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THE CREDIBILITY OF THE GOSPEL.

1 TIMOTHY 1:5. *This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all ac-
ception, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners;
of whom I am chief.*

THE sentiments expressed in these words form a perfect contrast to those which Paul, before his conversion, entertained in relation to Jesus Christ and the gospel. While the malicious prejudices of a Pharisee rankled in his breast, he verily thought that he did God service in persecuting the followers of the Redeemer. His own confession, concerning his former bitter opposition to christianity is in the following strong and candid language: "I persecuted this way unto the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women." Before King Agrippa, he acknowledged again, "I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them."

Under the influence of this hostile rage against the innocent unoffending disciples of Jesus, we find him applying to the high priest at Jerusalem, and desiring of him letters to Damascus, to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem. But how memorable in the history of Paul's life, and how important to the church of Christ, was that remarkable and happy event by which his whole inhuman plot was frustrated! He had advanced far in his journey, and had almost reached Damascus, where his murderous spirit was to have vented its malignant rage against every devoted follower of the Redeemer who might fall in his way. But while this furious, persecuting zealot was meditating vengeance, the benevolent Savior surprised him with a most signal display of his mercy. Then it was, that a great light suddenly shone around him from heaven, and he was so overpowered

by the radiance of that light, that he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, *Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?* This divine expostulation came home to the heart of the infuriated persecutor with a resistless energy, and in a moment all his prejudices were overcome, he was melted down in penitence and holy submission, and in the spirit of an humble and genuine disciple he immediately inquires, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?"

Very shortly after his conversion, by divine commission, Paul commenced preaching the faith which he once endeavored to destroy. His zeal in preaching the word, and his activity in promoting the cause of Christ, was greatly superior to that with which he had formerly opposed it.

¶The office of the ministry, he justly esteemed peculiarly honorable and sacred, and frequently in his writings takes occasion to express his grateful sense of the divine goodness in committing a trust so holy, and so important, to him. To this pious and devout feeling he had just been giving vent in our context. In the three verses immediately preceding the text, he uses the following humble, grateful, and ardently pious expressions, "I thank Christ Jesus, our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry; who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious." His former furious zeal in persecuting the church of Christ, he appears ever to have recollected with deep humiliation, and with most affectionate gratitude to a God of sovereign and boundless mercy, who could not only pardon his enormous guilt, but also, appoint him to preach the faith he had labored to destroy. Under this feeling of pious humility and deep self-abasement, he adds yet further, "And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant, with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus." In the text St. Paul sends Timothy an epitome, or brief abstract of that gospel which Jesus Christ had commissioned him to preach, and of which Timothy was probably at that time a student. *This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.*

We shall consider, and endeavor to improve this subject under the following propositions:

I. *The world is in such a state as to render a Savior absolutely necessary.*

II. *It is a faithful saying, or doctrine, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.*

III. *This faithful saying is worthy of all acceptation.*

I. *The world is in such a state as to render a Savior absolutely necessary.* Two circumstances in the condition of fallen apostate man, will demonstrate his absolute need of a gracious and almighty Savior, his *guilt* and his *impotency*. That all men are sinners, is a doctrine believed by every one who believes the Bible. Guilt, or liability to punishment, is the just and inevitable consequence of sin. The law of God being "holy, just, and good," necessarily condemns man for every unholy action. The divine law requires a *full* and *perfect* conformity to all its precepts, both in the *state* of our hearts

and in the *character* of our actions. If we fail in one point, *only*, we are necessarily subjected to its righteous penalty; for it is written, "Cursed is every one that continueth not in *all things* which are written in the book of the law to do them." The law of God is *immutable* in its nature, and *indispensable* in its obligations. It never can approve of sin, or hold and treat the transgressor of its sacred requirements as guiltless. It is, and will forever remain true, "that the wages of sin," (its just punishment) "is death." The perfect law of God must for ever exclude from the felicities of a holy heaven, every creature that is not perfectly holy and upright. For the same reason it must forever consign the unholy and the impenitent to the pains and penalties of the prison of Tophet. If these plain remarks be founded in truth, every sinner on earth must despair of being justified or saved by his own righteousness. Either God's righteous law must *relax* in its holy and immutable requirements, or man, sinful, impenitent man, must be subjected to its everlasting curse. The necessity, therefore, of a Mediator, to make an atonement for our guilt, is obvious and undeniable. The holiness and justice of the Divine Lawgiver, and the indispensable claims of his righteous government imperiously require, that, if sinful man be pardoned and restored to the favor of heaven, some personage greater than himself should make *an expiation* for his sins, and satisfy, in his stead, the claims of violated justice. The guilty condition of the human family, or the undeniable fact that all men are by nature under sin and condemnation, is proof, amply sufficient, that a Savior was absolutely needed.

