeness of it, or the holy efficacy of it.

III. Shew the importance of its being the grand theme of our ministrations, and the first object of our attachment.

It is that which God hath ever blessed to the salvation of sinners, and the edification of believers—The primitive christians lived upon it—Times of great revival in the church have always been distinguished by a warm ad-

herence to it. In the dark ages of popery, the schoolmen, as they are called, employed themselves in deciding curious points; but at the time of the reformation, the common salvation was the leading theme. Those ministers whose labours have been more abundantly owned for the promotion of true religion, have been distinguished by their attachment to the common truth; and those churches which have abounded the most in vital and practical godliness are such as have not descended to curious researches, nor confined their approbation to elegant preaching, but have loved and lived upon the truth from whomsoever it has proceeded.

There are three things in particular from which we are in danger of neglecting the common salvation, both as preachers and as hearers:

First: A pretended regard to *moral and practical preaching*, to the disregard of *evangelical principle*. All preaching, no doubt, ought to be practical; and there are no greater enemies to the Cross of Christ than men who can bear nothing but what soothes and comforts them: but this is not the only extreme. Almost all the adversaries of evangelical truth endeavour to cover their dislike to it under an apparent zeal for 'morality, the christian temper and christian practice.' If we neglect the common salvation in our ordinary labours, morality will freeze upon our lips, and neither the preacher nor the hearer be much inclined to practise it. To lose a relish for the common salvation is the first step towards giving it up; and the effects of this we are warned against from the example of *the angels who kept not their first estate*.

Secondly: The *love of novelty*—Both preachers and hearers are in danger of making light of common truths, and of indulging in a Spirit of curious Speculation. This will render preaching rather an entertainment, than a benefit to the soul. We are commanded to *feed* the church of God.....not their fancies, or imaginations, nor merely their understandings; but their renewed minds. It indicates a vicious taste, and affords a manifest proof of degeneracy, where the common salvation is slighted, and matters of refinement eagerly pursued. The doctrine of Christ crucified is full of the wisdom of God, and will furnish materials for the strongest powers; and here we

may dig deep in our researches : but if this subject has no charms for us, what are we to do in heaven, where it is their darling theme ?

Thirdly : A partial attachment to *one or two particular truths*, to the neglect of *the great body of truth*. It has frequently been the case, that some one particular topic has formed the character of an age or generation of men ; and this topic has been hackneyed in almost every place, till the public mind has become weary of it ; while other things of equal importance have been overlooked. Beauty consists in lovely proportion : and herein consists the holy beauty of religion. When every part of truth has its due regard, and every part of holiness its share in our affections, then will *the beauty of Jehovah our God be upon us*, and then will he *establish the work of our hands*.

Finally : The common salvation, though it affords ground for a universal application for mercy, yet will be of no essential benefit to us, unless it be specially embraced. Notwithstanding the indefiniteness of gospel invitations, it is nevertheless true, that, *He who believeth and is baptized, shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be damned !*

Sermon II.

PSALM xc. 16, 17.

Let thy work appear unto thy servants, and thy glory unto their children. And let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us; and establish thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish thou it.

IN every undertaking we have an end or ends to answer, to which all our labours are directed. It is no less so in religious undertakings than in others; and as these are pure, and worthy of pursuit, such is the good or evil of our exertions. What are, or at least should be, the great ends of a christian congregation in rearing a place for divine worship? What are the main desires of serious people amongst you now it is reared? If I mistake not, they are depicted in the passage I have read:—That *God's work may appear amongst you in your own time—that it may be continued to posterity—that God would beautify you with salvation—and prosper the works of your hands?*

The psalm was written by Moses, probably on occasion of the sentence of mortality passed upon the generation of Israelites which came out of E'gypt, on account of their unbelief, as recorded in the sixth chapter of Numbers. It was a heavy sentence, and very affectingly lamented by the holy man; but he discovers a greater concern for the cause of God, than for the loss of temporal comfort. He prays that they may be taught to make such a use of this awful providence as to *apply their hearts u to wisdom*; and that however God might afflict them during forty years wandering in the wilderness, he would bless them with spiritual prosperity.

This prayer was answered. That generation which was trained in the wilderness was, perhaps, the best that Israel exhibited during their existence as a nation. It was of them that the Lord himself spake, saying, *I re-*

remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown. Israel then was holiness to the Lord. May our prayer for the prosperity of God's cause amongst us be thus answered.

