

THE
WORKS
OF
THE REV . JOHN NEWTON

LATE RECTOR OF THE UNITED PARISHES OF
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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 XI.

OF BELIEVERS REST IN CHRIST.

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

THE learned have a variety of arguments whereby to prove the scriptures to be the word of God. But though that kind of proof, which may be brought in a way of reasoning and external evidence, is doubtless useful upon proper occasions, yet I apprehend the chief and most satisfactory argument to those who are capable of receiving it, arises from the correspondence between the subject-matter of the scriptures and the state of an awakened mind. When the eyes of the understanding are opened, we begin to see everything around us to be just so as the scriptures have described them. Then, and not till then, we perceive, that what we read in the Bible concerning the horrid evil of sin, the vileness of our fallen nature, the darkness and ignorance of those who know not God, our own emptiness, and the impossibility of finding relief and comfort from creatures, is exactly true. We cannot but apply the words of the woman of Samaria, and say, Come and see a Book that has told me all that ever I did (John iv. 29.), the ground of all my complaints, the true cause and nature of all the evil I either see, hear, or feel, from day to day. And as we find our disease precisely described, so we perceive a suitableness in the proposed remedy. We need a Saviour, and he must be a mighty one; but though our wants and sins, our fears and enemies, are great and numerous, we are convinced that the character of Christ is sufficient to answer them all. We need a rest, a rest which the world cannot give. Inquire where we will among the creatures, experience brings in the same answer from all, "It is not in me." This again confirms the word of God, which has forewarned us that we shall meet nothing but disappointment in such pursuits. But there is a spiritual rest spoken of which we know to be the very thing we want, and all our remaining solicitude is how to attain it. From hence, as I said, we may assuredly conclude, that the book which gives us such just views of everything that passes, must be given by inspiration from him who is the searcher of hearts. This proof is equally plain and conclusive to all capacities that are spiritually enlightened, and such only are able to understand it. We are now to speak,

III. Of this promised rest And here two things offer to our consideration:

1. What this rest is?
2. How it is obtained?

1. The Greek word* expresses something more than rest, or a mere relaxation from toil; it denotes refreshment likewise. A person weary with long bearing a heavy burden, will need not only to have it removed, but likewise he wants food and refreshment, to restore his spirits, and to repair his wasted strength. Such is the rest of the gospel. It not only puts a period to our fruitless labour, but it affords a sweet reviving cordial. There is not only peace, but joy in believing. Taken at large, we may consider it as two-fold:

1st, A present rest. So the apostle speaks, “We who have believed *do enter* into rest,” Heb. iv. 3.

(1.) The common, wearisome pursuit of the world, is described as “spending their money for that which is not bread, and their labour for that which satisfieth not” (Isa. lv. 2); wandering from object to object in quest of good (Psal. iv. 6), but still mortified by incessant and repeated disappointment. We should pity a person whom we should see seeking some necessary thing day after day, which we knew was impossible to be found there. It is, however, the case with all till they come to Christ. Satisfaction is what they profess to aim at, and they turn every stone (as we say), try every expedient to meet with it, but in vain. It is only to be found in him. When they come to him their wishes are answered. This is exemplified by our Lord in the character of a merchant-man seeking goodly pearls (Math. xiii. 46), who was still upon the inquiry till he had found one pearl of great price. This answered and exceeded his desires: upon the discovery of this one, he rejoiced to forego all his former acquisitions, and to give up every other possession on purpose that he might obtain it.

(2.) I have spoken something concerning the wearisome exercise of a conscience burdened with guilt; but by coming to Jesus, and believing in him, an end is put to this. When we are enabled to view our sins as laid upon Christ, that those who come are accepted in the Beloved, that there is no more condemnation, but pardon, reconciliation, and adoption are the sure privileges of all who trust in him,—O the sweet calm that immediately takes place in the soul! It is something more than deliverance. There is a pleasure more than answerable to the former pain, a comfort greater than all the trouble that went before it. Yea, the remembrance of the former bitterness greatly enhances the present pleasure. And the soul understands and experiences the meaning of those scriptures: “When the Lord turned the captivity of Zion, then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing,” Psal, cxxvi. 1, 2. “In that day thou shalt say, O Lord, I will praise thee: though thou wast angry with me, thine anger is turned away,

* Αναπαυσω.

and thou comfortedst me. Behold, God is my salvation: I will trust, and not be afraid: for the Lord Jehovah is my strength and my song; he also is become my salvation,” Isa. xii. 1, 2.

