

THE  
**WORKS**  
OF  
**THE REV . JOHN NEWTON**

LATE RECTOR OF THE UNITED PARISHES OF  
ST. MARY WOOLNOTH AND ST. MARY WOOLCHURCH-HAW,  
LOMBARD STREET, LONDON.

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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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**COMPLETE IN ONE VOLUME.**

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# SERMONS

PREACHED IN THE PARISH-CHURCH OF OLNEY.  
BUCKINGHAMSHIRE.

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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 IX.

LABOURING AND HEAVY-LADEN SINNERS DESCRIBED.

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

WE read that when David was withdrawn into the wilderness from the rage of Saul, every one that was in distress, or in debt, or discontented, gathered themselves unto him, and he became their captain, 1 Sam. xxii. 2. This would be reckoned but small honour in the judgment of Saul and his court, to be the head of a company of fugitives. Those who judge by outward appearances, and are governed by the maxims of worldly wisdom, cannot have much more honourable thoughts of the present state of Christ's mystical kingdom and subjects upon earth. The case of David was looked upon as desperate by those who, like Nabal (1 Sam. xxv. 10.), lived at their ease. They did not know, or would not believe, the promise of God, that he should be king over Israel; and therefore they preferred the favour of Saul, whom God had rejected. In like manner, though our Lord Jesus Christ was a divine person, invested with all authority, grace, and blessings, and declared the purpose of God concerning himself, and all who should obey his voice, that he would be their King, and they should be his happy people; yet the most that heard him saw no excellence in him, or need of him; their portion and their hearts were in this world, therefore they rejected him, and treated him as a blasphemer and a madman. A few, however, there were who felt their misery, and desired to venture upon his word. To these he gave the freest invitation. Those who accepted it, found his promise made good, and rejoiced in his light. Thus it is still: he is no longer upon earth to call us; but he has left these gracious words for an encouragement to all who need a Saviour. The greatest part of mankind, even in Christian countries, are too happy, or too busy to regard him. They think they deserve some commendation, if they do not openly mock his messengers, disdain his message, and offer abuse to all who would press them today, while it is called today, to hear his voice. Even this treatment his servants must expect from many. But there are a few, like David's men, distressed in conscience, deeply in debt to the law of God, and discontented with the bondage of sin, who see and believe that He, and He only, is able to save them. To these labouring and heavy-laden souls, he still says, "Come unto me, and I will give you rest." May his gracious Spirit put life and power into his own words, and into what he shall enable me to speak from them, that they may at this time receive a blessing and peace from his hands!

The text readily points out three inquiries:

1. Who are the persons here invited?
2. What is it to come to Christ?
3. What is implied in the promised rest?

I. The persons are those who labour (the Greek expresses toil with weariness<sup>1</sup>) and are heavy-laden. This must, however, be limited to spiritual concerns, otherwise it will take in all mankind, even the most hardened and obstinate opposers of Christ and the gospel. For let your consciences speak, you that account the yoke of Christ a heavy burden, and judge his people to be miserable and melancholy, are not you wearied and burdened in your own way? Surely you are often tired of your drudgery. Though you are so wedded and sold to your hard master, that you cannot break loose; though you are so mad as to be fond of your chains; yet you know, and I know (for I remember the gall and wormwood of that state), that you do not find all that pleasure in your wickedness which you pretend to. So much as you affect to despise hypocrisy, you are great hypocrites yourselves. You often laugh when you are not pleased; you roar out your boisterous mirth sometimes, when you are almost ready to roar with anguish and disquiet of spirit. You court the friendship of those whom in your heart you despise; and though you would be thought to pay no regard at all to the word of God, there are seasons when (like him you serve) you believe and tremble. And farther, what visible burdens do you bring upon yourselves? "The way of transgressors is hard," Prov. xiii. 15. Your follies multiply your troubles every day. Confusion and uneasiness in your families, waste of substance, loss of health and reputation, discord, strife, sorrow, and shame; these are the bitter fruits of your evil ways, which prey on your present hours, and make your future prospects darker every day. Surely you are weary and heavy laden beyond expression.

