

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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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.

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———Ah!

Tantamne rem, tam negligenter, agere!—TER.

Oh, that they were wise, that they understood this!—DEUT. xxxii. 29.

TO THE  
PARISHIONERS OF ST. MARY WOOLNOTH,  
AND  
ST. MARY WOOLCHURCH HAW,  
LONDON,  
THESE SERMONS  
ON THE  
MESSIAH  
ARE AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBED BY THE  
AUTHOR,  
TO REMAIN AS A TESTIMONY OF HIS RESPECT  
FOR THEIR PERSONS,  
AND HIS SOLICITUDE FOR THEIR WELFARE,  
WHEN HIS PRESENT RELATION  
TO THEM, AS THEIR MINISTER,  
SHALL BE DISSOLVED.

## SERMON XXXII.

### THE PROGRESS OF THE GOSPEL.

———*Their sound went into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world.*  
ROMANS, x. 18.

THE heavens declare the glory of God, Psal. xix. 1. The grandeur of the arch over our heads, the number and lustre of the stars, the beauty of the light, the splendour of the sun, the regular succession of day and night, and of the seasons of the year, are such proofs of infinite wisdom and power, that the scripture attributes to them a voice, a universal language, intelligible to all mankind, accommodated to every capacity. There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard. The combined effect of the visible works of the great Architect, presses a declaration upon the ear of reason—"The hand that made us is divine." We must, however, understand it of the ear of right reason. The loudest voice is unnoticed by the deaf. Thus it ought to be, and thus it would be, if man were indeed a rational creature, as he proudly boasts himself. That the fact in general is otherwise; that the bulk of mankind are no more affected by the works of God than the beasts of the field; that the philosophers who profess to study them, so faintly discern, so frequently deny the great First Cause of all, is a proof that sin has darkened and depraved the noblest powers of the soul, and degraded man into the state of an inattentive idiot. However, the evidence, if it does not excite his admiration and praise, is abundantly sufficient to convict him of stupidity and ingratitude, and to leave him without excuse, Rom. i. 20.

This passage, taken from that sublime ode of David, the nineteenth psalm, is applied by the apostle to illustrate the character and the progress of the still more wonderful display of the divine perfections, which God has made known by the glorious gospel. A variety of truths shine (like stars in the firmament) in the system of revelation. But principally Jesus, the Sun of truth and righteousness, the source of spiritual light and life, answers to the description there given of the material sun. "His going forth is from the end of heaven, and his circuit unto the ends of it, and there is nothing hid from his heat," Psal. xix. 6.

But the fulfilment of the promises respecting Messiah's kingdom is progressive. So far as this prophecy has been accomplished, the arm of the Lord has been revealed. It is his doing and may justly be marvellous in our eyes. The truth of the prophecy will be proved by its final completion, which, though not likely to take place in our time, we may be assured that it cannot fail, for the Lord hath spoken it. And besides, we have a sufficient pledge and security for the whole, in what he has already done. It was not necessary

for the fulfilling of this prophecy, nor consistent with the tenor of many other prophecies, that the spread of the gospel should be instantaneous and universal on its first publication. Messiah is to rule in the midst of his enemies till the appointed season, when all enemies shall be subdued under his feet. The gospel, the rod of his power, is so admirably adapted to the necessities of mankind, that the obstructions it has met with must be ascribed to their wickedness and obstinacy. Not that they could resist the will of God. Had he intended to give it universal success from the beginning, the event would have been answerable. But it was his pleasure to conduct the dispensation of it, so as, on the one hand, to display his sovereignty, wisdom, and power, and on the other, to afford a full proof of the depravity and alienation of the heart of man. This point is so much misunderstood and misrepresented, that though it is attended with great difficulties, especially if we give way to vain reasonings upon it, I shall venture, in the present discourse, to offer a few thoughts towards clearing the subject, and vindicating (if the very attempt be not presumptuous) the ways of God to man.

When the Sun of righteousness, after a long night of darkness, arose upon the world, there appeared a strong probability that the prophecies concerning the extent of his vital influence, from east to west, from pole to pole, would soon be completely realized. In a very short space he was known and adored by multitudes, through the greatest part of the Roman empire, and beyond its limits. But, perhaps, for about seventeen hundred years since that period, the boundaries of his kingdom, though they have been altered, have not been much enlarged. If he has since in some measure enlightened the more western parts of the globe, the eastern regions, which once rejoiced in his light, are now overwhelmed with gross Mahomedan darkness. And if we were capable of investigating the state of the world at this day, we should probably find, that five out of six of the human race now living, never so much as heard of the name of Jesus as a Saviour. There is reason to fear likewise, that in the nations who professedly call him Lord, and are not unwilling to be themselves called Christians, a greater proportion than five out of six, are no less strangers to his power and grace, than the Mahomedans who reject him, or the Heathens who never heard of him.

