

cles have been much more regarded in the court of the Gentiles, since the INCARNATION, than before our Lord appeared in Judea. Prior to the birth of Christ, it is said, a general prejudice in the people, and a very severe spirit in the government, prevailed amongst the Pagans against the belief of miracles*. But the fame which our Lord acquired by his mighty works, vexed the nations, and induced many individuals to make strange pretensions, in order to procure similar renown. To keep up the sinking credit of what they called *the old religion*, not only reports of miracles among themselves were multiplied, but of such as were supposed to vie with the miracles of Christ. In vain. For who now gives any credit to those ascribed to VESPASIAN, or to those which are attributed to APOLLONIUS? Their miracles, (as well as the *golden ass* of APULEIUS, written to recommend PAGAN RELIGION, as the only cure for *all vice whatsoever*,) have long since been discredited. Nor will any recent

* WHITE'S Sermons.

attempts

attempts which have been made to perform miracles, and to recommend the polytheism of the ancients, meet with better reception.

Indeed, succeeding *impostors* of the greatest note, have been afraid of running any hazard on the subject of miracles. MAHOMET, in particular, was too cunning to snatch at the seal of miraculous power to authenticate his mission. His plan was so drawn up as to avoid that danger. He contended, that the style and sublimity of the ALCORAN, was more than a miracle; or that at least, while other miracles were transient, this supernatural composition was permanent, and exceeded in dignity and excellence, other marvellous operations: and his ignorant, and interested followers, were willing to give him credit for his bold assertion.

Undertrappers in hypocrisy, and babes in enthusiasm, have not been so cautious, in renouncing every seeming attempt to perform miracles: but their aukward efforts to convince us of their supernatural agency, has
ended,

ended, where every man of sense and understanding foresaw they must end—in vexation to the pretended operators, and in shame to those who were so credulous as to listen to their impudent impositions.

2. The miracles of Christ were *necessary*. It was necessary that Jesus Christ should justify the divinity of his mission, and by consequence, the divinity of his doctrine, by his miracles. No other proofs would so well agree with the dignity of his person, the holiness of his ministry, with the religion which he taught, with the men who were to receive his instructions, with the full assurance of faith, by which his gospel was to be received, or with those promises and threatnings, by which the observation of our Lord's commandments are supported.

1. What other proofs would so well agree with the dignity of the person and ministry of the Son of God? Proofs drawn from reason are good between equals, as man and man; but they are not worthy the sovereign
 master

master of the world, who cannot, who must not compromise his authority with his creatures, nor expose himself to human contradictions. 2. What other proofs would so well agree to that religion which emanates from God? It hath been given us as divine; it must therefore be confirmed by proofs which are divine. It is God who commands. He must, to convince us of this, act himself, and shew us, that his will is marked by the seal of his power. 3. What other proofs would so well agree with those men who are to receive the Christian religion? Though it were not unworthy of God to make use of rational proofs, they are, by no means, accommodated to the capacity of every spirit. To reason, principles must be laid down, and consequences must be drawn from them. But to judge of the certainty of principles, and of the justness of consequences, requires a certain degree of light, which the bulk of mankind have not, and an attention which they are ill able to bestow. 4. What other proofs would so well agree to the full assurance of faith with which the Christian religion should be

be received? Human reasons have only a certain degree of evidence, which cannot compel us to acquiesce in them, when they are employed on truths which are not susceptible of demonstration. Experience teaches us how often men are ingenious enough to invent difficulties, when that which is proposed for them to believe, or to do, is opposite to the inclinations of their hearts. The spirit is too often the slave of the heart, or hath its residence in sensation; and, in most men, it is sentiment, or feeling, that decides. 5. What other proofs would so well agree with the promises and threatenings, by which the commandments of Christ are supported? These promises and threatenings, relate to that futurity which is beyond death, and the sepulchres of the dead; though these things appear the last and utmost bounds of all our affairs. Notwithstanding all the reasonings which philosophers have invented to prove the immortality of the soul, and, by consequence, a life to come, these verities, although demonstrated by them, are they not yet a problem to an immense number of people,

ple, who appear sufficiently free from passions? and are they not openly contradicted by some who are more rash, in proportion as they are more attached to their carnal affections? In a word, the religion of our Saviour being a divine religion, it demands proofs that are divine; AND SUCH ARE MIRACLES*.

As to the course of nature, how little do we know of it? and what is the light which philosophers afford? For even these Intimados of nature knew no more of her than what lies just before them, in common with those whom they most affect to despise: and all they know, if not A MIRACLE, is yet A MYSTERY. Let these her closet-acquaintance *steal*, as they are able, to her inmost recesses, they *can bring nothing* from thence concerning God's natural and moral government, as the Poet finely expresses it,

———BUT UNDECYPHERED CHARACTERS,
which only teach us the need we have of a

* SAURIN.

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better

better Decypherer than that REASON, on which these men so proudly rely*.

