

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.

CONTAINING
AN AUTHENTIC NARRATIVE, &C., LETTERS ON RELIGIOUS SUBJECTS, CARDIPHONIA, DIS-
COURSES 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.

COMPLETE IN ONE VOLUME.

EDINBURGH

Printed at the University Press, for

PETER BROWN AND THOMAS NELSON.

1830.

SERMON XII.

EFFECTS OF MESSIAH'S APPEARANCE.

Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as a hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing. Is. xxxv. 5, 6.

How beautiful and magnificent is the imagery by which the prophet, in this chapter, represents the effects of Messiah's appearance! The scene, proposed to our view, is a barren and desolate wilderness. But when he, who in the beginning said "Let there be light, and there was light," condescends to visit this wilderness, the face of nature is suddenly changed by his presence. Fountains and streams of water burst forth in the burning desert, the soil becomes fruitful, clothed with verdure, and adorned with flowers. The towering cedars, which were the glory of Lebanon, and the richest pastures, which were the excellency of Carmel, present themselves to the eye, where, a little before, all was uncomfortable and dreary. How is it, that so few of those who value themselves upon their taste, and who profess to be admirers of pastoral poetry in particular, are struck with the elegance and beauty of this description? Alas, we can only ascribe their indifference to the depravity of the human heart. They would, surely, have admired this picture, could they have met with it in any of their favourite authors; but descriptive paintings in this style, so exquisitely combining grandeur with simplicity, are only to be found in the Bible, a book which their unhappy prejudices and passions too often lead them to depreciate and neglect. But they who have a scriptural and spiritual taste, not only admire this passage as a description of a pleasing change in outward nature, but consider it as a just and expressive representation of a more important, a moral change, of which they have themselves been, in a measure, the happy subjects. The barren wilderness reminds them of the state of mankind by the fall, and of their own hearts, before Messiah, the Sun of righteousness, arose upon them with healing, with light, power, and comfort, in his beams. In that memorable hour, old things passed away, and all things became new. The Lord, by shining into their hearts, and showing them his glory in the person of Christ, has created for them a new heaven and a new earth. The works of God around them in his creation and providence assume a different appearance. Before, they lived without him in the world; but now, they see his hand wherever they look, they hear his voice in every event; for now the principles of his grace are planted in their souls, and they are no longer barren nor unfruitful, but are filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ to his praise, Phil. i. 11.

The verses which I have read exhibit the effects of Messiah's power and goodness, by another image equally pleasing. Not only the wilderness, but the

inhabitants of the wilderness partake of the virtue of the great Redeemer. He finds them in circumstances of distress, which he only can relieve. But when he comes the blind receive their sight, the deaf hear, the lame walk, and the dumb have voices given them to resound his praise. These mighty works, in their literal sense, marked his character, and confirmed his claims when he was upon earth; and to these he himself appealed in proof of his being the promised Saviour whom the prophets had foretold, and that no other was to be expected, Matth. xi. 3–6.

But the words have a still more sublime and important sense. As the great Physician, he cured all manner of bodily diseases and infirmities. But this was not the principal design for which he came into the world. The maladies to which sin has subjected the body, are but emblems of the more dreadful evils which it has brought upon the soul. He came to open the eyes of the mind; to make the obstinate will attentive and obedient to the voice of God; to invigorate our benumbed and paralytic faculties, that we may be active and cheerful in his service; and to open our lips, that our mouths may show forth his praise. I have a good hope that I may warrantably say, “This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears,” Luke iv. 21. Some of you who were once darkness, are now light in the Lord.

These different effects are produced by one simple, but powerful operation. While Lazarus lay in the grave, all his natural powers were inactive. But when the voice of the Son of God restored him to life (John xi. 43), he was, of course, immediately enabled to see, to hear, to move, and to speak. Thus, while we were spiritually dead, we were necessarily blind, deaf, dumb, and motionless, with respect to all the objects and faculties of that life of God in the soul, which is the perfection and honour of our nature. When we are made partakers of this life, by a new and heavenly birth, then our spiritual senses are brought into exercise, then the eyes of the blind are opened, to see the beauty and glory of divine truths: we hear the voice of God, we feel a liberty to walk and act in his service, and our tongues are taught to praise him. Here are four chief effects of a work of grace upon the heart, which distinguish believers from the rest of mankind.

And these effects are all to be ascribed to Messiah. For they are all wrought by the agency of his Holy Spirit. The gifts and graces of the Holy Spirit, which are absolutely necessary, as well for the perpetuating of his gospel from age to age, as for making it efficacious and successful, are bestowed upon sinners wholly upon the account of his mediation. It was, when he ascended on high and led captivity captive, that he procured these blessings for rebellious men, that the Lord God might dwell among them, Psal. lxxviii. 18. And it was only for his sake, and on the account of what he has to accomplish in the fulness of time, as intimated in the promise of the seed of the woman appointed to bruise the serpent’s head, that there were any gracious communications afforded to fallen

man, from the first entrance of sin into the world. But now the Redeemer's great work is fulfilled, his salvation is more openly revealed and applied by the publication of the gospel, with the Holy Ghost sent down from Heaven, and sinners hear the voice of God and live. Then all the changes prefigured and predicted in my text take place, and the wilderness becomes a fruitful field.