We mentioned, also, the *impotency* of fallen man, as another proof of the necessity of a Savior. By man's *impotency*, in this connection, we intend his inability by any works or endeavors of his own to secure or accomplish his own salvation. The apostle Paul, in writing to the church at Rome, speaking of the love of Christ in undertaking the work of our redemption, takes particular notice of man's helpless state as a sinner. In chapter 5, verse 6, he writes thus, "When we were yet *without strength*, in due time Christ died for the ungodly." We could neither render to the divine law that perfect obedience which, from its holy nature, it necessarily requires, nor did we possess ability to endure its severe and righteous *penalty*. Our destitution of strength in these respects, rendered the benevolent interposition and gracious mediation of the Lord Jesus Christ necessary to the accomplishment of our salvation. It did not seem fit that the holy and righteous Governor of the universe, should pardon and save sinners without an adequate atonement. It pleased God to adopt such a plan of redemption as would be calculated to bring a revenue of glory to his own divine attributes. He determined to exercise his mercy towards the guilty upon principles which might display in view of the whole rational universe, the glorious holiness of his character, and show him to be a God of truth and righteousness, by the same dispensation which proves him to be the benevolent Savior of the lost, the helpless, and the miserable. Not only was fallen man unable to accomplish his own salvation by his own efforts; but there was no creature, even those of the most exalted rank, that could afford him deliverance. Every rational subject

of God's moral government is bound to render constant and perfect obedience to his law on his own account. The obedience, therefore, of *one creature*, could not be imputed to *another*. The righteousness of Gabriel, though absolutely spotless, could avail *only* for himself. It could not be placed to the account of any one of the human family. Hence it is plain, that the most exalted creatures could never do any thing to redeem their brethren of Adam's apostate race. It is equally obvious, too, that they could not endure, in our stead, the penalty of God's violated law. The mightiest angel in heaven did not possess strength sufficient to sustain the wrath and curse due to the injured justice of God for the transgressions of men. How certainly, then, how inevitably must the whole human family have perished forever, had not their help been laid upon a Redeemer, who is both gracious and mighty to save.

How shall man be just with God? was a problem which the wisest sages of antiquity were not able to solve. They saw convincing proofs of the apostate condition of man, and of his consequent liability to the penalties of his Creator's righteous law; but upon what terms the transgressor might be restored to the favor of God, and be blessed with a sure title to the glorious inheritance of heaven, was a subject veiled from their minds in impenetrable darkness, and one on which rested the appalling gloom of uncertainty and death. It is true, the idea of the infinite goodness of Deity was calculated to raise a faint hope of mercy, but the glorious and awful attributes of the *divine justice* and holiness would, at the same time, serve to throw dismal uncertainty over the hope of forgiveness, and would necessarily render the situation of the convicted delinquent unspeakably gloomy and distressing. In order to restore peace to the conscience of the convicted sinner, it is necessary that we should be prepared to give a certain and satisfactory answer to his anxious inquiry, "What must I do to be saved?" On this momentous question, it is natural for the awakened sinner to wish to arrive at certainty. He cannot avoid feeling a deep solicitude to know on what grounds his multiplied and enormous transgressions can be expiated, and upon what principles a creature, so utterly unworthy as he feels himself to be, can be justified in the sight of a holy God. How a righteous and holy God can be just in justifying a vile rebel against his throne and government—how he can save with an everlasting salvation, in heaven, a rebellious sinner, whose just desert is the eternal miseries of perdition?

These momentous and interesting inquiries, blessed be God, are satisfactorily solved in the precious gospel of Christ. Our gracious Redeemer has, in his boundless benevolence, undertaken and accomplished every thing that was necessary in order to secure our salvation, and eternal felicity. "The Son of man is come to seek, and to save that which was lost." Because it was necessary to our reconciliation to a just and holy God, he shed his blood to be the "propitiation for our sins." "Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved." The gospel, we think, then, plainly teaches the necessity of a Savior to make an expiation for sin, and to deliver from guilt and condemna-

helpless sinners: who could not, in their own persons satisfy the law and justice of God; either by obeying the divine will in a perfect manner, or sustain the just penalty of the violated law of heaven. We proceed to show that it is a *faithful saying*, or doctrine, that *Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners*. In proof of this doctrine, we may refer to the *various prophecies* of the Old Testament, in which the coming of the Messiah was, during a long series of ages, predicted, in connection with the history of their accomplishment as recorded in the New Testament. It may be confirmed also by a reference to the *life of Christ—his miracles—his death—resurrection*—and the *propagation of christianity*, notwithstanding the violent opposition made against it by the Jews and Romans,—and finally, its *blessed effects* upon those happy persons by whom it was sincerely embraced. On each of these topics we must be very brief.