All I shall attempt will be, to review the *objects* desired, and shew the *desirableness* of them.

The objects desired, though expressed by the Jewish lawgiver, have nothing in them peculiar to that dispensation; but are equally suited to our times, as to others. They prove that the cause of God is one, through every dispensation, and is directed to one great end—the establishment of truth and righteousness in the earth.

The *first* branch of this comprehensive petition is, That *God's work might appear unto his servants.* All God's works are great. Creation is full of his glory: providence is no less so: and each is sought out by them that have pleasure therein. But it is evident that by the work of God, in this connexion, is meant the operation of his *grace.* When the Almighty took Israel to be his people, he bestowed blessings upon them of two kinds; temporal and spiritual. He gave them the promise of a good land, and of great prosperity in case of their obedience to his will. But this was not all: he set up his cause amongst them. They were his visible people, by whom true religion was practised, and its interests promoted. It was the carrying on of this cause that is here intended. It was begun from the time when God made promise to Abraham their grand progenitor, and was carried on during the lives of the patriarchs. When they were brought out of Egypt with a high hand, and formed into a people for himself, it became more apparent, and wore a more promising aspect; but when they were doomed to die in the wilderness, it seemed as if it must sink. Hence Moses, who was tenderly affected with what concerned the honour of God, pleads as he does. Thus he pleaded his *great name* on a former occasion: and thus the prophet Habakkuk pleaded when Judah was going into captivity, and the cause of God was likely to be ruined: *O Lord, revive thy work in the midst of the years; in the midst of the years make known: in wrath remember mercy!*

The work of God may be said to *appear amongst us* when sinners are converted to himself. Conversion is not confined to Jews and heathens; but extends to sinners of all ages and nations. It is not enough that we are born and educated under the light of revelation, nor that we yield a traditional assent to it. Nicodemus could boast of all this, and more: yet he was told by the faithful and true witness, that *except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of heaven*. Conversion work is peculiarly the *work of God*. Ministers and parents may be the instruments; but God is the proper cause of it. None but he who made the heart of man can turn it from its rooted aversion to the love of himself. Ministers and parents know this by painful experience; and therefore can each adopt the prayer here presented as their own. Wherever this work is, it will *appear* by its holy and happy effects. The drunkard will become sober, the churl liberal, the unclean chaste, and the malignant persecutor of Christ's people a humble sufferer for his name's sake.

The work of God will also appear amongst us if christians grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. The power of divine grace is no less apparent in the carrying on of God's work, than in the beginning of it. Nothing short of an almighty arm can preserve creatures, so prone to fall away, *from falling*, and present those who are so faulty, *faultless before the presence of his glory*. And where this part of the work is, it will *appear* also by its holy and happy effects. Such christians bear the most impressive testimony to the world of the reality and importance of religion.

A *second* branch of the petition is, That God's work might so appear as that there might be an illustrious display of his *glory*. All God's works display his glory; but the work of grace in the salvation of sinners most of all. Other things manifest his wisdom and power; but *this* his holy nature. The carrying on of his cause in the world, by the conversion and sanctification of sinners, gives a kind of visibility to the divine character. It is seen, and even felt by the most abandoned of men. God is said to have *appeared in his glory in buildi'g up Zion*, after it had been broken down by the Chaldeans. Even the heathen, when they saw what he

had wrought, could not forbear to acknowledge. *The Lord hath done great things for them!* But the building up of the gospel church, by turning the captivity of those who were the slaves of Satan, is still more glorious. The Lord could accomplish the former merely by his providence; but the latter is the effect of the travail of his soul.

