

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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## SERMON XXXIV.

### OPPOSITION TO MESSIAH IN VAIN.

*He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh; the Lord shall have them in derision.* PSALM ii. 4.

THE extent and efficacy of the depravity of mankind, cannot be fully estimated by the conduct of Heathens destitute of divine revelation. We may say of the gospel, in one sense, what the apostle says of the law, "It entered that sin might abound," Rom. v. 20. It afforded occasion for displaying the alienation of the heart of man from the blessed God in the strongest light. The sensuality, oppression, and idolatry which have prevailed in all ages, sufficiently prove the wickedness of men to be very great. But the opposition which they who have rebelled against the government of their Creator, make to the proposals of his grace, is a proof still more sinking. If sin has so hardened their hearts, and blinded their eyes, that of themselves they neither can nor will implore his mercy; yet it might be thought that if the great God, whom they have so heinously offended, should be pleased, of his own goodness, to make the first overtures of reconciliation, and to invite them to receive pardon, they would gladly attend to his gracious declaration; especially when they are informed, that to preserve them from perishing, he gave up his only Son to sufferings and death. But when they not only defy his power, but insult his goodness; when they reject and blaspheme the Saviour whom he commends to them; when they are but the more exasperated by his tenders of mercy; when they scorn his message, and persecute his messengers by whom he intreats them to be reconciled; this mad and ungrateful carriage shows such a rooted enmity against God in fallen men, as even the fallen angels are not capable of discovering. For Messiah took not on him the nature of angels, nor did he make proposals of mercy to them. But he did take upon him our nature. He visited us in person, for us he lived a sufferer, and died that we might live. The prophets foresaw and foretold the reception he would meet with, and their predictions were fulfilled. The Jews who professed to expect him, and the Heathens who had not heard of him, united their utmost efforts to withstand and defeat the purposes of his unexampled love. What must the holy angels think of the baseness, presumption, and obstinacy of such creatures!

But rebellion against God is not only wickedness, but folly and infatuation in the extreme. "Who ever hardened himself against the Lord and prospered?" Job, x. 4. He whom they opposed, and against whom they thought they had prevailed when they saw him dead upon the cross, soon resumed his glory and his throne. The text therefore principally respects the opposition

made to his gospel and to his kingdom after his ascension, which is still carrying on, but which always was, and always will be in vain. The words I have read offer two points for the consolation of those who love him, and for the timely consideration of those who have hitherto disregarded him.

I. That he sitteth in the heavens.

II. The notice he taketh of his enemies; he smiles at their rage, and treats both their power and their policy with contempt.

I. He whom God has anointed (therefore called Messiah), he against whom kings and rulers, nations and the people rage, sitteth in the heavens. He has finished his great work, and entered into his rest; having by himself purged our sins, he is immovably seated on his throne, at the right hand of the majesty on high, Heb. i. 3. He is the Head, King, and Lord of principalities, dominions, and powers, possessed of all authority, unchangeably fixed over all, God blessed for evermore, Rom. ix. 5. In this character he is the Representative, High-Priest, Advocate, and Shepherd of all who put their trust in him. He is ever mindful of them. While he is preparing a place for them near himself, by the power of his Spirit, he maintains an intercourse with them, and manifests himself to them as he does not to the world. By his providence, which ruleth over all, he manages their concerns upon earth, supplies their wants, and gives them present and effectual help and support in their time of trouble. To him their eyes and hearts are directed, they look to him and are enlightened (Psal. xxxiv. 5), strengthened, and comforted. And under his protection they are safe. He having taken charge of them, and engaged to save them to the uttermost, no weapon formed against them can prosper. Now they may draw nigh to God with boldness, for they have one who ever liveth to make intercession for them. Now they may lay aside all anxious, uneasy cares, for they have a mighty Friend who careth for them. Now they may say, each one for himself, "I will trust and not be afraid, for the Lord Jehovah is my strength, and my song, and my salvation," Is. xii. 2. Whether you have indeed fled to him for refuge as the hope set before you, committed your soul to him, and accepted him in all his offices, as your Prophet, Priest, and King, is a point of experience; if you have, he knows it, for he enabled you to do it; and he will not disappoint the hope and expectation which he himself has wrought in you. If you have, methinks you must know it likewise. Have you not done it more than once? Do you not daily repeat this surrender of yourself to him? It is certainly possible to assent to the truths of the gospel, considered merely as doctrines or propositions, yea to plead and dispute for them with much seeming earnestness, and yet to be entirely a stranger to their power. But I trust that they to whom I now speak will understand me. Our Lord reminded Nathanael of what had passed under the fig-tree (John i. 48), when he thought himself alone. Do not I remind you of seasons, when no eye but the eye of Him who seeth in secret was upon

