

THE  
**WORKS**  
OF  
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CONTAINING  
AN AUTHENTIC NARRATIVE, &C., LETTERS ON RELIGIOUS SUBJECTS, CARDIPHONIA,  
DISCOURSES INTENDED FOR THE PULPIT,  
SERMONS PREACHED IN THE PARISH CHURCH OF OLNEY,  
A REVIEW OF ECCLESIASTICAL HISTORY, OLNEY HYMNS, POEMS,  
MESSIAH, OCCASIONAL SERMONS, AND TRACTS.

TO WHICH ARE PREFIXED  
**MEMOIRS OF HIS LIFE, &c.**

BY THE REV. R. CECIL, A. M.

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**COMPLETE IN ONE VOLUME.**

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## SERMON XXXI.

### THE GOSPEL-MESSAGE, GLAD TIDINGS.

*(As it is written), How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things! ROMANS x. 15.*

THE account which the apostle Paul gives of his first reception among the Galatians (Gal. iv. 15), exemplifies the truth of this passage. He found them in a state of ignorance and misery; alienated from God, and enslaved to the blind and comfortless superstitions of idolatry. His preaching, accompanied with the power of the Holy Spirit, had a great and marvellous effect. His principal subject was the death of Jesus, who had lately suffered as a malefactor at Jerusalem. Though the transaction was past, and the scene at a considerable distance, yet by the manner of his representation, the fact was realized to their minds; and they could have been no more affected, had they been actually upon the spot at the time. Jesus Christ was exhibited to them as crucified before their eyes, Gal. iii. 1. By the same divine energy they were instructed in the knowledge of his character, who he was, and why he suffered; and likewise understood their own need of such a Saviour. Thus they hearkened to him, not with the indifference of the Athenians, but with application of all that he said to themselves. They heard, they believed, and they rejoiced. The apostle reminds them, that they had not received a cold speculative doctrine, but such a one as imparted a blessedness to them. This, indeed, many of them afterwards lost, when they were unhappily seduced by false teachers. But for a time the knowledge of a Saviour so exactly suited to their circumstances made them happy; and while they were so, they felt very strong emotions of gratitude and esteem for the messenger who brought them these glad tidings, though he was by many accounted and treated as the off-scouring and filth of all things, the Galatians received him as an angel of God, and attended to him, as if the Lord, who sent him, had spoken to them in person. And although he had till then been an entire stranger to them, his message opened a way to their hearts, and they gave him every testimony of the most cordial friendship; insomuch that, had it been possible, they would have plucked out their own eyes, and have given them to him.

Thus, likewise, when Philip preached the gospel in Samaria, the consequence was great joy in that city, Acts viii. 8. But when the gospel is thus gladly received, there must be a suitable disposition of mind. It is sent to the poor. It is designed to heal the broken hearted, to deliver the captives, and to give sight to the blind, Luke iv. 18. And therefore they who are well satisfied

with themselves, who say, We see, and who boast of their freedom, cannot possibly judge either of the truth or of the importance of the gospel doctrine. As the Lord waters the earth with a profusion worthy of his magnificence and bounty, and does not confine his rain to cultivated soils; so the good seed of his word often falls upon the highway, upon the rocks, and among thorns (Luke viii. 13–15); but it is only productive upon the good ground of an honest and good heart. Not that any human heart is truly good by nature, but some are prepared for the reception of the truth. And this preparation is the first effect of the word, when it brings forth fruit unto life eternal. It undeceives those who were for a time deluded with vain hopes, and convinces them that they are poor, and blind, and wretched, and helpless. Then they gladly accept the gospel of peace, and the message is to them as life from the dead.

The passage in the prophet Isaiah, from which my text is quoted, is very animated and descriptive. “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings!” Isa. lii. 7. Imagine a distressed people, at the will and disposal of a conqueror, who was justly offended with them, and under an anxious trembling uncertainty how he would treat them. If an authorized messenger should inform them, that, instead of the punishment they deserved, the king vouchsafed them a free pardon, was ready to receive them with favour, and to bestow honours and possessions upon all who applied to him, without excepting the most guilty, even the ringleaders in rebellion: how welcome would this messenger be to them! This, indeed, is beyond the manner of men. No earthly monarch has either magnanimity to make, or power to make good, so gracious and unlimited a proclamation to a whole nation of rebels. But this is the manner of the great God. Such an act of grace is the gospel. An act of grace to sinners, yet founded in righteousness, and displaying the glory of his justice equally with the riches of mercy. For it is founded on the mediation of the Son of his love, and procured by his blood. The messengers of this grace are thus welcomed and honoured by those who believe their report, and are esteemed very highly in love for their work’s sake, 1 Thess. v. 13. We may observe,