It is requested, *thirdly*, That God would impart to them his beauty: *Let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us!* All God's works are beautiful; but saints who are his workmanship, are the subjects of a *holy* beauty, or of the beauty of holiness. They are comely through the comeliness which he puts upon them. Conceive of the camp of Israel after they had been humbled, and taught to fear the Lord their God. Two or three hundred thousand godly young people, following him implicitly in the wilderness, and trembling at the idea of repeating the iniquities of their fathers! This was a sight at which even a wicked prophet was struck with awe, and could not forbear exclaiming, *How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, and thy tabernacles, O Israel!* Powerful are the charms of genuine piety. There is something in it that disarms malignity itself, and extorts admiration even from those who hate it. Milton represents the devil himself, on his approaching paradise, as awed by innocence, as staggered, as half inclined to desist from his purpose, and feeling a kind of perturbation within him composed of malignity and pity. Something like this, existed, methinks, in Balaam. He wanders from hill to mountain, seeking for curses, but scattering blessings; sometimes half inclined to unite with God, and concluding with a vain desire to die the death of the righteous. Powerful, I repeat it, are the charms of genuine piety. Conceive of a society of christians drinking into the spirit of Christ, and walking according to his commandments. What an amiable sight! *Beautiful as Tirzah, comely as Jerusalem, and terrible as an army with banners!* So much as we possess of the spirit of true religion, so near as we approach its original simplicity, so far as our doctrine is incorrupt, our discipline pure and impartial, and our conversation as becometh the gospel, so much of *the beauty of the Lord our God is upon us.*

A *fourth* branch of the petition is, That God would set his seal to their undertakings, and establish the work of their hands : *Establish thou the work of our hands upon us ; yea, the work of our hands establish thou it.*—It was the work of Moses and Joshua, and the rest of God's servants, to mould and form the people, especially the rising generation ; to instruct them in the words of the Lord, and impress their hearts with the vast importance of obeying them. And this has been the work of God's servants in every age. This is our object in our stated and occasional labours, in village-preaching, and in foreign missions ; this is the object in the present undertaking : but all is nothing unless God establish the work of our hands. Except the Lord build the house, the builders labour in vain. As we must never confide in God to the neglect of means ; so we must never engage in the use of means without a sense of our dependence on God.

Finally : It is requested that these blessings might appear both in their own times, and be continued to their posterity : *Let thy work appear unto thy servants, who are now alive, and thy glory unto their children, when they are no more.* It is desirable that true religion should be promoted *in our time.* This indeed should be our first and chief concern. Worldly men may care nothing about this. If they gain but the corn, the wine, and the oil, it is enough for them, but God's *servants* cannot be happy with mere temporal prosperity, if the interest of Christ do not prosper. Nehemiah might have lived in affluence at the court of Persia ; but he could not enjoy it while the city of his God was going to ruins. The true labourers in God's husbandry long to see it abound in fruits : the builders of his temple desire to see it rise. And though our own times lie nearest us, yet our prayers and efforts must not be confined to them, but extend to *posterity.* The succeeding generation should lie near our hearts. In them we hope for materials for God's building. The prayer of David would fit the lips of every godly man, and especially of every godly parent : *That our sons may be as olive-plants grown up in their youth ; and our daughters as corner-stones, polished after the similitude of a palace !*

I shall add a few words on the desirableness of the objects.

We have seen already that the manifestation of the *glory* of God depends on the progress of his *work*: by how much, therefore, we are concerned for the one, by so much shall we be importunate for the other. It is for the glory of God, that Satan's kingdom should be overturned, and the kingdom of his Son established on its ruins. This work is the *harvest* of all God's other works of glory. It was glorious in him to promise to give his Son the heathen for his inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession: but the glory of this also depends upon its being performed. It was glorious for Christ to die, that he might purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works: but it is by the actual accomplishment of this object that his glory is perfected. It was glorious for God in his providence to drive out paganism and popery from this kingdom: but if it stop here, what are we the better? The cutting down of weeds will be of but little use, if the pure seed be not sown, and spring up, and bring forth fruit in their place.

The progress of God's work in heathen countries has a close connexion also with our spiritual prosperity at home. There is much beauty and propriety in the petitions offered up in the lxviiith Psalm. *God be merciful unto us — THAT thy way may be known upon earth, thy saving health among all nations!* God blesseth the world by blessing the church, and making it a blessing. A statesman would wish for an increase in population, that the army, and navy, and every other department of society might be filled: and shall not we pray for the prosperity of the church of God; that faithful ministers, missionaries and every other description of christians, may not be wanting?

Finally: The regard we bear to the souls of men, especially to the rising generation, must render these blessings desirable. It is not yours, but you that we seek. Our hearts' desire, and prayer to God for you, is, that you may be saved. If we recommend you to attend the gospel and embrace it, Is it because we want to enlist you under the banner of a party? God knoweth! Yet we shall say to you, and especially to the rising generation, *Go tell us, and we will do you good; for the Lord, we trust, hath spoken good concerning us: and it shall come to pass that whatsoever good thing the Lord shall do unto us, that will we do unto you.*

Sermon III.

