

THE
WORKS
OF
THE REV . JOHN NEWTON

LATE RECTOR OF THE UNITED PARISHES OF
ST. MARY WOOLNOTH AND ST. MARY WOOLCHURCH-HAW,
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CONTAINING
AN AUTHENTIC NARRATIVE, &C., LETTERS ON RELIGIOUS SUBJECTS, CARDIPHONIA,
DISCOURSES INTENDED FOR THE PULPIT,
SERMONS PREACHED IN THE PARISH CHURCH OF OLNEY,
A REVIEW OF ECCLESIASTICAL HISTORY, OLNEY HYMNS, POEMS,
MESSIAH, OCCASIONAL SERMONS, AND TRACTS.

TO WHICH ARE PREFIXED
MEMOIRS OF HIS LIFE, &c.

BY THE REV. R. CECIL, A. M.

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SERMONS

PREACHED IN THE PARISH-CHURCH OF OLNEY.
BUCKINGHAMSHIRE.

TO THE INHABITANTS OF THE PARISH OF OLNEY.

MY DEAR FRIENDS,

I HAVE principally two motives for publishing these Discourses. The one is, to exhibit a specimen of the doctrine that is taught and most surely believed amongst us, to satisfy those who desire information, and to stop, if possible, the mouth of Slander. I cheerfully submit them to examination, in full confidence that they contain nothing of moment which is not agreeable to the general strain of the word of God, and to the principles of the church whereof I am a minister, as specified in the Articles, Liturgy, and Homilies. And that what I now print is to the same purport with the usual course of my preaching, I doubt not but all who stately hear me, will do me the justice to acknowledge.

My other motive is, a desire of promoting your edification. It is my comfort that many of you live by the truths of the gospel, and highly prize them. You will not, therefore, be unwilling to view the substance of what you once heard with acceptance. But it is to be feared, that the far greater part of the congregation have need to have the things pertaining to their peace pressed upon them again and again, for a different reason; not because they know them, and therefore love to have them brought to their remembrance, but because they have hitherto heard them without effect. For the sake of both, therefore, I am willing to leave an abiding testimony amongst you. I hereby take each of your consciences to witness, that I am clear of your blood; and that, to the best of my knowledge and ability, I have not shunned to declare the whole counsel of God.

In the choice of the subjects I have selected for publication, I have not been solicitous to comprise a succinct scheme of gospel-doctrine, but have given the preference to such topics, which the peculiar circumstances of the times, and of my hearers, make me desirous might be had in continual remembrance.

The exposition of the third commandment, which was first delivered in your hearing, I afterwards preached (nearer the form in which it now appears) at London; and as it led me to touch on some particulars of a very public and interesting concern, I have given it a place in this volume. And I shall think myself happy indeed, if it may please God to give weight to the

testimony of so obscure a person, with respect to a grievance under which the nation groans.

As long discourses are in many respects inconvenient, I have chosen to publish no more than a brief summary of what you heard more at large from the pulpit. And as I aim to speak plain truths to a plain people, I have purposely avoided any studied ornaments in point of expression, being desirous to accommodate myself to the apprehensions of the most ignorant.

May it please the God of all grace to accompany my feeble endeavours to promote the knowledge of his truth with the powerful influence of his Holy Spirit! And I earnestly entreat all who know how to draw near to a throne of grace by Jesus Christ, to strive mightily in prayer for me, that I may stand fast in the faith, and increase in the knowledge of Jesus the Saviour, and that, for his sake, I may labour, without fear of fainting, in the service to which he has been pleased to call me. May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all!

I am your affectionate friend, and servant in the gospel of Christ,

JOHN NEWTON.

Olney, January 20, 1767.

SERMON X.

OF COMING TO CHRIST.

Come unto me all ye that labour, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. MATTH. xi. 28.

THE dispensation of the gospel may be compared to the cities of refuge in Israel. It was a privilege, an honour to the nation in general, that they had such sanctuaries of divine appointment; but the real value of them was known to few. Those only who found themselves in that case for which they were provided could rightly prize them. In like manner, the gospel of Christ is the highest privilege and honour of which a professing nation can boast; but it can be truly esteemed and understood by none but weary and heavy-laden souls, who have felt their misery by nature, are tired of the drudgery of sin, and have seen the curse of the broken law pursuing them like the avenger of blood of old. This is the only consideration that keeps them from despair, that God has provided a remedy by the gospel; and Jesus has said, "Come unto me, and I will give you rest." If they could receive the full comfort of these words, and heartily obey the call, their complaints would be at an end; but remaining ignorance, unbelief, and Satan, combine in various ways to keep them back. Some will say, "O that I could come! but, alas! I cannot." Others, "I fear I do not come aright."—Having, therefore, endeavoured to show you the persons chiefly intended here under the character of those who labour and are heavy laden, I proceed to consider,

