

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.

MESSIAH
OR
FIFTY EXPOSITORY DISCOURSES
ON THE SERIES OF
SCRIPTURAL PASSAGES
WHICH FORM THE SUBJECT OF HANDEL'S CELEBRATED
ORATORIO
OF THAT NAME,
PREACHED IN THE YEARS 1784 AND 1785,
IN THE
PARISH CHURCH OF ST. MARY WOOLNOTH,
LOMBARD STREET,
LONDON.

—————Ah!
Tantanne rem, tam negligenter, agere!—TER.
Oh, that they were wise, that they understood this!—DEUT. xxxii. 29.

SERMON XXVIII.

MESSIAH WORSHIPPED BY ANGELS.

—*Let all the angels of God worship him.* HEBREWS, i 6.

MANY of the Lord's true servants have been in a situation so nearly similar to that of Elijah (1 Kings xix. 10), that like him they have been tempted to think they were left to serve him alone. But God had then a faithful people, and he has so in every age. The preaching of the gospel may be compared to a standard erected, to which they repair, and thereby become known to each other, and more exposed to the notice and observation of the world. But we hope there are always many, who are enlightened by his word and Holy Spirit, and training up in the life of faith and holiness, known and dear to God, though they have little advantage from public ordinances, and perhaps no opportunity of conversing with those who are like-minded with themselves. But even though the number of those who visibly profess the gospel of the grace of God were much smaller than it is, we need not be disheartened. If our sight could pierce into the invisible world, we should be satisfied that there are more with us than against us, 2 Kings vi. 16. And such a power is attributed to faith. It is the evidence of things not seen (Heb. xi. 1), because it receives the testimony of scripture, and rests upon it, as a certainty, and a demonstration; requiring no other proof, either of doctrines or facts, than that they are contained in the sure word of God. True Christians therefore are comforted by the assurance they have that their Saviour, the Lord of their hearts, is not so neglected and despised, nor his character so misunderstood and misrepresented in yonder land of light, as in this dark and degenerate world. Though too many here, like Festus, treat it as a matter of great indifference, whether Jesus be dead or alive (Acts xxv. 19); and ask them with a taunt, What is your Beloved more than another beloved? they are not ashamed, for they know whom they have believed; and if men will not join with them in admiring and praising him, they are sure that they have the concurrence of far superior beings. By faith they behold him seated upon a throne of glory, adored by all holy and happy intelligent creatures, whether angels, principalities, powers, or dominions. And when he was upon earth, in a state of humiliation, though despised and rejected of men, he was seen and acknowledged by angels. Their warrant and ours is the same. He is proposed to us as the object of our supreme love and dependence; and as we are enjoined to kiss the Son and to pay him homage, so when God brought him into the world, he said, "Let all the angels of God worship him."

Though the bringing Messiah, the first or only begotten, into the world,

may, as I have observed already, be applied to his incarnation, or to his resurrection, I apprehend it rather designs the whole of his exhibition in the flesh. At his ascension, having finished the work appointed for him to do, he was solemnly invested with authority and glory, and sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high. But in his lowest, no less than in his exalted state, the dignity of his divine person is the same, yesterday, today, and for ever. He was always the proper object of worship. It was agreeable to right, and to the nature of things, and a command worthy of God, that all the angels of God should worship him.

The holy angels that excel in strength (Ps. ciii. 20), always do his commandments, hearkening to the voice of his word. We might be certain, therefore, that this highest and most comprehensive command a creature is capable of receiving from his Creator, is fulfilled by them, even if we had no express information of the fact. But we have repeated assurances to this purpose. Thus Isaiah, when he saw his glory and spake of him, “saw the seraphim standing; each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. And one cried unto another, saying, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of his glory,” Is. vi. I see not how the force of the argument arising from this passage, to prove that Messiah is the proper object of the most solemn adoration which creatures can offer to the Most High, can be evaded; unless any were hardy enough to assert, either that the prophet was himself imposed upon, or has imposed upon us, by a false vision; or else that the apostle John (chap. xii. 41) was mistaken when he applied this representation to Jesus Christ. But the apostle likewise had a vision to the same effect, in which, while his people redeemed from the earth by his blood cast their crowns at his feet, the angels were also represented as joining in the chorus of their praises, saying with a loud voice, “Worthy is the lamb that was slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing,” Rev. v. 12. In brief, he is the Lord of angels. The heavenly host waited upon him, and sung his praises at his birth. Angels ministered unto him in the wilderness, Luke ii. 13, 14. And they are so entirely his servants, that, at his command, they are sent forth to minister unto, and to attend upon his believing people. Are they not all ministering (*λειτουργικα*, worshipping) spirits, adoring the divine Majesty, yet sent forth to minister (*εις διακονιαν*, for service) to the heirs of salvation? Heb. i. 14. He is likewise the head of angels, though they are not in the same near relation to him as the sinners whom he has redeemed with his blood; for he took not on him their nature. There was no redemption appointed for the angels who kept not their first habitation. But the confirmation of those who continue in holiness and happiness, is in and through him, “For all things both which are in heaven, and which are on earth, are gathered together in one (*ανακεφαλαιωσασθαι*, reduced under one head into one body) in him,” Ephes, i. 10. And they are

therefore styled, in contradistinction from the others, the Elect angels, 1 Tim. v. 21. He is their life, and strength, and joy, as he is ours, though they cannot sing the whole song of his people. It is appropriate to the saved from amongst men to say, This God shines glorious in our nature! he loved us, and gave himself for us!