EPHESIANS iii. 14—16.

For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.....that he would grant you according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might, by his Spirit, in the inner man.

THE writing and preaching of the apostles had two distinct specific objects in view. They *preached*, to make men christians; to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to the living God: They *wrote*, to make them eminent christians; to quicken believers in their heavenly race, to promote in them a growth in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Such was the zeal of Paul in endeavouring to accomplish the former, that he counted not his life dear to him, but was willing to die for the name of the Lord Jesus: nor was he less desirous of the latter; making it the leading object of all his epistles, and the matter of his prayer day and night. In the apostle's words there are three things which require our notice: The object desired—its importance—and the encouragement we have to seek it.

1. The *object* in which the apostle was so much interested on behalf of the Ephesians: *That he would grant you to be strengthened with might, by his Spirit, in the inner man.*

Nothing good is found in fallen man; nothing grows spontaneously in that soil but what is evil: if any thing holy be found there, it must be produced by the Spirit of God, who worketh in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure. Nor is divine influence less necessary in carrying on the good work after it is begun: such is our proneness to relax, to grow weary, to faint in our course, that we need to be continually strengthened with might, by his Spirit, in the inner man.

The object prayed for is not *bodily* strength; that is of but little account in the sight of God, though in many cases it becomes the matter of human boasting. Samson was possessed of might in the outward man to a high degree, and a poor use he made of it. Perhaps a more feeble character is not to be met with among those whom the Scriptures mention as good men: with all his wonderful exploits, he weakly yielded to the tempter, and became an easy prey to his enemies. Nor is it mere *mental* ability that is here intended; that was the strength of Solomon. Paul did not pray that we might be made great men, but good men; not that we might be poets or philosophers, but christians; not that we might excel in genius or learning, but in grace and goodness; that our souls may prosper and be in health—that we may be strengthened with might in the inner man. This part of the subject will be better understood by considering some of the symptoms of spiritual might.

1. The manner in which we perform *religious duties* may serve as a criterion by which to judge of our strength or weakness—If we be christians, we shall worship God in our families and in secret; shall search the Scriptures, frequent the house of God, and aim to discharge the various duties which appertain to our stations in life. These things we shall feel it incumbent on us habitually to regard: but the question is, How, and in what manner do we perform these exercises? If our souls be in a languishing state, they will become a task, and not a pleasure to us; we shall be weary of the Lord's service, feel his yoke to be grievous, and while we keep up a round of duty, our devotions will be cold, feeble and unprofitable. But if we be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might, we shall count of the return of sacred opportunities, and find that wisdom's ways are ways of pleasantness, and that all her paths are peace. When David longed for water of the well of Bethlehem, three mighty men brake through the host of the Philistines to obtain it, hazarding their lives for his sake; while men of weaker attachment would have murmured at the severity of such an enterprise. If we possess a warm heart for Christ, we shall not think much of the time, the talents, the property, the influence which we may devote to his

service: nor count our lives dear to us, if we may but promote his kingdom and glory in the world. This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments; and his commandments are not grievous. Nor will this pleasure be confined to the public exercises of religion, but will extend to those of a more personal and private nature. It is possible we may feel much animation, and possess much enjoyment in the outward means, while we are cold and lifeless in the duties of retirement; and this will be the case where the religion of the heart is not cultivated, nor close walking with God carefully maintained. But if we be strengthened with might, by his Spirit, in the inner man, communion with God will be earnestly sought after, private duties vigorously attended to, and the closet will yield us pleasure, as well as the tabernacles of the Lord of hosts. There are but few of whom it may be said, as of Caleb and Joshua, that they follow the Lord *fully*. Multitudes of professors appear to be but half-hearted in religion; they neither wholly relinquish it, nor take it up in earnest: but are desirous of following the Lord so far as is consistent with their carnal ease, their worldly interest, or their sinful passions, and no further. But if the object of the apostle's prayer be accomplished in us, we shall be decidedly for God, and prompt in our manner of serving him; not consulting with flesh and blood, not attempting to accommodate our principles and practice to those of the generality, nor wishing to 'do as little as possible for God, consistently with our own safety; but delighting to do all his will, we shall run in the way of his commandments.

