

“Then charged he his disciples that they should tell no man that he was Jesus the Christ.”

Matthew 16:20

Ye have heard several reasons of this inhibition served upon this truth in the mouth of the disciples, which doth not warrant any man to conceal this gracious truth, unless they have a peremptory command for the doing of it, as the disciples here had. He did it as a minister, not seeking his own glory, he did it as much pitying the disciples in their weak and unsettled condition, because they could not well maintain that truth before the Jews and learned Rabbis, which truth was controverted then, they being then unsettled, until the Spirit was poured-out upon them from on high, that the Son of Man was risen. He did it also as a plague upon the Jews, because they abused this truth, therefore as a just punishment and recompense of their sin, he lays on an arrestment on the truth, that they should tell no man, that he was Jesus the Christ, the Savior of sinners, the King, Priest, and Prophet of his people. He did it as a recompense of the sins of many for the accusing of the truth. But one of the greatest reasons of this inhibition was to make way for another glorious design, which was on foot in Heaven regarding Christ's suffering at Jerusalem, for, saith the apostle, “If they had known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of Glory.” Jesus Christ, knowing that he behooved to go to Jerusalem, and suffer, and to redeem the world, and so he sets them at liberty to crucify him, by their not knowing that he was the Lord of Glory, and so he leaves them to a latitude to persecute and crucify him, that so he might accomplish the great design that his Father and he had on foot concerning the redemption of the world. And the doctrine I shall here hold forth upon this reason of the inhibition is this, that the Lord by the most uncouth and strange dispensation in his Church brings about the most glorious purposes and works of God, that can be imagined in the world. There was no dispensation

almost that was more uncouth and more strange, and more dark, and more desperate-like, than this was, 'Let nobody know that I am the Christ, let none know that I am the Savior of the world,' yet all was done by the burial of that truth. The Lord Jesus Christ brought about the most glorious work that ever was wrought for his Church, which was by the death of a slain Christ, which was occasioned here some way by his hiding of this truth from those that were to crucify him. I say, the Lord useth by the most strange and uncouth dispensation in his Church, to bring about the most glorious purposes and advantageous works for the good of his Church of any in the world.

In following out this doctrine, I shall speak to these few things:

1. We shall speak a little of strange and uncouth dispensations, that fall-out in the Church.
2. Then a word to what those glorious works of God are, that are brought about by those glorious dispensations.
3. We shall give you some instances, by which it will appear that the Lord by the saddest and uncoutheast dispensations, that ever fell-out in the Church, has brought about the greatest and most advantageous work for her.
4. And in the close of the doctrine we shall speak a word of reason, why the Lord chooseth this way, for bringing about such glorious works and purposes by such uncouth and strange dispensations.

For the first, we call dispensations uncouth and strange and dreadful-like, when things, as it were, fall out by a kind of special providence, yet do jostle with the revealed Word of God and his commands, such as a lie put into the mouth of Jacob by Rebecca, there was a kind of secret providence in the thing that jostled with the command of God, yet ye know there came some strange advantage to him thereby. So Esther ye know came in the place of Vasthi the queen, this did ex-

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ceedingly jostle against the command of God, for the Jews should not have entered in marriage with any of that place that was not in covenant with God, this seemed to jostle against the command of God, yet ye know how this did amount to the good and advantage of the kingdom of Christ. So the sons of Jacob fell upon the Shechemites: that was an uncouth dispensation, the poor man was jostled exceedingly for that living among strangers, yet there came a great advantage for Jacob out of that; Jacob had too long rested in that nest, therefore saith he, "Arise Jacob, and go to Bethel."