I. The message of the gospel is glad tidings of peace and good things.

II. The messengers, or preachers, find ample reward in their success and acceptance.

I. According to the Hebrew idiom (which frequently obtains in the New Testament), all good things are comprised in the term *peace*. They are eminently comprised in the peace of the gospel; for it is the peace of God which passeth understanding. It brings a blessed assurance, that Messiah has made peace by the blood of his cross. They who believe this good report, derive from it peace of conscience; and are enabled to say, Though thou wert justly

angry, thine anger is turned away, Isa. xii. 1. It dispels their fears and forebodings, and inspires them with liberty to come to God as children; consequently, on their parts, alienation and enmity cease. They no longer conceive of him as an avenging judge or a hard master. They no longer dispute his authority, nor repine at his appointments. They become a willing people. They yield themselves to him. They cultivate peace in all their connections. The forgiveness and bounty they have received, teaches them likewise to forgive, and be kind as they have opportunity. They possess such good things as the world can neither give nor take away: Communion with God, grace, wisdom, and power. They serve him with their all, and are supported by his good Spirit in every trying circumstance; and they have a good hope, which enables them to rejoice in tribulation, and to smile in death.

If the wickedness and obstinacy of mankind were not so strongly described and exemplified in the Bible, and if we could forget that this obstinate perverseness was once our own character, we should find it difficult to conceive, after we understand the nature and design of the gospel, upon what grounds a scheme so wisely and completely adapted to relieve men from misery, to promote their present comfort, and to secure their future happiness, should, instead of being received with thankfulness, generally excite contempt and opposition. Can the world afford a peace which shall abide and cheer the heart under all the changing circumstances incident to us in this mortal state? Can it propose any good, any honours, profit, or pleasures, worthy of being compared with the honour which cometh from God only, the light of his countenance, and the riches of glory? Can the influence of the world preserve us from trouble, or support us under it, or deliver us out of it? Has it any charms capable of soothing the anguish of a wounded conscience? Can it obviate the stroke, or overcome the fear of death? Or can it inspire the soul with confidence and joy, in the contemplation of that approaching day, when we must all appear before the tribunal of the supreme Judge? That the world, if we possessed the whole of it, cannot do these things for us, is acknowledged by many, and felt by all. The gospel proposes a cordial for every care, a balm for every wound; and none who make the experiment of its efficacy are disappointed. In other cases, they who have received great obligations may speak highly of their benefactor; and they who beyond hope, have been recovered from a dangerous malady, may commend the skill and care of their physician, to those who are labouring under the same disease, without giving offence. But if they who have obtained life and peace by believing in Jesus, proclaim his goodness, and point him out to their fellow-sinners as the only Physician and Saviour of souls, their testimony is charged with folly, and their endeavours rejected with scorn, as officious and impertinent. Men, while left to themselves, will not come to him that they may have life. The God of this world so works upon their prejudices, pride, and

passions, that though the light of truth shines around them like the light of the sun, the eyes of their mind are blinded, and they are pleased with their darkness, and unwilling to see, 2 Cor. iv. 4. Hence of the few, comparatively, who are favoured with a clear and faithful dispensation of the gospel, the greater part, it is to be feared, reject the counsel of God against themselves; and his ministers in all ages, have had cause to adopt the prophet's complaint, "Lord, who hath believed our report?" Is. liii. 1. It would be thus universally, if the Lord, who gave the word, and who sends forth the preachers, had not engaged his promise, that they shall not labour wholly in vain, nor spend their strength for nought. He prepares a people to serve him, and to show forth his praise. And while some mock, others refuse to hear (Acts xvii. 32), and others, with an indolent indifference, are content to hear again and again, there are others whose hearts are opened to receive the truth in the love of it. They hear and believe to everlasting life.

II. The instruments of this happy change find their reward in their work. It being owned to the salvation of a few, they are compensated for all the opposition they meet with from the many; and this on a twofold account:

First, and principally, for the love they bear to their Lord, and to souls for his sake.

To see his name made precious to the hearts of sinners; to see those who were blind admiring his excellency; to see those who were so far off from God brought so nigh; to see those who were wretched rejoicing in his goodness; to hear those whose lips were filled with folly, falsehood, or blasphemy, proclaiming his praise; such salutary effects of their ministry fill them likewise with praise and joy: and when their hearers express the power and spirit of the gospel in their tempers and conduct, they can say, "Now we live, if you stand fast in the Lord," 1 Thess. iii. 8.

A secondary satisfaction, which of itself is sufficient to make them full amends for all the scorn of an unkind world, is the share they have in the affections of the people who are thus benefited by their ministry. This is the popularity which alone is desirable. It would be a small thing to be able merely to hold a multitude by the ears; but to be approved and loved by those to whom the Lord has made them useful, is a high honour, and a source of sublime pleasure. When Peter and John (Acts iii. 11) had healed the lame man, I doubt not but they were more affected by the simple honest testimony of his gratitude, than by the unmeaning wonder of all the surrounding multitude. If a true servant of the Lord, by any advantage of abilities or elocution, should attach a large congregation to a personal regard for himself, should be admired and beloved by them, and yet discover no attachment in them to the Saviour whom he preaches, their partiality to him would give him but little pleasure. He would be more ready to weep over them, than to rejoice in

the preference they gave him. For he seeks not their applause, but their edification; and he aims not to promote his own glory, but the glory of him who sent him, John vi. 18. He is indeed, glad to see them attending upon the means which God has promised to bless. But the faithfulness and closeness of his addresses to their consciences, by which many are sooner or later disgusted and driven away, is a proof that he does not want them merely to make up a number about him. They who make the office of a preacher an occasion whereby to promote their own interest or reputation, may, perhaps, obtain the reward they seek; but it is such a reward as can only satisfy a weak and mercenary mind; and from him, whose name they prostitute, they can only expect the reward assigned to hypocrites and unbelievers.