2. The degree of our spiritual strength may be determined by the manner in which we *resist temptation*.—All men are tempted; but all do not resist temptation: this is peculiar to the christian character. Mere worldly men go with the stream; they walk according to the course of this world, and are hurried along with the impetuous torrent. But if we be christians we are not of the world, and are in the habit of resisting its temptations. Yet if our resistance be feeble and indeterminate; if we hesitate where we ought to be decided; if we look back on Sodom, like Lot's wife, with a lingering desire after those sinful pleasures which

we profess to have given up, and regret the loss of sensual gratifications,—are we not carnal, and walk as men? He who is strengthened with might in the inner man will not pause when temptation meets him, nor parley with the tempter; but will readily answer, “Thus it is written.” It will be sufficient for him to know that God has forbidden this or that. Like a dutiful child, the will of his father is the guide of his conduct, and that alone will furnish sufficient motives for obedience: Thus it is written.

3. The spirit in which we *endure affliction* will tend to discover the degree of religion we possess.—Affliction is the lot of man, as well as temptation; and we must all get through our difficulties in some way or other; but the manner in which we get through them will shew whether we be strengthened with might in the inner man, or not. If we faint in the day of adversity, our strength is small; if we be fretful, and murmur at the hand of God: if we sink under the burden, and wish in ourselves to die, we either have no religion at all, or possess it but in a small degree. Great grace would enable us to bear affliction with submission, and even to rejoice in tribulation. Primitive christians were destitute, afflicted, tormented; and yet how happy were they with their lot! They took joyfully the spoiling of their goods, rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer for Christ’s sake, and counted it all joy when they fell into divers temptations. Out of weakness they were made strong, and waxed valiant in fight: thus they were more than conquerors through him that loved them.

4. The sense we entertain of *our own weakness* is also a criterion of our being strengthened in the inner man.—An apostle could say, “When I am weak, then am I strong.” To a worldly mind this may appear highly paradoxical, but a babe in Christ may understand it. When we have the greatest sense of our own insufficiency for what is good, and feel that we are nothing, and without Christ can do nothing, then are we strong in the Lord and in the power of his might. But if we feel self-sufficient, confident, and disposed to lean to our own understanding, then are we weak indeed, and become an easy prey to the enemy. Peter was never so weak as when he thought there was no danger of falling, and boldly

said, "Though all men should forsake thee, yet will not I." Paul was never so strong as when he felt himself to be "nothing." When most sensible of our own insufficiency, we shall pray most for strength from heaven, and watch most against temptation; and by these means we shall be strengthened with strength in our souls.

II. We are led to notice the *desirableness* of the blessing prayed for.—Paul would not have been so importunate in his request, if it had not been of the greatest importance that we should not only be christians indeed, but grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. But there are other reasons which might be offered.

1. The Scriptures lay much stress on this, as tending to *glorify God*.—"Herein is my Father glorified, (saith Christ) that ye bear *much fruit*: so shall ye be my disciples." Every field will bear some fruit, in the ordinary course of things; but it is to the more abundant honour of the husbandman when his field brings forth thirty, sixty, or a hundred fold. So it is not merely by our being christians, that God is glorified; but by our being eminent christians. Nor is this all: if we be desirous only of so much grace as may carry us safely to heaven, it is doubtful whether we shall ever arrive there at last. Abounding in the fruits of righteousness is considered by our Lord as essential to the very existence of true religion; for, saith he, "*so shall ye be my disciples.*" Christ himself brought forth much fruit, and it is necessary that we resemble him.

2. Our *usefulness* depends much on our being strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.—If our souls be in a languishing state, what good can we do in the world? Ye are the salt of the earth; but if the salt have lost its savour, wherewith shall it be salted? It is thenceforth good for nothing. What good can we do in society, amongst our immediate connexions or in our families, but as we diffuse a savour of Christ? And how can this be done, if we ourselves have lost that savour, and are become lifeless and unfruitful in the ways of God! At the close of every day it becomes us to inquire, Has any one been improved by our conversation? Will any one think the better of Christ, from what they have heard

or seen in us? Or have we been amongst men merely as men of the world; and might they not say of us, What do ye more than others? He who possesses much religion, will impart more or less of it to those about him: he will not make a show of it; yet it must be seen. There is that in the outward mien, the inward temper, and daily conversation of a man of genuine religion, which indicate that he has been with Jesus. The modesty of his countenance, the meekness and cheerfulness of his disposition, the sweet familiarity and seriousness of his intercourse with men, enliven the circle in which he moves, and recommend the religion which he professes.