II. What it is to come to Christ. I have observed in general, that it appears to have the same signification with believing in him. But that we may understand it the more clearly, let us inquire,

1. How those to whom he personally spoke these words, in all probability, understood them?

2. How far their apprehensions of them are applicable and suitable to our circumstances?

3. Whether, as we have the same necessity, we have not likewise equal encouragement to come to him with those who were conversant with him upon earth?

1. It does not appear, that those to whom our Lord spoke in person, were so much perplexed as many are now, to know what *coming* or *believing* should mean; he seems to have been understood (John vi. 30, and xix. 36.), both by friends and enemies. Many questioned his authority and right to exact a dependence on himself; but they seemed to be at no difficulty about

his meaning. It certainly implied more than a mere bodily coming into his presence. He was surrounded, and even followed, by multitudes, who never came to him in the sense of his invitation. To such while standing about him, he complained, "Ye will not come unto me, that ye may have life," John v. 40. Therefore, if we consult what is written of those who came to Jesus for relief, and obtained it, we may conclude, that coming to him implies,

1st, A persuasion of his power, and of their own need of his help. They knew that they wanted relief, and conceived of him as an extraordinary person, empowered and able to succour them. This persuasion of Christ's sufficiency and willingness was then, as it is now, afforded in different degrees. The centurion spoke with full assurance; "Speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed," Matth. viii. 8. The leper more dubiously: "Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean," Matth. viii. 2. Another, in still fainter language: "If thou canst do anything, have compassion, and help us," Mark ix. 22. The faith of this last was, as the man himself acknowledged, mixed with much unbelief and fear; yet Jesus did not despise the day of small things; he pardoned his suspicions, confirmed his fluctuating mind, granted him his request; and his case is recorded as an instance how graciously he accepts and cherishes the feeblest effects of true faith: "He will not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax."

2dly, An actual application. This evidenced their faith to be right. They did not sit content with having heard of him, but improved it: they went to him, told him their cases, and implored his compassion. Their faith prevailed against all discouragements. In vain the multitude charged them to hold their peace (Mark x. 48.); knowing that he only was able to relieve them, they cried so much the more a great deal. Even when he seemed to discover a great reserve (Matth. xv. 27.) they still waited, and knew not how to depart without an answer. Nor could a sense of unworthiness, fear, or shame, keep them back, (Mark v. 27.), when once they had a strong persuasion of his power to save.

3dly, When he was sought to as a soul-physician, as was the case with many whose bodily diseases he healed, and with others who were not sick, those who came to him, continued with him, and became his followers. They depended on him for salvation, received him as their Lord and Master, professed an obedience to his precepts, accepted a share in his reproach, and renounced everything that was inconsistent with his will, Luke ix. 23, 60. Some had a more express and open call to this, as Matthew, who was sitting at the receipt of custom, regardless of Jesus, till he passed by him, and said, "Follow me," Matth. ix. 9. That word, accompanied with the power of his love, won his heart, and diverted him from worldly pursuits in

an instant. Others were more secretly drawn by his Spirit and providence, as Nathaniel, and the weeping penitent (John i. 46.; Luke vii. 38.), who silently washed his feet with her tears: and this was the design and effect of many of their bodily and family afflictions. The man who was brought to be healed of the palsy (Mark ii. 5.) received the forgiveness of his sins; and the ruler, who first came to Jesus with no other view than to obtain the life of his son (John iv. 53.), obtained much more than he asked or expected. The Lord afforded such an affecting sense of his power and goodness upon that occasion, that he from henceforth believed, with all his house.

2. These things are applicable to us. Jesus is no longer visible upon earth; but he has promised his spiritual presence to abide with his word, ordinances, and people, to the end of time. Weary and heavy-laden souls have now no need to take a long journey to seek him; for he is always near them, and in a spiritual manner, where his gospel is preached. Poor and inconsiderable as we are in the judgment of the world, I trust we have a right to claim his promise (Matth. xviii. 20), and to believe that he is even now in the midst of us. Therefore come unto him; that is,

1st, Raise your hearts and breathe forth your complaints to him. Do you see your need of him? Be persuaded, and pray to him to assure you more strongly of his power and goodness. He is just such a Saviour as your circumstances require, as you yourself could wish for; and he is able to convince you in a moment that he is so. If he is pleased to cause a ray of his glory to break in upon your mind, your fears, and doubts, and griefs, would instantly give place.