Here, then, as I have intimated, is a pattern and encouragement for us. The angels, the whole host of heaven, worship him. He is Lord of all. We in this distant world have heard the report of his glory, have felt our need of such a Saviour, and are, in some degree, witnesses and proofs of his ability and willingness to save. He lived, he died, he rose, he reigns for us. Therefore, humbly depending upon his promised grace, without which we can do nothing, we are resolved, that whatever others do, we must, we will worship him, with the utmost power of our souls. It is our determination and our choice, not only to praise and honour him with our lips, but to devote ourselves to his service, to yield ourselves to his disposal, to entrust our all to his care, and to place our whole happiness in his favour. I hope, in speaking thus, I speak the language of many of your hearts.

Some reflections easily offer from this subject, with which I shall close it.

1. They who love him, may rejoice in the thoughts of his glory. They have deeply sympathized with him, when reading the history of his humiliation and passion. It has not been a light concern to them that he endured agonies, that he was rejected, reviled, scourged, and slain. He who suffered these things was their best friend, their beloved Lord, and he suffered for their sakes. In the glass of his word and by the light of his Holy Spirit, he has been set forth as crucified before their eyes, and they have been crucified with him, and have had fellowship with him in his death. From hence they derive their indignation against sin, and their indifference to the world which treated him thus. But now he is no more a man of sorrows; his head, which was once crowned with thorns, is now crowned with glory; his face, which was defiled with spittle, shines like the sun; his hands, which were manacled, wield the sceptre of universal government; and, instead of being surrounded by insulting men, he is now encircled by adoring angels. Therefore they rejoice with joy unspeakable, expecting soon to see him as he is, and to be with him for ever, according to the gracious promises he has made them, and the tenor of his prevailing intercession for them.

2. What an honour does his exaltation and glory reflect upon his faithful followers? The world that rejected him pays little regard to them; they are slighted, or scorned, or pitied, and, in proportion as they manifest his spirit, experience a degree of the treatment which he met with; they are accounted visionaries and hypocrites, many of them are great sufferers, and few of them, comparatively, are distinguished among men by abilities, influence, or wealth; they are pilgrims and strangers upon earth; yet this God is their God.

He who is worshipped by angels is not ashamed to call them brethren, Heb. ii. 11. They are nearly related to him who sitteth upon the throne; and he is pleased to account them his portion and his jewels. It doth not yet appear what they shall be; but the day is coming when their mourning shall be ended, their characters vindicated, and they shall shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Lord. They shall stand before him with confidence, and not be ashamed when he appears. Then shall the difference between the righteous and the wicked be clearly discerned. In that day the righteous shall say, "Lo, this is our God, we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the Lord, we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation" (Isa. xxv. 9): while the others, however once admired or feared by mortals, the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, no less than those of inferior rank, shall tremble, shall wish in vain to conceal themselves, and shall say to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth upon the throne, for the great day of his wrath is come," Rev. xvi. 15, 16. In that hour, the striking description in the book of Wisdom (which, though apocryphal, is in this passage quite consonant with the declarations of authentic scripture) will assuredly be realized. "Then shall the righteous man stand in great boldness before the face of such as have afflicted him, and made no account of his labours. When they see it, they shall be troubled with terrible fear, and shall be amazed at the strangeness of his salvation, so far beyond all that they looked for; and they repenting, and groaning for anguish of spirit, shall say within themselves, This was he whom we had sometimes in derision, and a proverb of reproach. We fools counted his life madness, and his end to be without honour. How is he numbered among the children of God, and his lot is among the saints!" Wisd. v. 1-5.

3. We may well admire the condescension of this great King, who humbleth himself even to notice the worship of heaven, that he should look upon the worship of sinful men with acceptance, and permit such worms as we are to take his holy name upon our polluted lips. If we know ourselves, we must be conscious of such defects and defilement attending our best services, as are sufficient to affect us with shame and humiliation. What wanderings of imagination, what risings of evil thoughts, what unavoidable though unallowed workings of self-complacence, mingle with our prayers and praises, and disturb us in our secret retirements, in the public assembly, and even at the table of the Lord! I hope we know enough of this, to be sensible that we need forgiveness, not only for our positive transgressions of his will, but for our sincerest, warmest, and most enlarged attempts to render him the glory due to his name! Yet we are incompetent and partial judges of ourselves; we know but little of the evil of our own hearts, and have but a slight sense of the malignity of that evil which is within our observation. But the Lord searches the heart and the reins; to him all things are naked, without covering,