III. The *encouragement* we have to pray that we may be strengthened with might, by his Spirit in the inner man, is intimated by the phrase, "That he would grant you according to the *riches of his glory, &c.*"—When men are both rich and generous, and willing to give to the necessitous according to their ability, it affords a very powerful motive to solicit their assistance. But who can estimate the riches of God's goodness, and the boundless extent of his grace! And if he gives according to the riches of his glory, what encouragement is here for prayer! Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it, saith the Lord. Ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full. Let us ask much, and we shall have much: The Lord taketh pleasure in them that fear him, and in them that hope in his mercy. He who had but one talent, and went and hid it in the earth, lost it; but he who had five talents, and went and traded with the same, gained five other talents. Men who live to God, and whose whole concern is to promote his glory, shall find their sphere of usefulness enlarging with their activity, and that God is girding them with strength proportioned to their labours. Like their divine Master, their reward is with them, and their work before them. To him that hath, shall be given, and he shall have more abundantly; but from him that hath not, shall he take away, even that which he hath.

Letter I.

To Mrs. MEAD.

Kettering, Jan. 10, 1801.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

YOUR heavy affliction, and it seems, approaching dissolution, have not been forgotten by me ; though, through a multiplicity of concerns, I have not been able till now to write. I know it is a serious thing to *die* ; but I know also, that faith in the Son of God will remove mountains.

It was one of the consolations of our Lord to his sorrowful disciples, when about to be taken from them : *I go to prepare a place for you ; and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you to myself ; that where I am, there ye may be also : and whither I go ye know, and the way ye know.* What can I offer to my dear dying friend more suitable than a few remarks upon this interesting passage ?

If our Saviour had been going to some unknown place, and we must not follow him, we might well be unhappy : *but whither I go ye know.* It is true, we know nothing of an hereafter beyond what God in his word hath told us : but those lively oracles are a light in a dark place, whose cheering beams pierce the otherwise impervious gloom of futurity. When a dying heathen was asked whither he was going ? “ O my friends ! (said he) we know nothing of an hereafter.” Such must have been our answer, but for the glorious gospel of the blessed God. As it is, we know whither our Redeemer is gone : he is gone to his Father, and to our Father ; to his God, and to our God. He is gone to the Mount Sion ; to the city of the living God ; to the innumerable company of angels ; to the spirits of just men made perfect ; to God the judge of all. Whither he is gone, we know ; for we have had a foretaste of the bliss. As believers, we are already come to Mount Sion. The church below and the church above are only different branches of the same family ; so that he who is come to one, is come to the other.

But how are we to follow him, unless we *know the way*? If he come and receive us, he will be our guide. And this is not all; *The way we know*. Thomas thought he knew not whither his Lord was going, nor the way that led to him: yet he knew his Lord, and believed in him as the Son of God, and the Saviour of sinners. Jesus therefore answered, *I am the way, the truth, and the life*: knowing me, you know the way to the heavenly life. Yes, my dear friend, we not only know *whither* our Saviour is gone, but the *way* that leads to him. The doctrine of the Cross, as dear PEARCE observed, "is the only religion for a dying sinner."

If an affectionate father had resolved to remove to a distant country, he might not take his wife and children with him the first time; but might choose to go by himself, that he might encounter and remove the chief difficulties in the way, and make ready a habitation to receive them. Such was the conduct of our Saviour. *I go to prepare a place for you; and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also*. His passage through the territories of death, was attended with the most dreadful of all conflicts; but having overcome, it renders ours an easy one. Death to us is—*Jesus coming to receive us to himself*.

The presence of a beloved object is the grand preparative of any place; and that which gives it its principal charm. Such is his preparation of a place for us. Jesus is *there*; and that is enough. If any thing will operate as a magnet to attract us from earth to heaven, it is the consideration of being *where Jesus sitteth at the right hand of God*.