But this is not the case with others. You avoid gross vices, you have perhaps a form of godliness. The worst, you think, that can be said of you is, that you employ all your thoughts, and every means that will not bring you under the lash of the law, to heap up money, to join house to house, and field to field; or you spend your days in a thoughtless indolence, walk in the way of your own hearts, and look no farther: and here you will say you find pleasure, and insist on it, that you are neither weary nor heavy laden. I might enlarge on your many disappointments, the vain fears which are inseparable from those who live without God in the world, and the trouble we find from disorderly, restless, and unsatisfied passions. But, to wave these things, I say briefly, that if you are not labouring and heavy

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<sup>1</sup> Compare Luke v. 5. John iv. 6. where the original word is the same.

laden, then it is plain that you are not the persons whom Christ here invites to partake of his rest. And though you can rest without him now, think, O think, what rest you will find without him hereafter? If you now say, Depart, he will then say, Depart. And who will smile upon you when he frowns? To whom will you then flee for help? or where will you leave your glory? O that it would please him to touch your hearts, that, as weary and heavy-laden sinners, you might fall humbly at his feet, before his wrath burn like fire, and there be none to quench it!

But to proceed: let us,

1. Explain the terms, what it is to *labour* and be *heavy laden*.
2. Show who are the persons that answer this description.

First, the persons are said to be,

1. Labouring, toiling, weary. This is not hard to be understood. Weariness proceeds either from labour or from weakness; and when these are united, when a person has much to do, or to bear, and but little strength, he will soon be weary. The case of some, however, is, that when they are tired, they can lay down their burden, or leave off their work. But these are not only labouring, fainting, weary, but,

2. Heavy laden, likewise. As if a man had a burden which he was unable to bear a single minute, so fastened upon him, that he could not by any means be freed from it; but it must always press him down, night and day, abroad or at home, sleeping (if sleep in such a circumstance was possible) and waking. How would the poor creature be wearied! How could you comfort or give him ease, unless you could rid him of his burden? How desirable would the prospect of liberty be to such a one! and how great his obligations and acknowledgments to his deliverer!

Secondly, This representation is an emblem of the distresses, and burdens of those who seek to Jesus, that they may have rest in their souls; nor can any truly seek him till they feel themselves in such a state. They may be generally comprised under three classes:

1. Awakened sinners. None but those who have felt it can conceive how sinners labour, toil, and faint, under their first convictions. They are burdened,

- 1st, With the guilt of sin. This is a heavy load. When Jesus bore it, it made him sweat great drops of blood. It is true, he bore the weight of all his people's sins; but the weight of one sin is sufficient to press us down, if God permits it to lie heavy upon us. I suppose the best of us can remember some action, some incident or other, in our past lives, which we would wish to forget if we could. Now, how would you be distressed to have a person sounding in your ears, from morning till night, and every day of your lives, that worst thing that ever you did? Would it not weary you? This is a faint

image of the convinced sinner's state. When conscience is truly awakened, it acts this officious and troublesome part; but its remonstrances are not confined to one sin, it renews the remembrance and the aggravations of multitudes. Nor is this the voice of a man, but indeed of God, who speaks in and by the conscience. The poor sinner hears and trembles: then the complaint of Job is understood: "Thou writest bitter things against me, and makest me to possess the iniquities of my youth," Job xiii. 26. Do you wonder that such a one can no longer take pleasure in worldly things? It is impossible, unless you could silence this importunate voice, that they can bear themselves at all. Nay, often it is so strong and urgent, gives them such a lively sense of what sin is, and what it deserves from a righteous God, that they are almost afraid or ashamed to see any person that knows them. They are ready to think, that people can read in their faces what passes in their hearts, and almost expect that the ground should open under their feet. O how wearisome is it to be continually bowed down with such a burden as this?

2dly, With the power of sin. Perhaps they were once in some measure at ease in this respect; they saw others whom they supposed to be worse; and therefore trusted in themselves that they were righteous. But convictions rouse and inflame our sinful natures. St Paul exemplifies this by his own case before conversion: "I was alive without the law once, but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died," Rom. vii. 9. He never was strictly without the law, for he expected salvation by obeying it; but he was without the knowledge of its spirituality, demands, and sanction; and while he remained thus, he was alive, that is, his hope remained good, and he was satisfied with his obedience. But when the commandment came, when its extent, purity, and penalty were brought home to his conscience, sin revived, and he died. He found all his pretensions to liberty, obedience, and comfort were experimentally confuted by what he felt in himself. The more an awakened sinner strives against his corruptions, the more they seem to increase. This wearies him; for, besides the greatness of the toil itself, he finds himself weak, weak as water, weaker and weaker. And he is not only weary, but heavy laden; for this likewise is a burden which he cannot shake off. He sees that he cannot succeed, yet he dares not desist.