In touching upon the subject of prophecy, we may look back to the first age of the world. Immediately after the apostacy of our first parents, we find upon record a gracious promise of an almighty and merciful Deliverer. In the very curse which God denounced against the serpent for seducing our first parents, a revelation of grace is made them; "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed: it (the seed of the woman) shall bruise thy head and thou shalt bruise his heel." "Here," as Dr. Scott remarks, "is a prophecy and a promise which have ever since been fulfilling, but have not received their entire accomplishment." Jesus Christ, as every intelligent christian well knows, is the woman's promised seed, and when he "was manifested to destroy the works of the devil," it might be said that this important, and truly important prediction was proved to be founded in truth and faithfulness.

The next remarkable prophecy which we meet with in the Bible is found in the promise which God made to Abraham, when he called him to leave his native country, and his kindred, and directed him to go to the land of Canaan to sojourn there. The God of glory manifested himself to this venerable father of the faithful, and made this encouraging promise to him; "I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great, and thou shalt be a blessing. And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee; and in thee shall *all the families of the earth be blessed*." St. Paul has interpreted the blessing of Abraham, as importing the free favor of God which is conferred upon both Jews and Gentiles through the Lord Jesus Christ. He holds forth this doctrine clearly in his epistle to the churches in Galatia. "Christ, (he observes, chap. 3, v. 18th,) hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree." And then he adds, v. 14, "That *the blessing of Abraham*, might come on the Gentiles, through Jesus Christ." This promise, which God made to Abraham, was virtually a prediction, that a Savior should be numbered amongst his descendants, in whom all the nations should be blessed. This gracious promise, or prediction, received its accomplishment in the advent of Jesus Christ into the world to save sinners. The same promise was renewed to Isaac and to Jacob successively.

who were designated particularly by the sovereign Jehovah as the chosen heirs of the predicted blessing. It was specially revealed to Jacob, that the glorious Shiloh or Messiah, who was to come, should be a descendant of his son Judah. "The sceptre" (said the pious patriarch, in his dying address to his sons, which was throughout prophetic) "shall not depart from Judah," (meaning the tribe of that name) "nor a law-giver from between his feet, until Shiloh come, and unto him shall the gathering of the people be." In after times, the family of king David was selected and designated as the particular branch of the tribe of Judah, which should be honored by giving birth to the Savior of mankind.

David wrote a number of plain and illustrious prophecies concerning the coming and glorious kingdom of the promised Messiah. In the 2d Psalm, he introduces the Lord Jesus Christ, himself, as solemnly announcing the eternal decree of the Father, by which he should be constituted the Mediator and supreme Head of the Church; "Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion. I will declare the decree. The Lord hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee." In his 22d Psalm, and in some others of his sacred odes, he has described various circumstances of our Savior's bloody passion and ignominious death, with as much exactness as any one could have done, who had been a witness of the whole tragical scene.

But we will pass on to the prophets, more particularly so denominated, and select a few from the numerous predictions in which they have foretold the coming of the Just One; and in which they have, with a divine pathos and beauty, described the glorious blessings of salvation, which, through his gracious mediation, are to be bestowed upon a sinful and ruined world.

ISAIAH enjoyed the clearest foresight of the glorious Messiah, and of the blessings and privileges of his kingdom of grace, of all the Old Testament prophets. There is a superior elegance and sublimity in the style of his predictions. In the following quotations there is a lustre and glory truly evangelical; chapter 9:2,6,7, "The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined. For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder; and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice, from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this." Chapter 11:10, "And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek; and his rest shall be glorious." Chapter 40:9—11, "O Zion, that bringest good tidings, get thee up into the high mountain; O Jerusalem that bringest good tidings, lift up thy voice with strength: lift it up, be not afraid; say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God. Behold, the Lord God will come with strong hand, and his arm shall rule for him; behold his reward is with him, and his work before him. He

shall feed his flock like a shepherd; he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young." Chapter 63:1, "Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah? this that is glorious in his apparel, traveling in the greatness of his strength? I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save." Chapter 45:22, "Look unto me and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God and there is none else."

Let us, in the next place, examine what predictions we can select in relation to the promised Savior, from the solemn and pathetic **JEREMIAH**. Chapter 23:5,6, "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a king shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth. In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely; and this is his name whereby he shall be called, **THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS**." In another part of his writings, this prophet has also spoken of the miraculous conception and birth of the expected glorious Messiah. Chapter 31:22, "The Lord hath created a new thing in the earth, A woman shall compass a man."