(3.) There is likewise a rest from the power of sin. In vain is this sought from resolutions and endeavours in our own strength. Even after we are spiritually disposed, and begin to understand the gospel-salvation, it is usually, for a season, rather a fight than a rest. But when we are brought nearer to Christ, and taught to live upon him as our sanctification, deriving all our strength and motives from him by faith, we obtain a comparative rest in this respect also. We find hard things become easy, and mountains sink into plains, by his power displayed in our behalf. Farther,

(4.) There is a rest from our own works. The believer is quite delivered from the law as a covenant, and owes it no longer service in that view. His obedience is gracious, cheerful, the effect of love, and therefore he is freed from those fears and burdens which once disturbed him in the way of duty. At first there was a secret, though unallowed dependence on himself. When his frames were lively he was strong, and thought he had something to trust to, but under a change (and changes will happen) he was at his wits end. But there is a promised, and therefore an attainable rest in this respect,—a liberty and power to repose on the finished work and unchangeable word of Christ; to follow him steadily through light and darkness; to glory in him only when our frames are brightest; and to trust in him assuredly when we are at our lowest ebb.

Such is the present rest; different in degrees according to the proportion of faith, and capable of increase even in those who have attained most, so long as we remain in this imperfect state. But there is,

2dly, A future rest, besides and beyond all that can be experienced here: “There *remaineth yet* a rest for the people of God,” Heb. iv. 9. Faint and imperfect are our most enlarged ideas of that glory which shall be revealed. “It does not yet appear what we shall be,” 1 John iii. 2. Who can describe or conceive the happiness of heaven? The most we can clearly understand of it lies in negatives. It will be as unlike as possible to this wilderness of sin and sorrow where we are now confined. Here we are in a warfare, but then we shall enter into perfect rest.

(1.) A rest from all sin. There no unclean thing shall defile or disturb us for ever. We shall be free from sin in ourselves. This alone would be worth dying for. Indwelling sin is a burden under which even the redeemed of the Lord must groan, whilst they sojourn in the body; and those who are most spiritual are most deeply affected with shame, humiliation, and grief, on this account, because they have the clearest views of the holiness of God, the spirituality of the law, the love of Christ, and the deceitfulness of their

own hearts. Therefore the apostle Paul, though perhaps in grace and talents, in zeal and usefulness, distinguished above all the children of Adam, accounted himself the chief of sinners (1 Tim. i. 15.), less than the least of all saints (Eph. iii. 8.), and cried out, under the disparity he felt between what he was and what he would be, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" Rom. vii. 24. But we shall not carry this burden beyond the grave. The hour of dissolution shall free us from the inbred enemies (the inseparable concomitants of this frail perishing nature) which now trouble us, and we shall see them no more for ever.

Again, we shall be free from all the displeasing effects of sin in others. Our hearts shall be no more pained, nor our ears wounded, nor our eyes filled with tears, by those evils which fill the earth. Now, like Lot in Sodom, we are grieved every day with the filthy conversation of the wicked, 2 Pet. ii. 7. Who that has any love to the Lord Jesus, any spark of true holiness, any sense of the worth of souls in his heart, can see what passes amongst us without trembling? How openly, daringly, almost universally, are the commandments of God broken, his gospel despised, his patience abused, and his power defied! To be a silent spectator of these things is sufficiently grievous; but if (as we are in duty bound) we dare to stand as witnesses for God in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, we find the spirit of the first born. Cain instantly takes fire, and denounces war against all who should presume to say, that we ought to obey and fear God rather than men. Invectives and ill treatment, are the certain lot of all who openly and consistently appear on the Lord's side; and if they escape stripes and bonds, imprisonment and death, it is to be ascribed to the restraints of divine providence, and (as a means in our happy land) to the temper of the laws, and to the clemency of the powers under whom we live. These things often constrain the believer to say, "O that I had wings like a dove! for then would I flee away, and be at rest," Psal. lv. 6. Let us not be weary or faint in our minds; ere long this wish shall be answered. A glorious rest awaits you, where sin and sinners shall have no place, nor the alarms of war be heard any more.

(2.) A rest from all outward afflictions, which, though necessary, and, under the influence of divine grace, profitable, are grievous to bear; but then they will be necessary no more. Where there is no sin, there shall be no sorrow. Then, believers, God "shall wipe away all tears from your eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away," Rev. xxi. 4.

(3.) A rest from Satan's temptations. How busy is this adversary of God and man! what various arts, what surprising force, what constant assiduity, does he employ to ensnare, distress, and terrify those who by grace have

escaped from his servitude! He says, like Pharaoh of old, "I will pursue, I will overtake, I will destroy," Exod. xv. 9. He follows them to the last stage of life, but he can follow them no farther. The moment of their departure out of the body, shall place them beyond his reach for ever

(4.) A rest from unsatisfied desires. Here the more we drink, the more we thirst; but there our highest wishes shall be crowned and exceeded; we shall rest in full communion with him whom we love; we shall no more complain of interruptions and imperfections, of an absent God, and a careless heart. Here, when we obtain a little glimpse of his presence, when he brings us into his banqueting-house, and spreads his banner of love over us, how gladly would we remain in such a desirable frame! How unwilling are we to come down from the mount! But these pleasing seasons are quickly ended, and often give place to some sudden unexpected trial, which robs us of all that sweetness in which we lately rejoiced. But when we ascend the holy hill of God above, we shall come down no more; we shall be for ever with the Lord, never offend him, never be separated from him again. We shall likewise rest in full conformity to him, Psal. xvii. 15. Here we find a mixture of evil in our best moments: when we approach nearest to him, we have the quickest sense of our defilement, and how much we fall short in every branch of duty, in every temper of our hearts; but when we shall see Jesus as he is, we shall be fully transformed into his image, and be perfectly like him.