2dly, Persevere in this application to him. Set a high value upon these his public ordinances, and be constant in attending them. His eye is fixed upon us; his arm is revealed amongst us. I trust it is a time of his grace, and that every day we meet he does something for one or another in the assembly. He has a fixed time for every one whom he relieves. He knew how long the poor man had waited at the pool-side (John v. 6.); and when his hour came, he spake and relieved him. So do you endeavour to be found in his way; and not here only, but in whatever he has made your duty. Read his word; be frequent in secret prayer. You will find many things arising from within and without to discourage and weary you in this course; but persist in it, and in good time you shall find rest for your souls. These are the means which the Lord has appointed you. Converse likewise at proper opportunities with his people; perhaps he may unexpectedly join you, as he did the two disciples when walking to Emmaus (Luke xxiv. 32.), and cause your hearts to burn within you. Further,

3dly, You are to follow him, to take up his cross, to make a profession of his name and gospel, to bear contentedly a share in the reproach and scorn

which is the usual lot of those who will live godly in Christ Jesus, in the midst of an unbelieving and perverse generation. You are not only to trust in him as a priest to atone for your sins, but to receive and obey him as your teacher and your Lord. If you are truly weary and heavy laden, you will be glad to do this, and are crying to him to enable you: and you are likewise willing to forsake everything that is inconsistent with his will and service. If you are desirous to come to Christ, it is not grievous to you to think of parting with your sinful pleasures and vain companions. Rather these are a part of the burden from which you long to be freed.

Come in this way, and you shall find rest for your souls. Are any of you thinking,—O that I could! Surely if I had seen him, and heard him, I should have ventured. But now unbelief and fear keep me back. I observe, therefore,

3. That as we have no less need of Jesus than those of old, who saw him and conversed with him; so we have at least equal encouragement to come unto him. This, I think, will appear, if we consider that,

On the one hand, the bodily presence of Christ, considered in itself, had no peculiar or extraordinary influence upon those who saw him, but all was wrought by the power of his Spirit; the same Spirit which is promised to abide with his church for ever.

1st, Multitudes who saw and heard him were unmoved and unconvinced by all the wonders of his love. Though he spake as never man spake, and went about doing good, he was slighted, opposed, and hated, even to the death. And those who know the heart of man, and believe that the carnal mind is enmity against God, will allow it highly probable, that upon a supposition he should appear again in the same circumstances of humiliation, and to use the same authoritative freedom in vindicating the commands of God from the vain figments, traditions, and customs of men, he would meet with little better treatment, even in those countries which are called by his name, than he did from the proud, self-righteous, unbelieving Jews. We may warrantably suppose there were many more lepers, blind, &c. in the places where he resorted, than those who came to him to be healed.

2dly, Many of his professed disciples, even after they had followed him for a while, turned back, and forsook him, John. vi. 66. We have, therefore, the less reason to wonder, when we see any give up the profession of the gospel, and return to the world again. It was thus from the beginning, and those who do so now, would have done so if they had lived then. His looks, his voice, his gesture, and even his discourses and miracles, could not engage a single person to cleave to him with full purpose of heart, unless he was likewise spiritually revealed to the eye of their faith, as the image of

the invisible God, the brightness of the Father's glory, full of grace and truth.

3dly, Even his true disciples, who were constantly with him, to whom he had personally made the most express and endearing promises, and who sometimes thought themselves assured beyond the power of a doubt, yet could not maintain their confidence longer than his Spirit upheld them. To them expressly, though not to them exclusively, Jesus had said, "I go to prepare a place for you" (John, xiv. 2.), and I will come again to receive you to myself, that "where I am, there ye may be also," John xiv. 3. When he had concluded that affectionate discourse, their doubts and fears were dissipated, and they could confidently say, "Now we believe" (John, xvi. 30.); yet it was not long before they found his reply fulfilled. Jesus said unto them, "Do you now believe? The hour is coming, when you shall be scattered every man to his own, and shall leave me alone," John, xvi. 32. Will not this instance convince you of your mistake, when you think you could depend more on a voice from heaven, than on the written word? The apostles had the strongest ground of assurance imaginable, the word of the Lord Jesus himself, face to face; and yet this would not support them, without renewed supplies of strength.

