

admiration, and confessed that "mighty works were wrought by his hands." But, notwithstanding their conviction of the truth of his teaching, and the dignity of his public ministry, their minds were filled with prejudice; their evil heart of unbelief was not subdued; and they were not prepared to render him that practical homage which was due to the true Messiah. To justify themselves in their infidelity, they pretended to doubt the truth of his mission; and they basely and ungenerously recounted the meanness and obscurity of his parentage, and the deficiency of his education:—"is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James, and Joseph, and of Juda and Simon? and are not his sisters here with us? And they were offended at him." The cause of this was, that their hearts were full of blindness and prejudice, their minds were worldly and carnal, and their reasonings were false and deceitful. And the effects of this were deplorable; for it is said that "he could there do no mighty work, save that he laid his hands upon a few sick folk, and healed them. And he marvelled because of their unbelief."—The sin of unbelief is here represented in a two-fold point of view.

1. *As injurious to those who exercise it.* "He could there do no mighty work." They did not believe in his power, and therefore they came not to him for cure; and he could not obtrude his goodness upon them, or force them to receive benefits from him consistently with his plan and determination. "How much," says the excellent Dr. Doddridge, "did these Nazarenes lose, by their obstinate prejudices against Jesus! How many diseased bodies might have been cured, how many lost souls might have been recovered and saved, had they given him a better reception!" And you will, no doubt, join in the pious wish which the doctor adds: "May divine grace deliver us from that unbelief, which does, as it were, disarm Christ himself, and render him a savor of death, rather than of life, to our souls!" But unbelief is here represented.

2. *As exceedingly unreasonable and absurd.* "He marvelled because of their unbelief;"—it excited the surprise of Christ. Unbelief is altogether without reason; it is not to be vindicated. It is contrary to the duty of the situation and circumstances under which men are placed; it is contrary to what might reasonably be expected from such men under such circumstances. It is to this last view of unbelief that we propose now to attend. We shall, *first*, explain what we mean by unbelief; and, *secondly*, justify the sentiment of surprise which existed in the mind of Christ on the occasion before us.

#### I. LET US EXPLAIN WHAT WE MEAN BY UNBELIEF

Unbelief, in general, is the rejection of God's revealed truth; and, in particular, it implies the neglect and refusal to receive and act on the testimony God has given of his

Son, as the only and all-sufficient Saviour of guilty men.

1. *The unbelief of some is TOTAL.* This implies a rejection of the Messiah—a denial of his Messiahship—a total refusal to admit of his being the way to life and blessedness. Such were the Sadducees—such were many of the ancient Jews—and such are evidently the majority of them to this day. Nor does it apply to Jews alone: the same word which tells us that the doctrine of Christ was "a stumbling-block to the Jews," tells us that, by the wise and philosophic Greeks, it was despised as "foolishness." All men in the present day have not even nominal faith in Christ. I speak not now of the thousands of heathens who are not believers in Christ; their case, whatever it may be, is not unbelief in the gospel;—"How shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And, how shall they hear without a preacher?"—their case is rather matter of our compassion than of our surprise. But it is matter of surprise, that in a Christian country, many to whom the gospel is preached, many who have heard the joyful sound of salvation,—that many of these should despise the majesty of the gospel, and refuse to give it that credence which it demands from them.

2. Not only are they unbelievers who reject, but such as mutilate and corrupt *Christianity*. There are many who profess to admire, and even to defend with zeal and learning, its exterior form and structure, who are yet among the very foremost to deprive it of all its beauty, and to rob it of its peculiar excellency. Amongst these, I cannot but include those who, while they admit the Messiahship of Christ, deny his divinity, his atonement, and his dwelling in the hearts of believers by his Holy Spirit. These are such distinguishing points in Christian truth, that he who systematically denies them cannot, with propriety, be called a believer in Christ. He admits the general words of Scripture, but he puts his own sense upon these words,—a sense very different from that which was put upon them by the primitive church—a sense very different from that which is plainly taught by Christ himself, and by his apostles. He builds the fabric of his hopes on a different foundation from that which God has laid in Zion, namely, on Christ, who "gave himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savor," and by whose blood alone we can be cleansed from sin; and he regards as so enthusiastic the idea of the indwelling of Christ in the hearts of his people by his Holy Spirit, that there is no room in his creed for the dominion of Christ as King in Zion. Thus, though he believes the words of Scripture, he believes them not in their true sense: and as he is not a believer, he is, of course, an unbeliever. This statement is no violation of true candor, for that requires attention to be paid to truth; and that candor which does not render