2. We call dispensations strange and uncouth, as they jostle with promises, predictions or prophecies of the Lord's great things towards his people; ye know he endeavored for the people of Israel to bring them out of the land of Egypt, it makes the burden seven times worse, their task is doubled, this jostled with God's promises or prophecies of coming out of Egypt, a bonny beginning indeed, there is not one of them will come out of it, their task is doubled, yet by these things he brought about their delivery gloriously, for great advantage to them, and great ruin to their enemies. Haman's promotion with all his followers to the court of the king, it did directly jostle against the oath that he had sworn he would have war with Amalek forever, Haman is so high, that he is like to overthrow all his Church and followers, that was an uncouth dispensation, yet his height overthrew him forevermore.

3. We call dispensations uncouth, as they jostle against the people of God, and as they difficult all the people of God, so as they cannot extricate themselves out of that plunge, nor know what way to do it, these are uncouth and strange dispensations. The people of Israel in their march out of Egypt instead of liberty and freedom of march God straitens them all betwixt Pharaoh and the Red Sea, with a rock on every hand, there was no escape there, that was an uncouth dispensation, yet that made way for a glorious outgate for them and the utter overthrow of the enemy forever.

‘Yea,’ saith Pharaoh and the Egyptians, ‘they are entangled in the land of Israel, the wilderness hath shut them in, we have gotten you in an hose-net. Yea, goodman, crack at leisure, it will be as good fishing you with an hose-net tomorrow ere this time.’

4. We call dispensations uncouth and strange, as in themselves they are destructive to the purposes and works he intends to bring about, as they are in themselves destructive to these purposes, they are uncouth enough. Why are they not? As for example, the Lord burieth a truth of great importance, lets men lay a great stone upon it, and say ‘It shall never rise again,’ then he brings up that truth again more glorious than ever. When he intends to make a truth famous on the Earth, then he lets bury it; that is an uncouth and strange providence and dispensation: this was the dispensation here mentioned in the text, “Let nobody know that I am the Christ”; once saith he, ‘Bury that truth. I forbid you to tell anybody that truth.’ That’s a strange dispensation, it seems to be destructive to the whole Covenant of Grace. ‘Nay, but bury it for all that, for I shall garr it rise with a thousand advantages more than ever yet’; he hath a sweet sharp hand in these things, yes truly he has a sellon gate to make contraries work for good. I confess it’s a bare moor that he goes over, and gets nothing; that dispensation never fell-out in the Church, but he gets aye an harle of it, for the good and advantage of the Church and people of God. I say then there are many uncouth and strange dispensations, now some of them jostling with commands, some with promises and predictions, some of them difficulting all the people of God, putting them all to their wits’ end, some of them of themselves destructive to the purposes he intends, yet by all those he will bring about the most glorious purposes and works for the good of his Church in the world. This is the cross wheel that appears in a wheel, whose spokes are dreadful for height, and full of eyes; this is the wisdom of God in his dealing with his

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Church going out of all men's sight, whereby he intends to bring about glorious things for his Church.

The second thing we would speak to, is, what are those most glorious works and purposes of God for his Church, that he intends to bring in by uncouth, dispensations? In a word, we mean by those such works and purposes as do minister occasion for the administration of the glorious attributes of God, whereby they may be gloriously seen for the good and advantage of the Church, such works and purposes as do manifestly bear ground to discover mercy to his friends, justice to his enemies, and God discovered thereby his glorious wisdom, faithfulness, holiness and justice exercised both to friends and enemies; I mean these glorious works and purposes, that offer in them a discovery of the attributes of God, an evident discovery of mercy for his people, and an evident discovery of justice toward his adversaries, those are the glorious works, that are brought about by strange and uncouth dispensations.

The third thing, I would here speak a word to, is, to give some instances wherein ye may see the truth of the doctrine many instances may be given in Scripture, I shall reduce them to these few heads:

1. Take the dispensation or providence that was first managed in man's sin, and is still managed yet in man's transgressions, and ye shall find by the most uncouth and dread full-like dispensations the most glorious works of God fall out for his Church: I shall mention but two particulars in all that head of providence, the one was Adam's fall; Adam's fall was a most dreadful dispensation, it jostled exceedingly with the command of God, and with promises, and was destructive in itself to his advantage, yet thereby the Lord brings about a better state for Adam and his posterity, than they were in before, thereby he did bring about admirable mercy to his friends, and admirable justice to his enemies, which will be seen for admiration, to the world's end, and forevermore.