If before this reaches you, you have not received your discharge, accept my affectionate farewell. We shall soon meet again; and meet to part no more. May you enjoy a safe and comfortable passage, and have an entrance ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ!

My sympathizing remembrance also to Mr. Mead, and to your brother and sisters. The Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit!

Affectionately yours,

A. F.

Letter II.

TO MR. T. R.

Kettering, Feb. 24, 1801.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I DROP you a few lines by Mr. T. to express the sympathetic feelings of my mind with a family whom I sincerely respect. Doubtless you have sustained a loss in the removal of dear Mrs. Mead, yet there are circumstances, which if duly considered, must greatly alleviate it. She might have left a family of helpless children. Her life might have been such as to have disgraced her connexions; and their only relief might have been in endeavouring to forget her. Or, if she had sustained a fair character among men; yet if that had been *all*, you would have sorrowed as those who have no hope.

As I said to her in the prospect of death, so now I say to you: *Whither she is gone ye know; and the way ye know.* It is not to an unknown state, nor where you cannot follow her. You have only to be followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

Jesus went to *prepare a place for his followers.* We understand how he *prepares us for heaven*: But how does his presence *prepare heaven for us*? Three ways occur to me:—

First, As constituting *the essence of its blessedness.*—Think what an accession of joy his triumphant entrance must have occasioned through all the heavenly regions, and what a source of continued enjoyment his presence affords? What would some societies be without certain interesting characters, which are in a sort the life of them? And what would heaven be without Christ? The zest of the heavenly bliss consists in its being the place where *Christ sitteth at the right hand of God.* This is urged, and well it might be, as the grand motive to *set our affections on things above.*

Secondly, *As gathering together the whole family of heaven and earth.*—This redemption brings many multitudes to

glory, out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; and every one that enters adds to the enjoyment. In order to connect us together in the closest bonds of affection, God has so ordered it, that both in this world and that which is to come, our blessedness should be bound up with that of each other; in seeing the good of his chosen, rejoicing in the gladness of his nation, and glorying with his inheritance. Hence it follows, that every accession to the heavenly world affords an influx to the enjoyment of its inhabitants. Every one that goes before may be said to contribute to the preparing of the place for them, which follow after. The pure river of the water of life has its origin in the throne of God, and the Lamb; but in its progress it passes through various mediums, which swell its streams, and render it more and more delectable. From the entrance of Abel into the New Jerusalem, to this day, it has been rising higher and higher, and will continue to do so till all the nations of the saved are collected together.

Thirdly, *As superintending the concerns of the Universe, and causing all events to work together and produce a great and ultimate good.*—Glory awaits the righteous immediately upon their departure from the body; but a much greater glory is in reserve. Innumerable events in the system of providence must remain inexplicable, till the mystery of God be finished. It is impossible for spectators to comprehend the use of all the parts of a complicate machine, till it is constructed and put into motion. And as our Forerunner is now preparing the scenery of this grand exhibition, and hastening it to its desired issue, it is thus that he is preparing a place for us.

From hence we are encouraged to be looking for, and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, and directed to consider it as the period when we shall be fully *satisfied*. How solemn, and yet how sweet, is the description of it. *The Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and the trumpet of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first. A shout*, methinks, denotes the universal joy of heaven for the arrival of the day when the war is terminated in victory, and the last enemy is destroyed. The blowing of a *trumpet*, may probably allude to that of jubilee, on which the pri-
son

doors were thrown open, and the captives set at liberty. Such were the consolations presented to the Thesalonians on the death of their christian friends.

Our Lord did not absolutely forbid his apostles to weep at his departure : he himself *wept* at the grave of Lazarus ; but he dissuaded them from *excessive* grief—Let not your heart be troubled. I think that I never felt what may be called *heart trouble*, or *deep* distress, for the loss of any person, however near to me, whose death I considered merely as a removal to the church above. The words of our Saviour are here applicable : *If ye loved me ye would rejoice, because I go to the Father ; for my Father is greater than I.* That is, the glory I go to possess with my Father is greater than any thing I could inherit upon earth ; and therefore, if ye loved me, and your love operated in a proper way, you would rather be glad for my sake, than sorry for your own.

Present our kind and sympathizing regards to Mr. M. and all the family, and accept the same yourself, from

Yours affectionately,

A. F.