1. They were once blind, but now they see. The religion of true believers is not the effect of imagination and blind impulse, but is derived from a solid knowledge, which will bear the strictest scrutiny, and is the reasonable service of an enlightened understanding. They see God; their apprehensions of him are, in some measure, answerable to his greatness and his goodness, and inspire them with reverence and love. Their conceptions of other things in which they are most nearly interested, are agreeable to the truth. Sin appears to them hateful in itself, as well as mischievous in its consequences; and holiness, not only necessary by the ordination of God, but desirable for its own sake, as essentially belonging to the true dignity and happiness of man. They know themselves; they see and feel that they are such creatures as the Bible describes them to be, weak, depraved, and vile. Of course, they see the folly of attempting to recommend themselves to God, and can no longer place any dependence on what they once accounted their wisdom, power, or righteousness; and therefore they see the absolute necessity of a Saviour. They see, likewise, and approve the method of salvation proposed by the gospel, as worthy of the wisdom and justice of God, and every way adapted to the exigencies of their sins, wants, and fears. They see and admire the excellence, dignity, and sufficiency of him, on whom their help is laid. His power, and authority engage their confidence, his love captivates and fixes their hearts. They see the vanity of the present state, and the vast importance of eternity. In these respects they have all of them a good understanding, however inferior in natural capacity or acquired knowledge to the wise men of the world.

2. Their knowledge, so far as they have attained, is not merely speculative, cold, and indistinct, like the light of the moon. The Sun of righteousness has shined into their hearts. The light they enjoy is vital, cheering, and effective. Because they thus see, they hear likewise. They were once deaf to the voice of God, whether he spoke by his word or his providence, whether in the language of mercy or judgment. But now their deaf ears are unstopped. They are now attentive, submissive, and willing to receive his instructions, and to obey his commands. With them, one "Thus saith the Lord," has the force of a thousand arguments. They desire no farther proof of a doctrine, no other warrant for their practice, no other reason for any dispensation, than Thus the Lord has said, This he requires, and, This is his appointment. Thus their wills are brought into subjection; and they so understand, as to believe and obey.

3. Farther, with their sight and hearing they receive power and activity. Once they were tied and bound in the chain of their sins, or like a man benumbed with

a dead palsy, unable to move. If they sometimes seemed to express desires that might be called good with respect to their object, they were faint and ineffectual. But now their fetters are broken, the health and strength of their souls is restored, and God has wrought in them not only to will but also to do according to his good pleasure, Phil. ii. 13. It is not more wonderful that a cripple should suddenly recover the use of his limbs, than that a person who has long been fettered in sinful habits should be enabled to move and act with alacrity in the service of God. But in the day of divine power sinners are made both willing and able. How burdensome was that which they once accounted their religion! how little comfort did it yield them! how little did it assist them against their passions or against their fears! But all things are become new, since they have attained to a life of faith in the Son of God. Their religious service is now pleasant, and their warfare against sin and the world victorious. Their obligations, motives, resources, encouragements, and prospects inspire them with a holy vigour to run, with patience and perseverance, the race that is set before them.

4. Having their sight and hearing thus restored, and their hearts enlarged to walk at liberty in the ways of wisdom, they are no longer dumb, silent, and sullen, but, out of the abundance of their hearts, their mouths speak the language of gratitude, praise, and joy. For though most people have the faculty of speech, and can use, or rather abuse their tongues fluently; though we are sufficiently expert from our childhood, in the dialects of falsehood, profaneness, and folly; yet, by nature, we are dumb with respect to the language that becomes us, as the creatures of God, and as those who have sinned against him, and yet are invited to seek his mercy. But when grace teaches the heart, then the heart teaches the mouth, Prov. xvi. 23. When we believe, then we speak, yea, we sing and greatly rejoice; as it is written, "In that day I will praise thee; though thou wast angry, thine anger is turned away," Isa. xii. 1. And again, "The voice of joy and thanksgiving is in the tabernacles of the righteous," Psal. cxviii. 15. "Let the redeemed of the Lord say, That he is good, and his mercy endureth for ever, Psal. cvii. 1, 2.