2. Consider even in the ordinary falls of his people into sin, these are uncouth dispensations, yet I hope ye will all grant that the Lord lets his people be broken thereby? That he may the more and the surer many times bind them up. It's true ye should abominate every evil way, and ye may not sin, that grace may abound, yet it's as true in this respect, I may say, that grace hath many times super-abounded, when sin hath abounded: the thing wherein it holds true, that uncouth and strange dispensations bring about a most glorious work, which I shall instance was in that dispensation, which was managed in the Church of God before shewn, to Egypt there was an uncouth dispensation falls-out, yet always glorious: in end, of all Jacob's children Joseph was the best child of all the coupe, he was thinking on and dreaming of some things, and he is ay telling something of them, for anger of that they'll take away his life, yet, as it fell-out, they sell him to the Egyptians into Egypt, where the dreamer and all his dreams now, quoth they? There is an uncouth dispensation, what shall become of the kirk now, for the special man, that should keep her alive, is sold a slave? This was an uncouth dispensation, yet a dispensation most useful for the Church of any dispensation that could fall-out. 'Hold your tongues,' saith Joseph to his brethren, 'God is wise enough in this, much shame and lack belongs to you for your selling of me, but God was wise enough for all that, he brought it about for good'; and then ye know the uncouth dispensation that was trusted with the Church in Egypt, what sad things they met with, before they went forth from it, that jostled against both commands prophecies, and predictions, after promised liberty their bondage grows ay the longer the worse, then they resolve to slay all the male-children, but truly they never throve fast until then there is an uncouth providence, the decree comes out to slay all the men children, but it's said, the more they slew, the more they increased. Now but ye may think they had grown many of them, and they had not slain none of them in faith, ye are all mistaken, there would never

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have been so many of them, the more they slew, the more they increased, and that way God brought them to be above these Lowns, wherein they were cruel, well yet the dispensation grows ay the more and the more uncouth, the king grows ay angrier and angrier: angrier may he be, shame nor he burst at the broad side for anger, but if his anger should rive him all to bits, they shall come out of Egypt that day, 400 years that they entered in, and so they did, ye would even be telling their things now, sirs, to one another, and then ye know the sad dispensation they were exercised with, after they went out of Egypt, before they came to the land of Canaan, when the Red Sea is before them, and a rock on every hand, and Pharaoh and all his host behind, this was the uncouthest dispensation of all, yet by it came the most glorious work of all, for then they were made fully and forever quit of Pharaoh and all his company, they were never troubled more with them, God sets ay all his enemies once fair a foot on the field, he gives aye a good account of his enemies once in the field, and some to the sword, but the next time they are sought, they are not to be found.

Ye need not think that these days are all away, in truth I think they are but even coming, yet many of them whenever God gives over good an account of the adversaries of the Church, they had need to say their last prayers, for truly they are near a close. For once Pharaoh and all his host came out of Egypt, he had need to have fallen to his last prayers with it, for he was near an end, and then ye know what difficulties they met with in the wilderness and in the land of Canaan, and yet all of these brought about a most glorious work, in end theirs are right brave wives' tales, to tell about the fire-side at night: there was another uncouth providence falls out in David's time concerning the three years' famine that was upon the Church, that all the land was like to be starved with hunger, many would think that was an unhappy dispensation, but truly it was one of the happiest dispensations that ever fell out in the Church, for were it not these years of fam-

ine, the dreadfulness of the breach of sacred oaths to God had never been known, and then ye know what uncouth-like dispensations fall out upon the Church in Esther's days, the enemies of the Jews, there is all at a very great height, they having gotten authority on their side, they have all the people of God beforehand hanged, for they had a religion that other folks knew not, this uncouth dispensation brought about the most glorious work imaginable for the overthrow of all the enemies of the Church.