EZEKIEL was certainly inspired to foretell the establishment of the Messiah's kingdom, and the flourishing state of his church, when he uttered the following prediction, chapter 34:22—24, "Therefore will I save my flock, and they shall no more be a prey; and I will judge between cattle and cattle. And I will set up one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, even my servant David; he shall feed them, and he shall be their Shepherd. And I the Lord will be their God, and my servant David a Prince among them; I the Lord have spoken it."

In the prophecy of **DANIEL**, we find a remarkable prediction of the Messiah's sufferings to expiate the sins of his people. Chapter 9:26, "And after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for himself." This prediction, was literally accomplished, when the Lord Jesus Christ was crucified on Calvary. He it was who suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that sinners justly condemned for their iniquities, by believing on him might be reconciled to God, and be made heirs of eternal life.

The prophet **MICAH** was inspired to designate the very town in which the Savior should be born. Chapter 5:2, "But thou Bethlehem Ephrathah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me, that is to be Ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting."

The prophet **ZECHARIAH**, in the most animated and pathetic strains, calls the attention of the Daughter of Zion, or the church of God to the joyful advent of the promised Savior. Chapter 9:9, "Rejoice greatly O Daughter of Zion; shout O Daughter of Jerusalem: behold thy king cometh unto thee; he is just and having salvation; lowly and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass." Our blessed Savior fulfilled this prophecy when he entered Jerusalem riding upon an ass, and the whole multitude of the spectators on that memorable occasion understanding the subject in the same light, were for the moment greatly excited, and with ecstasy and rapture irrepressible, cried,

“Hosanna to the Son of David; blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.”

A brief quotation from the writings of the prophet MALACHI will close our chair of predictions. Chapter 3:2, “Behold I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come saith the Lord of hosts.” The messenger first mentioned in this passage, was evidently John the Baptist, who was to be the harbinger of the Messiah, and was to prepare the way before him, and the “Messenger of the covenant,” who was so certainly in a short time to succeed John, was undoubtedly no less a personage than the divine Messiah himself, whose advent into the world had been so long foretold, and had for so many ages been the subject of ardent desire, and delightful expectation to the faithful people of God.

If we, now, my brethren, for a few moments, keep our attention fixed upon the prophecies we have been reciting from the Old Testament, and compare them with the history of our blessed Savior as we find it related in the writings of the four evangelists, do we not find a strikingly exact agreement between the predictions of the prophets, and the events recorded by the evangelists? The evangelist Matthew, in giving the genealogy of Jesus Christ, traces his descent from Abraham the father of the faithful, by Isaac the son of promise, then by Jacob, Isaac’s younger son, who inherited his father’s blessing. Next, he selects the tribe of Judah, and of that tribe points to the family of David, in which family he finds his descent. Who does not here plainly “see the blessing of Abraham” coming upon his posterity and upon all the nations of the earth, in exact accordance with the gracious promises which God appended to his merciful covenant with that ancient patriarch? The Messiah, agreeably to the record of the same evangelist, was born in Bethlehem of Judea, which served as a fulfillment of a prediction of the prophet Micah, which we have quoted above. And he was brought up at Nazareth, “that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene.” For the tedious period of four thousand years did the church of God, travail in ardent expectation of the coming of the Just One. To this long desired, glorious and important event, the promises, types, and prophecies of the Old Testament dispensation all looked forward. In Jesus of Nazareth, we see every circumstance foretold and pre-figured in relation to the promised Messiah, receiving an exact completion. In the fullness of time, in wonderful and precise agreement with promises and prophecies uttered by the inspired patriarchs and prophets, the true Messiah hath appeared for the salvation of the church. He has graciously condescended to put away the sins of his people by the sacrifice of himself, and is “become the author of eternal salvation, to all them that obey him.” Horrid, indeed, is the ingratitude of those who reject the benevolent Jesus, and neglect the great and precious salvation which he died to procure for lost sinners. From such enormous guilt, from such black ingratitude, may we all be preserved.

The benevolent *miracles* wrought by our blessed Savior, while they were so beneficial to those persons who were privileged with being the subjects of them, afforded to the world at large the clearest and most conclusive evidences of his true and proper divinity, and of his mission into the world to redeem and save guilty, helpless, perishing sinners. To his *miracles* our Redeemer himself appeals, in refuting the unreasonable cavils of the unbelieving Jews. "The works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of me that the Father hath sent me." John 5:36. Surely the beneficent miracles which were daily performed by our blessed Redeemer ought to have served as a clear and convincing testimony of his proper divinity, and of his being sent of the Father, as the ambassador of his grace to sinful men.