On the other hand, consider if the loss of his bodily presence is not more than made up to us,

1st, By the fuller manifestation of the Holy Spirit than was afforded before his ascension.

The Holy Ghost was not then given in that clear and abundant measure as afterwards (John, vii. 39.), because Jesus was not yet glorified. While he was with them, he was their Comforter and Teacher; but he told them, "When I depart, I will send you another Comforter" (John, xiv. 16, and xvi. 7.), whose office and abode with you will be in many respects so much more advantageous, that on this account it is expedient for you that I go away.

2dly, By the greater number and variety of promises which we enjoy. We have not only the scriptures of the Old Testament in common with them, but to us the ancient revelations of the will and love of God are enlarged, explained, applied, and confirmed, by the superaddition of the New, Ephes. iii. 5.

3dly, By the experience of multitudes of all ages, people, and languages, who have gone before us, since their time, the cloud of witnesses to the truth and grace of God, the reality of eternal things, and the victorious power of faith, is now increased by the concurrent evidence of thousands and millions, who have overcome all opposition by the blood of the Lamb, and the word of his testimony.

4thly, By the proofs and living witnesses of his power and grace amongst ourselves. Are there not many, with whom you worship and converse from day to day, who can tell you, they were even dead in trespasses and sins, but he has quickened them? They were once as you are, labouring and heavy laden; they waited for him long, had a share in such temptations and conflicts as you now feel, were often at a stand, and upon the point of concluding their case to be desperate, as you may think yours at present; but at length they were enabled to come unto him, and they have found rest. Every such instance should encourage you to gird up the loins of your minds; to be patient, and hope to the end. As they have known your troubles, so shall you partake of their consolations in due time. What is it then should hinder you from coming to Jesus, that you may find rest? What exceptions can your unbelief devise against the invitations, motives, and example, which the Lord sets before you by his preached gospel?

(1.) Is it a sense of your load which makes you say you are not able? But consider that this is not a work, but a rest. Would a man plead, I am so heavy laden, that I cannot consent to part with my burden; so weary, that I am not able either to stand still or lie down, but must force myself farther? The greatness of your burden, so far from being an objection, is the very reason why you should instantly come to Christ, for he alone is able to release you.

(2.) But perhaps you think you do not come aright. I ask, how would you come? If you can come as a helpless unworthy sinner, without strength, without righteousness, without any hope but what arises from the worth, work, and word of Christ, this is to come aright. There is no other way of being accepted. Would you refresh and strengthen yourself, wash away your own sins, free yourself from your burden, and then come to him to do these things for you? May the Lord help you to see the folly and unreasonableness of your unbelief!

I have observed already, that coming to Christ signified more at first than merely to come into his presence: so likewise, it means more now than to be found among his worshippers. Let none of you be deceived with a form of godliness. Examine your religious profession by these tests: Have you laboured under a sense of your misery? Have you known the burden of sin? Has Jesus given you rest? Or are you earnestly seeking to him for it? If you understand not the meaning of these questions, you are not yet in that state to which the promises are made. And why are you not labouring and heavy laden? Are you not sinners? Has not the righteous God revealed a law? Has he not guarded this law with the sanction of a dreadful curse? Have you not transgressed this holy law in thought, word, and deed, times without number? If you have not, why do you join in the public confession,

and call for mercy when the commandments are repeated? If you have, how will you escape the penalty? How indeed, if you dare to neglect this great salvation? The law condemns you already; if you receive not the gospel you must perish without remedy; for other name or means whereby men can be saved there is none under heaven. Once more you are warned of danger; once more the refuge is set before you. We preach Jesus, who came to seek and to save those who were lost; Jesus, who was wounded with whips, and thorns, and nails, that his enemies might be healed. Does not this thought affect you? Will you slight his love, despise his blood, and crucify him afresh? God forbid. Is there not some heart now relenting, beginning to feel impressions of fear, shame, and grief? Happy beginning! Obey the voice of God now opening in your conscience! Now is the time to pray; before you knew not what to pray for; but now you see you want the blood of Christ, and the teaching of his Spirit. "Ask, and you shall receive; and seek, and you shall find." Take your warrant from my text; Jesus has said, "Come unto me, and I will give you rest." Let your hearts answer, "Take away our iniquity, and receive us graciously: Behold, we come unto thee, for thou art the Lord our God; and in thee the fatherless, the helpless, the comfortless, find mercy."