It's not believed what good God brings about for the Church by uncouth and strange dispensations, that when the wicked spring as the grass, and are as the green bay-tree, it is that they may be cut-off forever. Brutish men know not this, that when the wicked are brought to a great height, it is that they may be cutoff forever, it's the fore-runner of the dreadful vengeance of God upon them, when he raiseth them to a great height, that it is that his vengeance may cut them off forever, and then ye know the sad things that befell the Church at Babylon, ye know what decrees came out there against those that worshipped the true God: if any man seek but a suit from the king for so many days, he shall be cast into the den of lions; if any man worship not the image which Nebuchadnezzar hath set-up, he shall be cast into the fiery furnace. This was a dreadful dispensation, that these laws and decrees should have been settled by the kings of the Earth, against whom there was no rising-up. Nay but there were as many bony decrees came out the back of these again, if any man speak a word against the God of Heaven, they shall be cast into the den of lions, and a midden made of their houses, they shall rot in the Earth; no God can save in the manner that this God can do. In truth I think, though one had sworn it to you, if it had not been in the book of God, ye should not have believed it, I doubt if ye believe it well as it is. But believe this, if ye will, that uncouth and strange dispensations bring about glorious works of God for the good of the Church, I know well ye have many instances

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of it, the great part of the Bible clears it, and the book will be believed by better than ever stood on your shins. The weakest turns that ever fell out in the Church that way, he made them ay the strongest turns. I cannot help it that ye will not believe it, but it's true enough.

But next there is many instances of this under the New Testament also, for he is even that same God under the New Testament that he was under the Old. The first great and remarkable thing, that fell out under the New Testament, was the destruction of Jerusalem, and the abomination that makes desolate, set-up in the midst thereof. This was a dreadful thing, the place of the public worship of the Lord is all dug down and overthrown. Yea but we are all obliged to God for that, for all that the Lord took occasion by that to build many a kirk in these lands, the Lord set up a Christian Church better than ever that was, he brought out a good turn out of that evil. And there was another remarkable thing fell out there at Jerusalem, concerning the Jews' persecution at Jerusalem, there is nothing then but heading and hanging, drugging and drawing to prisons, all the twelve apostles are put away, and there may be no more public preaching, all the apostles and ministers must be banished and put away, no man may speak more in the name of the Lord. In truth that was a canny gate that they took, for truth, for if they had sitten seven years in a general assembly to have spread truth, and made it famous through the Earth, they took the ready way and the shortest cut, that was an happy luck that that persecution rose, it would have been long ere our wit had brought it that way about, that way the Gospel came to us, we were unworthy of it, but God was good that gave us it for all that, it was even by that dispensation and the like, whereby God took occasion to send the Gospel over to these islands. Whenever God had a mind to make some truth eminently glorious, then he let it ay fall into some enemy's hand to suppress and bury it, and by the burial

of it he made it to rise again, and be the most famous truth upon the Earth.

And the last tale I shall tell you about it, is this, and it is even the last that will be, and that is, Gog and Magog will even gather together to rout-out the Church, and then when they are all well drawn up, and fair on the field, God will even make an end of all together, and soon decide the controversy that way; they will all gather up, and then God will even make an end of them. God hasten that day of their gathering together. For if they were all once well gathered together, God will make us quite of them. So goodsooth ye will find the pope and the turk take even other by the hand, to drive one design, the pope and the turk and prelates and malignants will even all shake hands together, and draw up fair once in the field, for the swallowing-up of the Church, Lord hasten them all fair afoot on the field, that so the poor sad people of God may see a good sport in the down-come. For if they were once well drawn-up, there should be a sudden down-come, God would make us quit of them, that gate. We must even wait-on a while, until they draw better up; but if they were all well drawn-up, I assure you we would not need to wait long afterward.