you? Did not you then and there, once and again, accept him as your Saviour, upon the warrant of his own word, devote yourselves to his service, resign yourselves to his disposal, and entrust yourselves to his care? Then fear not. He that sitteth in the heavens is on your side. If the premises be well grounded, the inference is sure. And though many may rise up against you, they shall not prevail; for he will teach your hands to war, and your fingers to fight, will cover your head in the day of battle, and in the end make you more than conquerors. For the battle is not yours, but the Lord's. Your enemies are his, and his cause is yours. They who associate against him shall be dashed in pieces, as the billows break and die upon a rocky shore.

II. The feebleness and insignificance of their rage against Messiah, is intimated by the manner in which he notices their proceedings; he holds them in derision, he laughs them to scorn. He has them perfectly under his control, holds them in a chain when they think themselves most at liberty, appoints the bounds beyond which they cannot pass, and can in a moment check them, and make them feel his hook and bridle, when in the height of their career.

It is the Lord's pleasure not only to favour and to support his people, but to do it in such a way that it may appear to be wholly his own work, and that the praise belongs to him alone. And therefore he permits their enemies for a season to try if they can prevent his designs. For a season, things take such a course that their attempts seem to prosper; they threaten, they boast, and confidently expect to carry their point. But the contest always issues in their shame and confusion. He not only disconcerts their schemes, but makes them instrumental to the promoting of his own designs. Thus when he sent Moses to deliver Israel from Egypt, Pharaoh, instead of complying with his command, increased their burdens, added to the rigour of their bondage, and, though rebuked by a succession of severe judgments, he hardened himself the more, and was determined to detain them if he could. But he could not detain them a day or an hour beyond the appointed time which God had long before made known to Abraham, Exod. xii. 41, 42. Then they were delivered, and Pharaoh and his host overthrown in the Red Sea. Hereby the name of the God of Israel was more known, noticed and magnified, than it would have been, if Pharaoh had dismissed the people without reluctance or delay.

In like manner, when Messiah left the earth, his followers were considered as sheep without a shepherd. The world conspired to suppress his cause, and to root out the remembrance of his people. But the methods they employed counteracted their own designs. They who were dispersed by the persecution that followed the death of Stephen, preached the word wherever they went, the gospel spread from place to place, and the number of disciples daily increased. So that the Jewish rulers soon found themselves unequal to the task, and foreboded their own disappointment, doubting whereunto these things would grow, Acts v. 24. In some cases the Lord signally interposed,

and shewed how entirely the lives and the hearts of his adversaries were in his hands. The haughty Herod was suddenly smitten by an invisible hand, with a loathsome and mortal disease, Acts xii. 23. He fell, devoured by worms, but the success of the gospel, which he had presumed to withstand, greatly increased and spread. The furious zeal of Saul of Tarsus (Acts ix), against the truth, was silenced in a different manner. Jesus, whom he ignorantly persecuted, appeared to him in the way to Damascus, when he was breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples, disarmed his rage, made him a monument of his mercy, and an earnest and successful preacher of the faith which he had laboured to destroy.

From the Jews, the business was transferred to the Heathens, whose opposition was no less unavailing. Though they sometimes affected to boast that they had suppressed the Christian name, the gospel was propagated in defiance of their attempts to prevent it. The worst and the best of the Roman emperors were alike industrious, and alike unsuccessful, in their endeavours to stifle the work of God. At length, in the reign of Constantine, the Christian religion obtained the sanction and protection of imperial authority.

But it soon appeared that the religion of the New Testament gained little advantage by this revolution. Though the worship of heathen idols gradually declined, and sunk into disrepute, the bulk of the people of all ranks were only changed in name. The world still lay in wickedness (1 John v. 19), and true Christianity was still exposed to persecution. When the name of Christian ceased to be invidious and despicable, new names were soon invented to stigmatize the real servants of God; and ecclesiastical power gradually increased, till the mystery of iniquity reigned for ages in the temple of God. The persecutions of Popery equalled and exceeded those of Paganism. And they who aspired to be Christians indeed, were constrained, like the worthies of old, to wander on mountains and in deserts, to hide themselves in dens and caves of the earth, Heb. xi. 38. Yet, under all disadvantages, there was still a remnant, according to the election of grace, who could not be compelled to wear the mark of the beast. And while persecutors, who could only kill the body, seemed to weaken the church militant, they increased the number and the songs of the church triumphant.