open, without concealment, Heb. iv. 13. He understandeth our thoughts afar of, and beholdeth us exactly as we are. Our dislike of sin is proportionable to our attainments in holiness, which are exceedingly short of the standard. But he is infinitely holy, and therefore evil is unspeakably hateful to him. How vile and abominable therefore must our sins appear in his view! Indeed, if he were strict to mark what is amiss, we could not stand a moment before him, nor would it be agreeable to his majesty and purity to accept any services or prayers at our hands, if we presumed to offer them in our own name. But now there is an atonement provided, and a way of access to a throne of grace, sprinkled with the blood which speaketh better things than the blood of Abel. Now that we have an Advocate, Intercessor, and High-Priest to bear the iniquity of our holy things, we are accepted in the Beloved. Now the great and holy God vouchsafes to admit such sinners into communion with himself. He invites us to draw near with boldness; and because of ourselves we know not how to pray as we ought (Rom. viii. 26), he favours us with the influence of his Holy Spirit. It is a great instance of the power of faith, that, remembering what we have been, and feeling what we are, and having some right apprehension of him with whom we have to do, we are enabled to approach him with confidence, and to open our hearts to him with greater liberty than we can use to our dearest earthly friends. His people know by many infallible proofs, that his presence is with them in their secret retirements, and in their public assemblies, according to his promise. He hears and answers their prayers, he revives their spirits, he renews their strength; he gives them reason to say, that a day in his courts is better than a thousand of the world's days. Such are their expectations, and such, in the exercise of faith, is their experience. They worship him whom the angels worship; and they know, that, unworthy and defective as they are, their worship is no less acceptable to him, than that of the angels in glory, by virtue of their relation to him, who is Lord both of angels and men.

4. Hence we may infer the necessity of that change of heart, which the scripture expresses by a new birth, a new life, a new creation, and other representations, which denote it can be effected only by divine power. Till we are the subjects of this operation, we are incapable of enjoying, or even of seeing the kingdom of God, John iii. 3. Though to outward appearance the congregation before me seem all to be serious and attentive, as if engaged in the same design, and animated with the same desire and hope, he to whom our hearts are known, doubtless observes a great difference. Some of you, through custom, or a regard to your connections, brings you hither, yet must be sensible that this is not your chosen ground, and that these are not the subjects which give you pleasure. We preach Christ Jesus and him crucified—Christ Jesus the Lord. The Lord sees, though I cannot, the indisposition of your hearts towards him. You are soon weary and uneasy; and you wish to throw the blame of your uneasiness upon the preacher. You regard

his method, his manner, his expressions, with no friendly intention, in hopes of noticing something that may seem to justify your dislike; and a sermon, not very long in itself, is to you very tedious. We wish well to your souls, we study to find out acceptable words; for though we dare not trifle with or flatter you, we are unwilling to give you just offence. But if you will be faithful to yourselves, you may perceive that it is not so much the length or the manner, as the subject of our sermons that disgusts you. You would, perhaps, hear with more attention and patience, did we speak less of him whom the angels worship. There are assemblies more suited to your taste, and there are public speakers to whom you can probably afford a willing ear, for a much longer time than we detain you; because there you are at home. You are of the world, and you love the world. The amusements, the business, the converse, and the customs of the world, suit your inclination. But here you are not, if I may so speak, in your proper element; and yet it may be, there are persons in the same seat with you, who think themselves happy to hear what you hear with indifference or disgust. If you knew your state as a sinner, your need of a Saviour, and the excellency and glory of the Saviour whom we preach to you, you likewise would be pleased; and a preacher of very moderate powers would fix your attention, and gain your esteem, if he preached this gospel. But what ideas do you form of a future state? Surely you cannot suppose, that in the eternal world you will meet with any of the poor expedients you have recourse to now, for filling up your time, which otherwise would hang heavy upon your hands. To attempt a detail of the round of vanities which constitute a worldly life, would be unsuitable to the dignity of the pulpit. Let it suffice, that death will remove you from them all. If they are now necessary to what you account your happiness, must you not of course be miserable without them? If you believe you shall exist hereafter, do you not desire heaven? But such a heaven as the word of God describes could not afford you happiness, unless your mind be previously changed and disposed to relish it. Neither the employment nor the company of heaven would be pleasing to you. It is a state where all the inhabitants unite in admiring and adoring him who died upon the cross. If this subject is displeasing to you here, it would be much more so there. Heaven itself would be a hell to an unhumbled, an unholy soul. Consider this seriously, while there is time to seek his face; and tremble at the thoughts of being cut off by death in your present state, insensible as you are of who he is, and what he has done for sinners. May he enlighten your understanding, and enable you to see the things pertaining to your true peace, before they are for ever hidden from your eyes!