Had we clearer and wider views of nature, we should be, perhaps, thoroughly convinced, that a miracle contains no greater exercise of divine power, than the arrangement and preservation of the settled course of things.—The shooting up of a plant in the eye of superior Beings, may not be more natural than the resurrection of the dead. But whatever we think of these things, the works of God bend not at our presence, but go forward in their own train, regardless of human praise or censure; and being the offspring of wisdom, are content to be judged by folly †.

If miracles were necessary to sanction the mission of Moses, who, in the name of God, was to bring forth the sons of Jacob from the house of bondage, both prophecies fulfilled, and miracles performed, were the proper seals of His mission, who was to take Israel out of

* Bishop WARBURTON.

† Dr. OGDEN.

Israel ;

Israel; the children of the promise from a carnal generation; who was also, to be a covenant to the Gentiles, and to erect a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; a kingdom which shall not be left to other people, but shall break in pieces, and consume all opposing kingdoms, and shall stand for ever.

It is no wonder therefore, that our Lord laid so much stress on the evidence which his miracles afforded to prove He was the promised Messiah. To John's disciples, he said, Go and shew to John again those things which ye hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up. To the Jews in general, this was his appeal: The works that I do in my father's name, they bear witness of me. If I do not the works of my father, believe me not: but if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works.

3. The miracles of Christ were *illustrious*. For they as much agreed with the benign disposition of the New Testament, as the mira-

cles of Moses coincided with the terrors of the former dispensation. In short, the miracles ascribed to Christ and his apostles, recommend themselves to our belief on the following accounts :

They were wrought by persons who solemnly appealed to God, and who declared they would perform them. They were wrought in a public manner. Before enemies and unbelievers. In a learned age and civilized countries. Not with any air of pride, vanity, and ostentation. Not for the sake of lucre, or for worldly advantage. They were wrought in confirmation of precepts and doctrines, good and useful to mankind. At a time when men wanted neither power nor inclination to expose them if they were impostures, and were in no danger of being called atheists and heretics, and of being insulted by the populace, and persecuted by the civil magistrate, for ridiculing them. They were various and numerous. Of a permanent nature, and might be reviewed, and re-examined. Had nothing fantastical or cruel in them, but
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were acts of kindness and beneficence. They had ceased a long time before Christ appeared, and therefore, would raise the attention of men. They converted multitudes to the faith. Were attested by proper witnesses. Foretold by the prophets, and such as the Jews expected from the Messiah*.

Though all this, and more, may be safely advanced of the miracles of Christ and his apostles, yet those performed by the latter, were done in the name of Jesus, and in no respect interfered with the seal of his peculiar mission ; but on the contrary tended to confirm it.

What shall we say then, to these things? If after such prophecies of Christ, previous to his Incarnation, as have been stated in the first of these discourses, and such miracles as when Incarnate he unquestionably performed, we do not own Christ to be the Messiah, and put our trust in him, but

* Rev. J. JORTIN.

actually prefer to our Lord some impostor that has appeared, or some prophet yet to be expected; or if after such proofs of his mission, we prefer natural religion to the revealed, and the dictates of moral philosophers to the doctrine of the gospel, and to the life and immortality brought to light by it, are we not left without excuse? But if, on the other hand, we believe unto salvation, is not all boasting for ever excluded? Surely it is. It becomes us, therefore, to say, under all we now enjoy, and all we can expect from Christianity, Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy, and for thy truth's sake. AMEN!

SERMON

S E R M O N VIII.

ON THE PREACHING OF CHRIST.

LUKE iv. 15.

AND HE TAUGHT IN THEIR SYNAGOGUES, BEING
GLORIFIED OF ALL.

HAVING seen what Christ DID, I mean, in reference to his miraculous operations, we are now to take some notice of what he TAUGHT.

As to those places where our Lord condescended to teach, it is easy to remark, that what he said to the woman of Samaria, he himself began to fulfil. Woman, said he, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither only in this mountain, nor yet at
O 4 Jerusalem,

Jerusalem, worship the Father. But the hour cometh, and now is, when the TRUE worshippers shall worship the Father, in every place, *in spirit, and in truth*; for the Father seeketh such to worship him.

It is evident, that our Lord taught his disciples on a mountain, in a ship, in common conversation by the way side, and in the houses of his friends and enemies, as well as in the temple, and in the synagogues. But wherever he taught, he was glorified of all. Not, we may be sure, of all men; but by men of all sorts; Jews and Gentiles, illiterate and learned, moral and profane.

Of those SUBJECTS on which our Lord chiefly insisted, and of the MANNER of his teaching, I purpose to give my opinion in this discourse.

I. We may observe, the SUBJECTS of our Lord's sermons were not the arts and sciences, civil law and policy, mercantile and military operations; nor were they logic,
grammar,

grammar, and what is now called the *belles lettres*. On some of these things indeed, and on other matters pertaining to this life, there are incidental hints, and occasional observations in his discourses, worthy of our serious attention; and something more than this, on those duties which are inseparably connected with revealed religion.