The circumstances which attended the death of Jesus Christ corresponded with remarkable exactness with various predictions, which he himself had uttered in the hearing of his disciples before the mournful event took place; and which also precisely accorded with various prophecies. One of his professed disciples, for thirty pieces of silver, betrayed him into the hands of the Romans. The perfidy of wicked Judas had been foretold long before he was born. The ancient evangelical prophet had predicted, likewise, that Christ's *visage should be more marred* than any man's, and his form more than the sons of men; that he should be *put to grief, wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities*. Do we not learn from the story of his last sufferings, that the inhuman soldiery, after profanely mocking the innocent Son of God, proceeded with unrelenting cruelty to buffet him with their fists, scourge him with knotty whips, then to crown him with piercing thorns, beating them with savage wantonness into his sacred temples, and finally glutted their own rage and the merciless fury of the Scribes and Pharisees, by crucifying him between two thieves on the hill of Calvary? In this very manner had the tragical sufferings and bloody death of the divine Messiah been described in the writings of the ancient prophets of God, many ages before he came into the world. They had predicted that his hands and his feet should be pierced, that his heart should be broken with reproach, and be full of heaviness, that he should look for some to take pity, but should find none; and for comforters, but none should be found; that his face should not be hid from shame and spitting, that he should be cut off, but not for himself, that he should be wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities, that he should make his soul an offering for sin, that he should make reconciliation for iniquity, and bring in everlasting righteousness; that the chastisement of our peace should be upon him and with his stripes we should be healed. Can any man in the sober and unbiassed exercise of reason reflect upon these remarkable predictions of the prophets, and then read the story of the Savior's sorrows and agony in Gethsemane, and of his bloody wounds and anguish on the cross of Calvary, and not feel a thorough conviction that it is indeed a faithful saying, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners!

The *resurrection* of Christ is one of the main pillars of our chris-

tian faith. If Christ be not risen, said Paul to the christians of the church of Corinth, "then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain." We have reason to bless God that no fact recorded in the Bible is confirmed by fuller, or more complete testimony, than that of our Savior's resurrection. It is confirmed by the testimony of both his enemies and his friends. His disciples were chosen witnesses of this important event. On various and different occasions, they saw and conversed with their adored Redeemer, personally, after he was risen from the dead. Christ not only shewed himself to his disciples on several different occasions, but used the utmost pains, by many infallible proofs, to remove from their minds every doubt in relation to the reality and certainty of his resurrection. The risen Savior was seen not only of Cephas, or Peter, and the rest of the eleven disciples, but on another occasion, afterwards, he was seen, as St. Paul has recorded, of more than *five hundred persons at once*, of whom he remarked that the greater part were living at the time of his making the record.

The fact of the resurrection of Jesus Christ was also clearly proved and firmly established by his enemies themselves. The chief priests, it is true, when the soldiers who had been appointed to guard his sepulchre informed them that Christ's body was not to be found where it had been laid by Joseph and Nicodemus, were very solicitous to conceal from the world the knowledge of his resurrection; but to what means did they resort in order to prevent its discovery? They gave a bribe to the soldiers to induce them to propagate the silly, self-contradictory story, that while they were asleep his disciples had stolen him away. But it was death for a Roman soldier to sleep upon guard; how then are we to believe that the soldiers would, at that time, suffer themselves to fall asleep? The pretence is utterly incredible. And if the declaration were even admitted, that they were really asleep when the body was removed, how could they know that the disciples had taken it away? Can men be judged competent to testify to any fact which should have taken place while they were asleep? The chief priests and Pharisees did not believe the story themselves, but they trusted they could impose it upon the credulity of the ignorant and prejudiced populace, hence they conceived the design of bribing the soldiers to propagate the most absurd and incredible report that ever was invented. Their whole conduct seems to evidence that they harbored a secret suspicion that Christ might have risen from the dead, as he had predicted he would before he was put to death; and that they viewed it as a fact which, if it could be supposed to exist, never could be disproved by fair, open and regular testimony. This absurd contrivance of the Jewish priests, we think, affords strong presumptive evidence, that they thought the report of Christ's resurrection might possibly be true, though they earnestly wished to conceal the knowledge of it from the world; and therefore, we think we are warranted in ranking them *amongst the witnesses* of the reality of this important fact. The Lord is risen indeed—he is risen—"the voice of rejoicing and salvation is in the tabernacles of the righteous." "He was delivered for our offences, and raised again for our justification." We

rejoice that we have found such *plenary evidence* to confirm the truth so full of consolation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.

The same comfortable doctrine is also further confirmed by the *ascension* of our blessed Savior to heaven. Of this fact also, the apostles themselves were eye-witnesses. In the gospel of the evangelist Luke, chapter 24:50—52, we find this interesting fact recorded. "And he led them out as far as to Bethany, and he lifted his hands and blessed them. And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven. And they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy."