Now for reason why the Lord takes such uncouth dispensations, to bring about his glorious work and purposes for the good of the Church, it is even for this, that he may discover the hearts of all men, much weakness in some, much wickedness in others; he lets poor silly weak things even babble on, and every one tell their own tale, and thereby discovers their weakness, and others, he gives them opportunity to vent the malice that is in their hearts, and thereby discovers their wickedness, a sword shall pierce through many's hearts, that the hearts of many may be disclosed. He doth it also, that he himself may be the more seen in his glorious work for the Church, that nobody may say they have a hand in that work, to ascribe glory to themselves, but that the Lord alone may be exalted.

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Use. Now for use of this doctrine, I would have you all considering with yourselves that there is now a juncture of strange dispensations concurring together upon the Church at this time, as ever was upon the kirk of God. Are not those that should feed the Lord's people with the Word of Life, sold as slaves? Of the people of God under bondage? The sanctuaries of the Lord all thrown down and desolate? The ministry thrust-out, a number of them, and the rest of them ready to be thrust-away? Unrighteous decrees multiplying day after day? This is a clear thing to you all, the adversaries of our Lord Jesus and his Church are all at an eminency, and on foot, so that I dare say, the hearts of many of the godly are at a stand, about what will become of all, there is such a juncture of difficulties and dreadful dispensations rolled over upon us.

Now is there any of you that has a heart to believe in this case, that the result of this shall be the most glorious work for the good of the Church, that ever came about? Have ye an heart to believe this truth? I dare say ye want nothing, but an heart to believe it. Do ye believe this, that these uncouth dispensations shall bring about the most glorious works, that ever our eyes saw? This will be, whether ye believe it or not. God never brought about such an uncouth dispensation, but he brought about a most glorious work at the back of it. Christ Jesus is, in a manner, now dead and buried: good-sooth his being buried will make him victorious over them all. The uncouthest dispensation that ever was, brought ay about the most glorious work for the Church. Nobody has an heart to believe this. Has any of you an heart to believe this doctrine, that the whole tenor of the Bible holds out that the Lord by uncouth dispensations brings ay about a most glorious work for the good of the Church? Have ye an heart to believe this? Has any of you that charity to give God, that believes all things, and hopes all things, without which though a man would give all his goods to the poor, and his body to be burnt, it were an unacceptable sacrifice? Ye must

have that charity, that bodes ay luck on God's hand, and thinks ay liberally of him. Have ye an heart to believe this, that the generation to come will have the Lord to bless, for strange and uncouth dispensations? Every generation yet had the Lord to bless, for the uncouth dispensations that were trusted with their fore-fathers has any of you an heart to believe that the generation to come will have the Lord to bless, for these uncouth dispensations that now we are trusted with? The truths of God are now buried, the covenant is buried; that great truth [that Christ is sole head of his Church, and Lord over the consciences of men] is now buried. Now has any of you an heart to believe it, that the burial of the covenant will be the resurrection and glory of the covenant? Has any of you an heart to believe this? It will be true enough, believe it as ye will, that burial of the covenant shall be the resurrection and glory of the covenant: it shall be seen, to their everlasting shame, that it was an uncanny gate that they took for themselves, to break the covenant, that day they broke it, and burned it at the cross of London. If they had sitten seven years in a General Assembly, contriving how to make it a famous covenant, they fell upon the right gate that day. Have ye an heart to believe this? It will be true, whether ye will believe it or not. The burial of the covenant shall be the glory of the covenant.

Now this is a controverted truth, that Christ is sole Head and King of his Church, and Lord over the consciences of men; his laws and officers are rejected, and the king's laws and officers are chosen. Now, has any of you an heart to believe this, that the burial of this truth shall make it the most famous truth on the Earth? The most glorious days of the Church of God are ay brought about by the most sad and dark days. Therefore let us rest in hope, and endure patiently.

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