But the stated subjects of our Lord's teaching were the purity and extent of the law, the extreme and universal depravity of human nature, the necessity of his atonement, and of regeneration to enjoy it; the spirituality of his kingdom, the nature and necessity of faith and repentance, that he was the author of both, the way, the truth, and the life; the only medium of access to the Father, and the only ground of our acceptance with him; that the weary and heavy laden were ever welcome to come to him, or believe in his name, and that those who did this, should, in no wise, be cast out: for though in this world, they might expect tribulation, yet by believing on him, they were

were here taught to expect a peace which passeth all understanding ; a peace which should be to them, the earnest of future, and of eternal glory.

These were lessons of universal importance, and of the highest moment. Let us be thankful they are not only recorded by the Evangelists, and expounded by their best expositors, the Apostles, but that pastors and teachers, are raised up successively, to shew that what Christ taught, is for ever worthy of all acceptance.

One of these pastors and teachers has observed, that if any genuine Christian of competent understanding in his religion, should be asked, What things his master taught mankind, different from, or superior to any other teachers ? he might readily answer :— Faith in himself as a divine Saviour ; the malignant nature, and consequent danger of sin ; the certainty and promise of pardon and acceptance with God ; the doctrine of repentance and regeneration ; the love of God and our neighbour ;

neighbour ; the excellency of the soul, and the wisdom and importance of its salvation ; the apparent emptiness and vanity of the world, and the infinite superiority of spiritual things ; the honour and pleasure of piety and goodness, of contentment with what we enjoy, of patience under what we endure, trusting God with all our hearts, mortification of sin, self-denial, forgiveness of our enemies, and injuries, and universal candour and charity. This, says Mr. Barker*, when I have added, that he preached the doctrines of the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment, is a short sketch of those things which were inculcated by this illustrious TEACHER.

Though what has now been said of the teaching of Christ, admits of ample proof, yet some men are pleased to extol the gospels far beyond the epistles, on presumption that the Evangelists have said very little in favour of those doctrines of grace which they cannot deny, are strongly stated in the wri-

* Author of two volumes of Sermons, and of some excellent Letters to DR. DODDERIDGE.

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tings of the Apostles : whereas, it would not be difficult to prove, that there is not one religious tenet unfolded in any of the inspired Epistles which is contrary to the teaching of Jesus Christ, or which is not contained in the prophecies of him, and in the history of his life.

Beside, if ALL scripture is given by inspiration of God, it is wrong to suppose that any part of it which properly belongs to the present œconomy of grace, is of any greater authority than another ; and it is foolish to imagine, that after the day of Pentecost, any *doctrines* should be revealed of less importance to us than what preceded that memorable effusion of the holy spirit, or which contradict the personal ministry of Jesus Christ.

II. The MANNER in which our Lord taught the way of truth, and those things which accompany salvation, is now to be regarded,

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But who can fully comprehend, and accurately describe the manner of his teaching? For, he taught by actions as well as by words. What is most obvious in the *latter*, I will briefly mention.

I. Our Lord taught with *simplicity*.

His appearance was plain, and unadorned with the dress of any peculiar office; yet it was not rude, or of illiberal complexion. The language which he condescended to use was unrefined in its structure, inharmonious in its arrangement, and by no means the most promising to be employed in the arts of persuasion. Yet those who were sent to apprehend him, returned and said, Never man spake like this man! and all bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceedeth out of his mouth.

If to us, who only *read* an abridgment of his discourses, there appears something so solemn in his devotions, so perspicuous and excellent in his instructions, so familiar, easy,
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and elegant, in his conversations, and so pathetic in his expostulations, what must his disciples have felt when they heard him utter his mind in all these forms, and *saw*, as well as heard, that he was full of grace and truth! To whom said they, by the mouth of Peter, shall we go? Thou hast the words of ETERNAL LIFE. And when he taught daily in the temple, though the chief priests, and the scribes, and the chief of the people sought to destroy him, they could not, for the far greater number of the people were very attentive to hear him.

What a contrast between Christ and Aaron! The port, the dress, and the stile of that high priest, were suited to a shadowy dispensation. Whereas the words which Christ spake were spirit and life: and every thing in him, and about him, wisely accommodated to the gospel of his grace. Yet Moses with his rod, and Aaron with his bells, are by some, even to this day, more admired than that prophet who hath in all things the pre-eminence.— A vicious taste for pomp
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and shew, in pronunciation as well as in appearance, is common, and sometimes violent; nor are those ever wanting who are disposed to indulge wandering eyes and itching ears, and who are inclined to deal more in shew than in substance, and in sound more than in sense.

2. Our Lord taught with *sincerity*.

Where this is wanting it must be imitated; for nothing can please us much, or long, on serious subjects, where sincerity is suspected. Eloquence can never supply its place. For what is eloquence, [or that at least, which is often so called,] but a persuasive turn given to the elocution to supply that inward, that conscious persuasion of the speaker, so necessary to gain a fair hearing? But the first preachers of the gospel did not need a succedaneum to that inward conscious persuasion. [Much less did Jesus Christ.] And what is the *end* of eloquence, even when it extends no further than to those more general principles, but to stifle reason, and inflame the passions?

But