There is not perhaps a darker chapter in the book of divine providence, nor a meditation which calls for a more absolute subjection and submission to the holy will and unsearchable wisdom of God, than this. The first spread of the gospel proved it to be a divine expedient, fully capable of producing all the great purposes which the prophets had foretold, and which the state of the world required. It reconciled men to God, to themselves, and to each other. It subdued their passions, regulated their affections, freed them from the guilt and bondage of sin, from the love of the world, and from the fear of death. Wherever the doctrine of the cross was preached, it produced that

salutary change of conduct which philosophy had long attempted in vain; and raised men to that life of communion with God, of which philosophers had no conception. Such was the bright morning of the gospel day. But in time, yea, in a little time, dark clouds obscured its light; its progress was impeded, and in a manner stopped. On one hand, the profession and name of the gospel gave occasion to mischiefs and abominations which had been unknown among the Heathens; so that the part of the world which received the name of Christendom, was little distinguished from the rest, in a religious view, but by a fierce and rancorous superstition, which tyrannized over the consciences, liberties, and the lives of men. On the other hand, as I have observed, the very name of Christianity was restrained to a small portion of the earth; many nations have not heard of it to this day; and many who once professed it have renounced it long ago.

Thus the fact stands. We cannot deny it. But how shall we account for it? Infidels and petty reasoners think they here find an invincible objection against the truth. They say, "If the gospel you speak of be so salutary and necessary, if it be indeed the greatest effect of the divine goodness, why has not God, who is the common Father of mankind, afforded it to all the nations of the earth? and why is it restrained to so few?" But I think we may retort the question, and let them who propose it give such an answer (if they can) as shall not amount to a confession of the obstinacy and ungrateful folly of mankind. When the world saw the happy tendency and effects of this gospel in the age of the apostles, why did they not universally receive it? We know that when the use of the mariner's compass, the art of printing, and many other inventions that might be named, were discovered in one country, they were presently adopted by the surrounding civilized nations. Even the recent attempts to venture through the air with a balloon, hazardous as they certainly are, and insignificant with respect to real usefulness, are likely in a little time not only to engage the notice, but to excite the imitation of Europe. Why then was the gospel, the most beneficial and important discovery the world has been favoured with, the only one that has been treated with general contempt? Certainly our Lord has assigned the true reason, "Light is come into the world, but men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil," John iii. 19. They hate the light, they will not come to it, nor will they permit it to come to them if they can possibly prevent it. This glorious gospel of the blessed God has been and still is shunned and dreaded, and every human precaution and exertion has been employed to withstand and suppress it, as though, like the pestilence, it was baneful to the welfare of society. May we not say, speaking after the manner of men, that the Lord has done enough to confirm his own express and solemn declaration, that he has no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked may turn from his way and live! Ezek. xxxiii. 11. He has raised up a succession of faithful servants, from

age to age, to publish these glad tidings. The reception they have met with, not only from the Heathens, but from nominal Christians, is well known to those who are acquainted with ecclesiastical history, which contains little more than a detail of the arts and cruelties by which the civil and ecclesiastical powers of almost every kingdom, where the gospel has been known, have endeavoured to suppress it.

The nation of Great Britain, in particular, has but little right to ask, Why the gospel of Christ has been spread no farther among the Heathen? The providence of God has favoured us with peculiar advantages for this service. Our arms and commerce have opened us a way to the most distant parts of the globe; and of late years, the enterprising spirit of our navigators has added almost a new world to the discoveries of former times. How far have our plans been formed with a subserviency to the great design of evangelizing the Heathen? How much have we done to promote it in Asia, where our influence and opportunities have been the greatest? What impression of the name and spirit of Christianity has our conduct given to the inhabitants of India? But I forbear—Facts are too well known to need recital; too glaring to need a comment. It is true, we have an incorporated society for propagating the gospel in foreign parts, and we hear of missionaries; but of the good effects of their missions, as at present conducted we neither hear, nor expect to hear. While America was ours, the efforts of a few individuals from the northern provinces in the last and present century, were not without success. But I fear this is all the honour we can claim. Some good has been done by the Danish mission to Tranquebar; but I believe our influence in it has been rather nominal than effective. The extent and effects of the labours of the *Unitas Fratrum*\*, compared with their circumstances and resources, must not be omitted on this occasion. They doubtless excite admiration, and thankfulness to God, in every serious mind acquainted with the subject. But excepting in these instances, I believe the Heathens have derived but little knowledge of the gospel from their connections with Christendom for some ages past. And I think none of the commercial nations in Europe have had the propagation of Christianity less at heart than the English. What obligations the natives of Africa are under to us, for instruction or example, may be estimated, in part, by a cursory survey of the state of our West-India Islands!