The ascension of our Redeemer gave the fullest attestation to his divine and mediatorial character, and by this illustrious event, the way was happily prepared for the propagation of his holy religion throughout the whole earth. The apostles, accordingly, after the memorable day of pentecost, having been endued with power from on high, by the descent of the Holy Ghost upon them, proceeded to preach, in his name, repentance and remission of sins among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.

The wonderful and glorious *effects* produced, in the *primitive age*, by the preaching of the commissioned ministers of Jesus, soon afforded a new and decisive attestation to the credibility of the interesting doctrine that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. By the ministry of the apostles and a few devoted and zealous evangelists who co-operated with them, the religion of Jesus, in a few years, obtained a general prevalence throughout the Roman empire, and spread among all the nations of the then known world. In order to have a complete view of the strength and conclusiveness of the evidence deduced from *the rapid and remarkable spread of christianity in the first age of the gospel dispensation*, we must consider the opposition the ministers of Christ had to encounter, together with the wonderful and blessed success which every where attended their evangelical labors; and further also, the happy and glorious effects of the gospel upon the hearts and lives of those who were brought, cordially and sincerely, to embrace it. By each of these several considerations, the credibility of the gospel may be established beyond all reasonable possibility of doubt.

Never was any scheme opposed with so much bitterness and rage, as was the holy gospel and the benign religion of Jesus Christ. Both Jews and Romans conspired against the Lord, and against his anointed. With systematic and insatiable malignity and rage, they incessantly persecuted the faithful heralds of the cross, and employed their utmost efforts to put to silence every zealous advocate of the christian cause. For this purpose, they caused the first evangelists to be frequently put under arrest by the interposition of the civil authority—by cruel scourging, by imprisonment, and by various kinds of barbarous usage, they endeavored to deter them from the prosecution of their evangelical duties. But the exalted Savior and king of Zion, to whom all power in heaven and in earth was given at the period of his glo-

rious ascension, completely frustrated the impious plots and machinations of his own and his church's enemies. By his wise and efficient over-ruling providence, the opposition which was made against his gospel, proved, in almost every instance, an occasion of its greater furtherance. "The blood of the martyrs became the seed of the church:" and thus it turned out that the more the gospel was opposed, and the ministers of Jesus persecuted, the more mightily did the word of God grow and prevail. The primitive ministers of Christ were borne forward in the glorious cause in which they had embarked, by a noble zeal, which rendered them superior to all the savage cruelties with which their enemies could distress them. With heroic intrepidity, they journeyed from country to country, and from one city and village to another, proclaiming every where the glorious doctrines of salvation, through a crucified and risen Savior. Through the blessing of heaven upon their labors of love, multitudes of perishing sinners were turned from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God. Nor did they ever desert the cause of their heavenly Master, or intermit their assiduous exertions to promote his holy religion; unless, when confined in prisons and dungeons until they were called to give the last seal to the truth and importance of the religion which they had been called to preach and advocate by the sufferings of a bloody martyrdom. In the course of a few years, the gospel was carried over every part of the world then known, and multitudes, in every country into which the blessed light of christianity penetrated, believed and turned to the Lord.

But in order to see the full evidence in favor of the *divinity* and *truth* of the gospel, arising from its general propagation through the world, it will be useful for us to consider its *blessed effects* upon the *experience* and *practice* of the *genuine* converts of Jesus Christ. The happy men, who have experienced the heavenly power of the religion of Jesus in their own souls, have the witness in themselves that he came into the world to save sinners. The Spirit sent down by the exalted Savior has convinced *them* of sin, made *them* feel their perishing need of salvation, and enabled *them* to rely upon the Lord Jesus Christ, and to rejoice in him as the Lord their righteousness and strength—the source of their present peace and consolation, and their glorious everlasting portion. Having had the salvation of God wrought in their hearts, with humble joy and confidence, they can refer to themselves as examples of the riches and the efficacy of the grace of the exalted Redeemer, and know by their own happy experience that he came into the world to save poor, miserable, helpless sinners. O, that we all had this important, comfortable seal to our faith!