2. Those who are seeking salvation by the works of the law are labouring and heavy laden, engaged in what is beyond their strength, and baffles all their endeavours. This may appear from what has been already said. It is a hard task to keep the whole law; and nothing else will either please God, if made the ground of justification, or satisfy the conscience that has any true light. Those declarations of the word, that "cursed is the man who continueth not in all things written in the book of the law to do them" (Gal.

iii. 10), and “whoso keepeth the whole law, and yet offendeth in one point, he is guilty of all” (James ii. 10), keep them in continual anxiety and servitude. The wickedness of their flesh makes it impossible for the law to give a ground of hope; yet they cannot lay down their burden, but are compelled to renew the fruitless task. I speak not of mere formalists, who go through a round of external services without meaning or design; but all who are in a measure sincere, find themselves still followed with a restless inquiry, “What lack I yet?” Matth. xix. 20. Endless are the shifts and contrivances they are put to, but all in vain; for, what makes it worse, they always add to this burden many inventions of their own, as though the demands of the law were too few.

3. Those who are under temptation. It is a hard and wearisome service to be in close conflict with the powers of darkness. The leading branches of this exercise are,

1st, When the soul is assaulted, and, as it were, filled with insufferable blasphemies. When Satan is permitted to shoot these fiery darts, none can express (not even those who have felt them) the amazement and confusion that fills the mind. For a person who has received a reverence for the name and attributes of God to be haunted from morning to night, from day to day, with horrid imprecations, so strongly impressed, that he often starts and trembles with an apprehension that he has certainly consented, and spoken them aloud with his lips,—this is irksome and terrifying beyond description.

2dly, When the foundations of faith and experience are attacked. Many who have thought themselves grounded in the truth, who have hoped that they had surely tasted that the Lord is gracious, and have in their first comforts been ready to say, “I shall never be moved (Psal. xxx. 6), thou, Lord, of thy goodness hast made my mountain so strong,” have found themselves afterwards at their wits end, when the enemy has been permitted to come in upon them like a flood, Isa. lix. 19. One black cloud of temptation has blotted out all their comfortable evidences; and they have been left to question, not only the justness of their own hopes, but even the first and most important principles on which their hopes were built.

3dly, When the hidden corruptions and abominations of the heart are stirred up. And perhaps there is no other way but this of coming to the knowledge of what our depraved natures are capable. Such things a season of temptation has discovered to some, which I believe no rack nor tortures could constrain them to disclose, though but to their dearest friend. This subject, therefore, will not bear a particular illustration. The Lord’s people are not all acquainted with these depths of Satan. As people who live on shore have a variety of trials, dangers, and deliverances, yet know but little



of the peculiar exercises of those who go down to the sea in ships; so, in the present case there are great waters (Psal. cvii. 24), depths of temptation, known comparatively to few. Those who are brought through them, have more to say of the wonders of God in the great deep than others; and this is his design in permitting it, that they may know more of him and more of themselves. But while they are under these trials, they are weary and heavy laden; and this burden they must bear till the Lord removes it. The help of men, books, and ordinances, is sought and tendered in vain, till his appointed hour of deliverance draws near.

These, therefore, convinced, striving, and tempted souls, are the persons to whom Jesus says, "Come to me, and I will give you rest." The purport of this gracious invitation we are to consider hereafter. In the meantime rejoice in this, Jesus has foreseen your cases, and provided accordingly. He says, *Come*; that is, *believe*, as he himself expounds it: "He that cometh unto me, shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst," John vi. 35. See how his promises suit the state you are in.

1. Are you heavy laden with guilt? The gospel-message is, "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son, cleanseth us from all sin," 1 John i. 7.

2. Are you groaning under the power of indwelling sin? Hear his gracious words: "I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live," John xi. 25. And to the same purpose his prophet: "He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might, he increases strength," Is. xl. 29.

3. Are you striving in the fire to keep the law? "Wherefore will you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which satisfieth not?" Forego the vain attempt. Is it not written, "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth?" Rom. x. 4.

4. Are you in temptation? He that says, *Come unto me*," has been tempted himself (Heb. ii. 18), and knows how to pity you. He has power over your enemy, and can deliver you with a word, Mark i. 27. Did he not thus dispossess Satan in the days of his humiliation? And if then, surely he is no less able now; for since that time he has gloriously triumphed over the powers of darkness," Col. ii. 15. And as his arm is not shortened, neither is his ear heavy; he has said, without exception, "Whosoever cometh unto me I will in no wise cast him out" (John vi. 37); and thousands who have been in your distress, have successively found that promise fulfilled: "The God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly," Rom. xvi. 20; Zech. iii. 2.