That the gospel is so little known in the world, and so little received where it is known, cannot be so properly ascribed to the will of God, as to the wickedness and wilfulness of men. Undoubtedly he to whom all things are possible, who has absolute power over the hearts of his creatures, could make a way for the universal reception of it. And we trust that in his own time he will do so. But power is not his only attribute. It would be rash and

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\* More generally known amongst us by the name of the Brethren, or Moravians.

absurd to suppose that the great God will do every thing that he can do. We are sure that he will do what is worthy of himself; but of this his own infinite wisdom is the only competent judge. What is becoming of his perfections and holy government, we can know no farther than he is pleased to inform us. But it certainly becomes us to lay our hands upon our mouths, and our mouths in the dust, when we contemplate his conduct; or, if we do speak, to adopt the apostle's language, "Oh the depths of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For of him, and through him, and to him are all things. To whom be glory for ever," Rom. xi. 36.

However, my text is fulfilling, and shall be fulfilled. This joyful sound has already been spread far abroad, in defiance of all attempts to restrain it. Multitudes from age to age have heard it, and found it to be the power of God unto salvation. And it would be easy to prove, if it belonged to my subject, that the superior advantages of civilization which Christendom enjoys are remotely owing to the knowledge of revelation. To this must be chiefly ascribed the different state of this island from what it was when visited by Julius Caesar. Yea, our modern philosophers would make but a poor figure, were they despoiled of all the plumes they have borrowed from the book they affect to despise. Farther, the purpose of God to save sinners by faith in his beloved Son, is the primary ground of that patience and long-suffering which he still exercises towards such a world as this. And some imperfect traces of this design transmitted by tradition, are probably to be found though woefully disfigured among every nation and people under heaven which have at least preserved, in a degree, the notices of right and wrong, and some faint warnings of conscience, in the most savage state of human nature. But, were it not for reasons connected with the designs of his mercy, we can scarcely conceive that the holy God would have perpetuated the race of mankind in a state of rebellion and enmity against his government. Or if he had permitted them to multiply, and left them wholly and absolutely to themselves, without interposing some restraints upon their depravity, I believe the inhabitants of the earth would have been no better than incarnate fiends.

The prophecies, both of the Old and New Testament, encourage us to hope for a time, when the light of gospel-truth will break forth with meridian brightness, the glory of the Lord be revealed, and all flesh shall see his salvation. As a pledge of this, and of the truth of the whole scripture, we have what may be called a standing miracle continually before our eyes; I mean the state of the Jews, who, though dispersed far and wide among many nations, are everywhere preserved a distinct and separate people. The history of the world affords no other instance of the like kind. The great monarchies, by which they were successively conquered and scattered, have successively perished. Only the names of them remain. But the people whom they



despised, and endeavoured to exterminate, subsist to this day; and though sifted like corn over the earth, and apparently forsaken of God, are still preserved by his wonderful providence, unaffected by the changes and customs around them; still tenacious of the law of Moses, though the observance of it is rendered impracticable. Many days, many ages they have lived, as the prophets foretold they should, without a temple, without sacrifice or priest, Hos. iii. 4, 5. As yet, many heathen nations are permitted to walk in their own ways. But at length the fulness of the Gentiles shall come in, and all Israel shall be saved, Rom. xi. 25, 26. The revolutions and commotions in kingdoms and nations, which astonish and perplex politicians, are all bringing forward this great event. The plan of the human drama, to us, who only see a single scene, is dark and intricate; but the catastrophe is approaching; and in the close of the whole, the manifold wisdom of God will be admired and adored, and all holy and happy intelligences will acknowledge with transport, He has done all things well.

But the point I am chiefly to press upon my hearers, is, that this word of salvation is sent to you, Acts xiii. 26. How the great Judge will deal with the Heathens, who were never favoured with it, he has not seen fit distinctly to inform us. But thus far he has assured us, that it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon, yea for Sodom and Gomorrah, than for those who have the privilege of knowing the gospel, if they reject it, Matth, xi. 20–24. To them much is given, and of them much will be required. Do not think ministers assuming if they magnify their office. We have no reason to think highly of ourselves. Nor would you be blameable for disregarding us if we spoke in our own names. But if we preach the truth of the gospel in simplicity and sincerity, then we speak in the name of the Lord, and demand your attention. Do you ask for our authority and commission? Ask your own consciences. If, like Felix, when you mean only to indulge your curiosity by hearing us, you are constrained to tremble (Acts xxiv. 25); if we force upon your mind the remembrance of what you have said or done; if our message makes you uneasy and dissatisfied with yourselves; if you cannot avoid feeling at some times the truth of our principles, and the necessity of the change we would press upon you; if, though you have been repeatedly displeased and offended with what you hear, and, perhaps, have gone away purposing or threatening that you would hear it no more, you still appear amongst us—then you have a sufficient proof, that the ministers are sent and authorized to speak to you, and we take your consciences to witness that we preach the truth.