It is of great importance to examine ourselves by this test, and not to be satisfied with our knowledge of the gospel, any farther than our consciences bear us witness, that it has produced a real moral change in our tempers, conduct, and pursuits. For there is a knowledge which is falsely so called. It puffeth up, but edifieth not. Our Lord's declaration deserves our most serious attention: "For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not may see, and that they which see, might be made blind," John ix. 39. It is very possible, yea, very easy, by the help of books, sermons, and converse, to acquire an orderly and systematic knowledge of divine truths; it may be learnt thus, like any other branch of human science, and the head be well stored with orthodox sentiments; and there may be an ability to prove and defend them, in a way of argumenta-

tion, while the heart is utterly a stranger to their salutary influence. Such characters are too common. None make a greater parade and boast of seeing than these persons. None are more fatally blinded. They smile with disdain when they speak of a self-righteousness founded upon prayers, alms-deeds, and sacraments, but are not aware that they themselves live in the very spirit of the Pharisees (Luke xviii. 2), so clearly described and so expressly condemned in the New Testament. Their supposed knowledge of the doctrines which they misunderstand and abuse, is the righteousness on which they build their hopes; and trusting to this, they despise all those who are stricter in practice than themselves, as ignorant and legal, and discover almost as great dislike to close and faithful preaching as they could do to poison. Though the doctrines of the gospel, when rightly received, are productive of godliness, it is to be feared there are people who espouse and plead for them to quiet their consciences, by furnishing them with excuses for the sins they are unwilling to forsake. It is not surprising that they who are displeased with the yoke of our Lord's precepts should seem friendly to the idea of salvation without the works of the law. The notion of the final perseverance of believers may afford a pillow for those to rest on, who, being at present destitute of all feeling of spiritual life, labour to persuade themselves that they are Christians, because they had some serious thoughts, and made some profession of the truth, many years ago. So likewise, in what the scriptures teach of the total inability of fallen man, they think they have a plea to justify their negligence and sloth, and therefore are not disposed to contradict the testimony. The invitation and command to wait, and watch, and strive in the ways and means of the Lord's appointment, they evade, as they think, with impunity, by confessing the charge, and saying, I am a poor creature indeed, I can do nothing of myself aright, and therefore to what purpose should I attempt to do anything? A minister may preach upon these points, in general terms, and obtain their good word. But if he speaks plainly and faithfully to conscience; if he bears testimony not only against dead works, but against a dead faith,—against spiritual pride, evil tempers, evil speaking, love of the world, and sinful compliances; if he insists that the branches of the true vine should bear grapes, and not the same fruit as the bramble; hearers of this stamp will think they do God service by censuring all he can say as low and legal trash. How awful! that people should be blinded by the very truths which they profess to believe! Yet I fear such cases are too frequent. God grant a delusion of this kind may never be found amongst us! For if the salt itself should lose its savour, wherewith shall it be salted? Matth. v. 13. May we come simply to the light, with a desire of seeing more of ourselves, and more of our Saviour, that we may be more humble and spiritual, more afraid of sin, more watchful and successful in striving against it, and, in our whole conversation, more conformable to our glorious Head!

But to return:—From what has been offered upon this subject we may observe,

1. That true Christianity is friendly to society, and to the common interests of mankind. It is the source of peace, tenderness, benevolence, and every humane temper. It is calculated to soothe the fierce disposition, to enlarge the selfish spirit, and to transform the lion into the lamb. What then must we think of those pretended friends to liberty and free inquiry, whose unhappy zeal is employed to rob us of the only light and balm of life! who, by their misrepresentations and cavils, endeavour to persuade others, though they cannot effectually persuade themselves, that the gospel, a scheme so wise in its constitution, so salutary in its design, so powerful in its effects, is no better than an imposition, the contrivance of superstitious or artful men! Why should they attempt to take away the foundation of our hope and the spring of our comfort (if they were able), when they know they have nothing to substitute in their place! Let us think of them with that compassion which their state calls for, and pray for them, if peradventure God will give them repentance to the acknowledgment of the truth, 2 Tim. ii. 25.

2. The change thus wrought is great, marvellous, and, if not so frequent, might be styled miraculous. It is more than education, example, persuasion, or resolution can perform. It is the work of God alone to open the blind eyes, to change the heart of stone into flesh, and to raise the dead.

This thought should exclude boasting. The happy subjects of this change were no better by nature or practice than others. They have nothing but what they have received. The glory and praise is due to the Lord alone. It should likewise soften their censure of those who are still in a state of alienation from God, or at least prevent the emotions of anger and resentment towards them. They know not what they do. Their danger should excite our pity and our friendly endeavours to recover them from the error of their way. And, especially, we should be careful so to regulate our behaviour, that, if they obey not the word, they may without the word be convinced and won (1 Pet. iii. 1) by the force of our example. If the Lord be pleased to do that for them which he has done for us, their dislike of us, and their opposition to us, will be quickly at an end; and though they set out after us, they may possibly make a swifter progress in the Christian life than we have done. Thus, though Saul of Tarsus approached Damascus as an enemy and a persecutor, when the scales fell from his eyes, he not only immediately joined the disciples, but in a little time became a pattern to them.

That the change is the work of God, should likewise be considered by those who, from a sense of the greatness of their sins, and the strength of their sinful habits, are ready to sink into despair. Whatever apparent difficulty there may be in your case, it is easy to divine power. All things are possible with God (Mark x. 27), and all things, likewise, are possible to him that believeth, Mark ix. 23.

The promises invite you to apply to him who is the author and finisher of faith and who has said for your encouragement, “Him that cometh unto me, I will in nowise cast out.”