The effects of the gospel, upon the genuine disciples of Christ, are of such a striking nature, that it seems very strange that the most stupid and hardened infidels should not be confounded and put to silence by witnessing them. To see the most audaciously profane, and stupidly careless sinner struck, perhaps instantaneously, with such an awful sense of his guilty and lost condition, as to be almost unable to support under it, his conscience so distracted with agonizing re-

morse as to make him a terror to himself; and to extort from him the anxious inquiries, "what shall I do to be saved?" how shall such a hell-deserving rebel find reconciliation to his righteous and offended Sovereign? How shall such a servant of iniquity as I have been escape the miseries of eternal damnation? How shall I get my aggravated guilt cancelled, and obtain admittance into the favor of my long forsaken, long insulted God and Savior? To hear such language as this from the lips of one who probably had formerly gloried in his contempt of religion, and who prided in ranking foremost amongst the enemies of the cross of Christ; to hear one who but a short time before had been a bold and impious blasphemer, most earnestly and fervently praying to God for mercy and salvation, and then after his sinking feet have been taken from the deep pit and the miry clay of sin and misery, to hear him, with the melodious strains of gratitude and joy, celebrating the grace which has made him free; to see him punctually attend upon the preaching of that gospel which he once so cordially despised; to observe an entire change in his whole character and manner of life, to hear him no longer blaspheme, to find him now abstaining, conscientiously, from "all appearance of evil," and uniformly endeavoring to live soberly, righteously and godly—such a happy moral renovation, affords the best evidence which can be given of the divinity of the religion of Jesus Christ; the *most conclusive proof* that he came into the world to save sinners.

If the philosophy of Plato, and Socrates, and Seneca, had produced the same blessed effects upon their morals and their conversation, it would have been the boast of the whole infidel tribe. The excellent nature of philosophy would have been loudly extolled and applauded. Can any good reason be assigned, why the excellent effects of christianity in disposing and engaging its *genuine* disciples to lead a life of pure and spotless morality, should not be deemed a sufficient evidence of its truth and importance? When we behold the scoffer turned to be sincerely devout, the licentious holy in all his deportment, the worldling having his daily conversation in heaven, and esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than all the honors, emoluments and pleasures of a delusive enchanting world, can we, in view of these excellent tendencies of the religion of Jesus, withhold our assent from this important, well-attested, credible saying, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners?

III. We have now, as we trust, satisfactorily evinced the credibility of the declaration in our text, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. We also, in conclusion, proposed to show that this "faithful saying," is "*worthy of all acceptation.*"

This faithful saying is worthy of the acceptation of all who have the privilege of hearing it proclaimed, and that, with *all the heart*. Persons of every age, rank and condition in life, are interested deeply in its serious import, and should be concerned to hear and receive it with honest candor, and improve it with faithful diligence. With regard to the *aged*, it is universally esteemed proper and necessary for them to have their thoughts much employed upon the grave and solemn subjects

of religion, death, and eternity. This opinion, my respected senior friends, is certainly founded in truth and propriety, and I hope my venerable aged hearers have many years ago laid it solemnly to heart. Some of you I trust, long since, having given the precious gospel of the Redeemer a sincere and cordial reception, and as a happy consequence of your early faith and repentance, long have been, and are *now*, daily privileged to rejoice in hope of the glory of God. You know in whom you have believed, and now your daily comfortable employment consists in waiting for the blessed end of your faith, the everlasting "salvation of your souls."

But, dear young friends, I seriously fear it is far otherwise with many of you. That you are sinners, you will no doubt feel willing to acknowledge; yet, strange to think, you feel no present concern about your own salvation. This matter, in which you must acknowledge you have a greater interest than in any thing else, you have most probably persuaded yourselves to postpone till some future day—a day which, very possibly, you may not live to see. In the mean time, you promise yourselves a long season to revel in sensual delights and gratifications. You are much pleased with the license which Solomon has given you, when he says, "Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth, and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the way of thy heart, and in the sight of thine eyes." But the serious import of this piece of *sacred irony*, you studiously endeavor to forget. You carefully exclude from your thoughts the solemn, faithful, monitory warning, with which the same verse concludes. You will not give it place in your thoughts lest it should damp the ardor of your spirits in your festive hours, or prove an alloy to the poignancy of your illicit pleasures. Permit me, for once, however, to press it upon your attention and to entreat you to give it a patient hearing, and serious attention and consideration. It is, "**KNOW THOU, that for all these things God will bring THEE into judgment.**" This, dear, unthinking youth, is to be the end of your scenes of dissipation, and vain delights, and none can tell you how near that end may be. Death, unsparring death, may surprise you in the midst of your jovial delights, and hurry you to the tremendous bar of your divine Judge, before you have even seriously resolved upon a reformation. O, let the possibility of such an awful alarm excite the youngest of you, who are capable of serious reflection, to feel a deep solicitude for the salvation of your precious souls. Not only resolve that you will seek salvation, but earnestly determine that this day you will accept the offered blessings of the gospel; if you should defer coming to the Savior only till to-morrow, you might come a day too late. You will lose nothing by embracing the Savior and devoting yourselves to a life of religion and piety at once, for "the ways of wisdom are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are paths of peace." If she prohibits your carnal, short-lived, empty joys and gratifications, she will give you in return or exchange, pure, spiritual, never-ending felicity. Exalt her, my dear young friends, and she shall promote you to true honor. Embrace her cordially and sincerely, and she will give you an unfading crown of glory, joy, and felicity.