2. But how is this rest to be obtained? Blessed be God, in that way which alone can render it attainable by such unworthy indigent creatures. If it was to be bought, we have nothing to offer for it; if it was proposed as a reward of merit, we can do nothing to deserve it. But Jesus has said, "I will give you rest." Our title to it cost him dear; he purchased it for us with his own blood; but to us it comes freely. Faith in his name puts us in immediate possession of the first-fruits, the earnest of this inheritance; and faith will lead us powerfully and safely through all hindrances and enemies to the full enjoyment of the whole. Faith unites us to Christ; gives us an immediate interest in all the benefits of his life, death, and intercession; opens the way of communication for all needful supplies of grace here, and insures to us the accomplishment of all the Lord has spoken to us of, in a state of glory. "He that believeth shall be saved" (Mark xvi. 16.); saved in defiance of all the opposition of earth and hell; saved notwithstanding he is in himself unstable as water, weak as a bruised reed, and helpless as infancy. What Jesus will give, none can take away. Only remember that it is a free gift. Receive it thankfully, and rejoice in the Giver. Let him have all the glory of his own undertaking. Renounce every hope and every plea, but his promise and mediation. Commit your souls to him, and then fear nothing. "The eternal God

is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms,” Deut. xxxiii 27. He will fight your battles, heal your wounds, refresh your fainting spirits, guide you by his counsel while here, and at last receive you to himself.

May we not therefore say, Happy are the people that are in such a case! happy they, who have been enabled to accept this gracious invitation, who have already entered upon the rest of grace, and have a well-grounded expectation that they shall rest in glory! Believers, what should you fear, or why complain? Look back to where the Lord found you sleeping in, helpless and hopeless, yet insensible of your danger: look forward to what he has provided for you, an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away; a crown of life, a kingdom that cannot be shaken; think of the love, the suffering, the glory of him to whom you owe these blessings; and let these considerations animate you to run with patience and thankfulness the race that is set before you, Heb. xii. 1.

Happy likewise are you, whose hearts are fixed upon this rest, and this Saviour, though as yet you are in heaviness through manifold temptations. The Lord will give you rest. Doubt it not; he cannot deny himself; wait his hour; though he seem to tarry long, yet maintain your confidence in his promise. Redouble your prayers, cry mightily to him, he will not (as perhaps many around you do) rebuke your importunity, and charge you to hold your peace. Look at the generations of old, and see; did ever any trust in the Lord, and was confounded? or did any abide in his fear, and was forsaken? or whom did he ever despise that called upon him?

And you, who are yet strangers to rest, are thus far happy, that you are still spared, and have the gospel continued to you. The Lord is still waiting to be gracious; he says to all, Come unto me, and ye shall find rest for your souls. Do you not see this rest desirable? What rest, either here or hereafter, can you expect, if you remain in the service of sin? Why may not you obtain your liberty? You are no worse than others, either by nature or practice. Though you have been transgressors from the womb, you are not excluded, if you do not exclude yourselves: though your sinful habits and inclinations are exceeding strong, he is able to subdue them. There is a power in his blood, and in that Spirit which he is exalted to bestow, sufficient to make the Ethiopian change his skin, and the leopard his spots (Jer. xiii. 23.), to soften the hardest heart, and to pardon the most aggravated guilt, and to enable those to do good who have been accustomed to do evil. Arise, he call-eth you. O may he accompany the outward call of his word with the efficacious power of his grace, that you may this instant obey his voice, and flee to him for refuge! Whither can you flee else? Who but Jesus can save you from the wrath to come? Be wise, and delay no longer. “But if you will not hear, mine eye shall weep for you in secret places,” Jer. xiii. 17. If you will

not come to Jesus for life, you must die. If you are out of Christ, God is angry with you every day. The curse of his broken law lies heavy upon you, whether you are asleep or awake, abroad or at home, at the market or in the church. The wrath of God is revealed against you; if you turn not, he will whet his sword (Psal. vii. 12.); he hath bent his bow, and made it ready: he hath prepared the instruments of death to smite you; he hath ordained the arrows of his vengeance against you. And can you, dare you, go on in your sins, and say, I shall have peace? O may you be wise in time! "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God," Heb. x. 31. "Consider this, ye that forget him, lest he tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver," Psal. 1. 22.