To appearance the church of Christ was often brought low. It was very low at the time of the Reformation. But then it suddenly was revived, and broke forth like the sun from behind a dark cloud; and the light of the gospel was diffused far and wide, almost as at the beginning, in the apostles days. But Protestants were quickly actuated by the same spirit as their Popish and Pagan predecessors had been. The form of Christianity was professed and protected, and the power of it denied and opposed. And to this day it remains a truth verified by experience, that all who will live godly in Christ Jesus, must, in one way or other, suffer persecution, 1 Tim. iii. 12.

Of late years the sanguinary spirit, which, under pretence of doing God service, destroyed his people by fire and tortures, is much subsided. We live in a time when great pretences are made to candour and moderation. We have reason to be thankful for our religious liberty, to the good providence of God. But so far as men are concerned, we are not indebted for it, to a just sense and acknowledgment of the right of private judgment, but to the prevalence of sceptical indifference and infidelity. The religion of the gospel was, perhaps, never more despised and hated than at present. We seem to be returning apace to the state of the primitive ages, when there were but two sorts of persons, Christians and infidels. But notwithstanding all the arts and assaults of men, whether open enemies or pretended friends, the Bible is still extant, the gospel is still preached, yea, is still spreading. The Lord has always had a people, though they have been often hidden from the general notice and observation of men. He that sitteth in the heavens laughs his opposers to scorn, and maintains his own cause in defiance of them all.

Surely if this work was not of God, the united efforts of kings, councils, popes, philsoophers, the great, the wise, the decent, and the profligate, must have overthrown it long ago. If a miracle be demanded in proof of Christianity, behold one! Though the world has been raging and plotting against it, from its first appearance; though it has been fiercely assaulted by those without, and shamefully betrayed by many within, it still subsists, it still flourishes. And subsist it shall, for it is maintained by him, who has the hearts of all men in his hands, and can control or change them as he pleases. He can, and he will, support and strengthen his people under all their sufferings. He can disappoint his adversaries by unexpected events, divide them among themselves, and so manage them by his providence, as to make them protect and promote the very cause which they hate. And whenever he pleases, he can, as it were, from the stones (Matth, iii. 9), raise up instruments to carry on his work, and to show forth his praise. Therefore,

1. Let not his people tremble for the ark. Our eyes indeed should affect our hearts. It becomes us to be jealous for the Lord of hosts, to be concerned for the contempt and dishonour that is cast upon his government and grace, to be grieved for the abounding abominations of the day, and to pity and pray for obstinate sinners who know not what they do. But we need not fear the failure of his promise. His truth and honour are engaged for the success of his gospel, and they must stand or fall together. It is a cause dearer to him than it can be to us. The manifestation of his glory in the salvation of sinners, by the doctrine of the cross, is the one great concern, for which the succession of day and night, and of the seasons of the year, is continued, and the visible frame of nature is preserved. He will work, and none shall let it. The kingdoms of the earth shall become the kingdoms of the Lord and of his Christ. The fulness of the Gentiles shall come in, and the dispersed of Israel shall

return to the Lord their God, and be saved. These great events, to those who judge by an eye of sense, and according to the present state of things, may appear improbable or impossible. But the Lord of hosts hath purposed, and who shall disannul it? His hand is stretched out, and who shall turn it back? Is. xiv. 27.

2. Think it neither strange nor hard, if any of you are called to suffer for the sake of the truth. Think it not strange; for thus it has been from the beginning. Think it not hard; for our sufferings are small, if compared with the lot of many who have lived before us. We are not called to resist unto blood. Many prophets and righteous men have desired to see such days of liberty as we are favoured with, but have not seen them.

3. Consider seriously, Who is on the Lord's side? His is the strongest side, and must prevail. If you have yielded yourselves to him, and taken upon you his yoke, your best interests are safe, your final happiness is secured. Nothing can separate you from his love. You shall be kept by his power through faith, and no weapon formed against you shall prosper. But if you are against him, tremble, for the day of his wrath will come; "it will burn like an oven, and all the proud, and all that do wickedly, shall be as stubble, and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of hosts, and shall leave them neither root nor branch," Mal. iv. 1. Turn therefore in time from your evil ways, submit yourselves unto him, and implore his mercy while he waiteth to be gracious, that iniquity may not be your ruin.