Once more, the news of salvation through Jesus Christ is worthy the acceptance of men of every rank and condition in life. Hear this, all ye people, give ear all ye inhabitants of the world, both low and high, both rich and poor together. The most honorable and illustrious personages in every age of the world, have been those who have not esteemed themselves too great to fear God and keep his commandments. Statesmen of the most profound erudition and the brightest talents, and even kings who had the wealth of whole nations at command, have laid down their fame and their honors at the feet of the Savior, and esteemed it their highest dignity, and joy, to call him "*The Lord our righteousness.*" Moses esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than all the treasures in the royal court of Pharaoh.

The most illustrious of the kings of Israel were those who paid the most sacred regard to the holy institutions of the true religion. In modern ages, too, the wisest philosophers, and men of the most distinguished talents and the highest literary fame have confessed it their chief glory to rank with the disciples of the meek and lowly Jesus, and have professed to owe their religious comforts and their hope of future and everlasting happiness to the free and sovereign mercy of God in their Redeemer who came into the world to save sinners. On this truly respectable list, we find the venerable names of a Newton, a Bacon, a Lyttleton, a West, a Jennyns, a Gardiner, a Hale, a Wilberforce, a Washington, a Wirt; men, whose tried integrity, whose incomparable talents, and whose eminent piety and usefulness have deservedly been held in universal admiration, and whose names will be approved and signally honored before an assembled universe, when the countenance of the scoffing infidel will be blackened with shame and pale with horror, and his character blasted with eternal infamy.

But if the free overtures of salvation are insipid and uninteresting to sinners of superior rank, who have a proud conceit of their own righteousness, we know by *whom* they will be embraced with humble gratitude and cordial delight; by *all those* weeping mourners, who, like the apostle Paul, feel themselves to be the chief of sinners. All who have been brought to know and feel that in a spiritual view they are wretched and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked, will feel not willing only, but thankful and joyful to be privileged to be found in Jesus Christ, not having their own righteousness. If any of my hearers are convinced that they are poor, miserable, helpless sinners, I design in the conclusion of this discourse, affectionately to point them to the Lamb of God, who, by his vicarious death, takes away the sin of the world. Take refuge in his bleeding wounds, and then you will be able to say, upon good grounds, we "know in whom we have believed." Do any of you, with streaming eyes and trembling hearts, ask us what you shall do to be saved; hear it and receive it as a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, the chief of sinners.

The woman's promised seed is born—and the illustrious descendant of faithful Abraham, whose day that holy sage rejoiced to anticipate,

has descended to bless all the families of the earth. The Root and Offspring of David has spread forth his life-infusing boughs. The bright and morning Star has shed the lustre of his orient beams on this dark globe—this region of guilt, moral gloom and misery; and unto them who fear his name hath the glorious Sun of righteousness arisen, with healing, and joy, and salvation in his beams.

For unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given; Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of peace. Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah! This that is glorious in his apparel, travelling in the greatness of his strength? Rejoice, and love, and praise, O trembling, weeping penitent! This is Jesus who speaks in righteousness, and who is mighty, and gracious and faithful to save.

Here is the prophet Jeremiah's righteous Branch, whose name is the Lord our righteousness—Ezekiel's faithful Shepherd, presiding over, protecting and saving in the darkest seasons of adversity and trial, the chosen flock of the God of Israel—Daniel's Prince Messiah, who was cut off for sin, and brought in everlasting righteousness for the free justification of every penitent, believing sinner—Micah's Ruler in Israel, whose coming was from Bethlehem Ephratah. Here is the glorious and merciful King, whom Zechariah foresaw as coming to bless the daughter of Zion; just, and having the blessings of salvation to dispense to all who feel their need. And finally, Malachi's Messenger of the covenant of divine mercy, in whom all spiritual believers delight, as being infinitely precious, "full of grace and truth." To him give all the prophets of the old dispensation, their united testimony, that through his name, whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins. It is, therefore, a faithful saying, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.

But yet, once more, Immanuel's holy life, his godlike beneficent miracles, his death of ignominy on the cross, his resurrection on the third day, conformably to his own prediction to the Jews, and to his own disciples, his triumphant ascension to heaven in view of his wondering apostles, and his sending down his Spirit to convince the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment, *afford evidence complete*, that he is indeed the true Savior, and that "he is able to save to the uttermost" all "that come unto God through him, seeing *he ever liveth to make intercession for them.*"