But true Christians will, and do, set a high value upon the ministers who, with simplicity and godly sincerity, preach the gospel of peace, in such a manner as to evidence that they are influenced by a regard to the glory of God, and to the good of souls; and they give proof of their affection in more ways than by speaking well of them.

1. By the satisfaction with which they accept a faithful ministry, as a balance to the trials they meet with in common life. There are many poor and many afflicted people, who have little comfort in the things of this life, and in their own houses. Some are pinched by penury, and some who live in opulence, yet dwell, as the psalmist expresses it (Psal. lvii. 4), in the fire and among lions. They suffer not less than the others, though to a different way, from the unkindness and opposition of their nearest connections. But in the house of God, they are satisfied and comforted. And, according to the words of the prophet, though the Lord is pleased to give them the bread of adversity, and the water of affliction (Is. xxx. 20), yet since their teachers are not removed into corners, but they have free access to the preaching of his word, and can attend upon a minister who careth for their souls, and meets them, when they are weary, with a word in season, they bear their appointed cross with cheerfulness. Though they have much bitterness of heart at home, known only to themselves, they have a pleasure which a stranger intermeddleth not with, when they go up to the house of the Lord. But if the instrument, who is the messenger of God to them for good, be removed, and they are deprived of these opportunities, the regard they bore him is manifested by their sorrow for losing him; which often affects them more sensibly than all their other griefs.

2. By taking kindly and in good part his most searching discourses in public, or even his reproofs and admonitions in private, if needful. For they know that he watches over their souls, as one who must give an account, Heb. xiii. 17. And because they love him, they do all in their power to make the service a pleasure and not a grief to him. They do not wish him to speak smooth things to them, or to entertain them with the discussion of points in

which they have little concern, but to hear that which is suitable to their own case and circumstances. And if the preacher discovers to them, that through inadvertence, they have allowed themselves in any wrong practice, or have lived in the omission of any duty, instead of being offended with his plain dealing, they love him the better for it.

3. By their tenderness and sympathy with him in all his exercises; and by their care, according to their ability, to make his situation comfortable, and to avoid every thing that might give him just occasion for complaint or grief. The trials of a faithful minister are neither few nor small. His work is great; he is sure to meet with enemies and discouragements. He travails in birth for souls (Gal. iv. 19); he is pained by the opposition of the wicked, the inconstancy of the wavering, and the inconsistency of many who make profession of the truth. He feels many anxieties for those who are enquiring the way to the kingdom, lest they should be turned aside and hindered; and too often the hopes he had indulged, of some who discovered a concern for religion, are disappointed. His inward conflicts are many. He often walks in much weakness, fear, and trembling, 1 Cor. ii. 3. When he considers what he is, what he ought to be, and what he has to do, he is often distressed, afraid, and ashamed, and unable to speak. His path is spread with snares, his heart wounded with temptations. But his judicious hearers have some knowledge of what he endures for their sakes and in their service; they love him, pity him, and pray for him, and their kind attention comforts him under all his tribulations.

Sometimes their regard is rather improperly expressed; as when they not only value his ministry, but hold him so highly a favourite, that they can hardly hear another. A preference is certainly due to the person who is made especially useful; but no faithful preacher should be slighted. Though gifts and abilities are not equal in all, yet they are all the Lord's messengers, and entitled to regard.

Again, it is an improper regard, if they yield themselves implicitly to him, to be governed by his will. So far as we speak agreeably to the scripture, which is the rule and standard of faith and practice both to you and to us, we are authorized to require your attention and obedience; but you are not bound to receive what we propose merely upon our own authority. There are those who account ignorance the mother of devotion, and expect an implicit compliance with their injunctions, by virtue of their office and personal influence. But a true minister will account it his honour and pleasure to preach to an enlightened people who love and study the Bible, and, like the Bereans, search the scriptures (Acts xvii. 11), to see if things are so as represented. We have no dominion over your faith, but wish to be helpers of your joy, 2 Cor. i. 24. Nor do we pretend to dominion over your purses, though we are to remind you of the apostle's charge, "To do good, and to communicate, forget not," Hebrews, xiii. 16.

How much are they to be pitied, who account that word of grace a burden, which to those who receive it with thankfulness, proves the balm and cordial of life! Take heed how you hear. If the gospel is not made to you a savour of life, it will be a savour of death. It will aggravate your guilt and condemnation, and leave you utterly hopeless and inexcusable. If you continue impenitent and obstinate, the hour is coming when you will wish you had never heard of the name of Jesus. It had been better for you never to have been born, or to have lived and died among the savage Indians, or to have been an idiot or a lunatic to the end of your days, than to have lived where the doctrine of salvation was published in your hearing, if you finally reject the counsel of God against yourselves!