

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,
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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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!

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 XXXIX.

JOB'S FAITH AND EXPECTATION.

I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand in the latter day upon the earth. And though after my skin, worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God. JOB, XIX 25, 26.

CHRISTIANITY, that is, the religion of which Messiah is the author and object, the foundation, life, and glory, though not altogether as old as the creation, is nearly so. It is coeval with the first promise and intimation of mercy given to fallen man. When Adam by transgression had violated the order and law of his creation, his religion, that is, the right disposition of his heart towards God, was at an end. Sin deprived him at once of faith and hope, of love and joy. He no longer desired, he no longer could bear the presence of his offended Maker. He vainly sought to avoid it; and when compelled to answer, though he could not deny his guilt, instead of making an ingenuous confession, he attempted to fix the blame upon the woman, or rather indeed upon the Lord himself, who had provided her for him. But mercy, undeserved and undesired, relieved him from a state in which he was already become obdurate and desperate. A promise was given him of the seed of the woman (Gen. iii. 15), which virtually contained, as the seed contains the future plant, the substance of all the subsequent promises which were fulfilled by the incarnation of the Son of God, and by all that he did, or suffered, or obtained for sinners, in the character of Mediator. For a sinner can have no comfortable intercourse with the holy God, but through a Mediator. Therefore the apostle observes of the patriarchs and servants of God, under the Old Testament, "These all died in faith," Heb. xi. 13. We can say nothing higher than this, of the apostles and martyrs, under the New Testament. They died, not trusting in themselves that they were righteous, not rejoicing in the works of their own hands; but they died, like the thief upon the cross, in faith, resting all their hope upon him, who, by his obedience unto death, is the end of the law for righteousness unto every one that believeth, Rom. x. 4. We have greater advantages, in point of light and liberty, than those of old. The prophecies concerning Messiah, which, at the time of delivery, were obscure, are to us infallibly interpreted by their accomplishment. And we know that the great atonement, typically pointed out by their sacrifices, has been actually made; that the Lamb of God has, by the one offering of himself, put away sin. But as to the ground and substance, their faith and hope? were the same with ours. Abraham rejoiced to see the day of Christ (John viii. 56); and aged Jacob, soon after he had said, "I have waited for thy salvation, O Lord," died with the same composure and willingness as Simeon did, who saw it with his

own eyes. Job, who was perhaps contemporary with Jacob, who at least is, with great probability, thought to have lived before Moses, gives us in this passage a strong and clear testimony of his faith. And it forms a beautiful and well chosen introduction to the third part of the Messiah, the principal subject of which is, the present privileges and future prospects of those who believe in the Saviour's name.

The learned are far from being agreed, either in the translation, or in the explanation, of this text. The words *worms* and *body* being printed in Italics in our version, will apprise the attentive English reader, that there are no words answerable to them in the Hebrew. If you omit these words, something will be evidently wanting to make a complete sense. This want different writers have supplied, according to their different judgments, and from hence chiefly has arisen the variety of versions and interpretations. But it would be very improper for me, in this place, to take up your time, and to draw off your attention from the great concerns which should fill our minds when we meet in the house of God, by giving you a detail of controversies and criticisms, which after all are much more uncertain than important. We need not dispute, whether Job, in this passage, professes his assurance of the incarnation of Messiah, or of his resurrection, or of his final appearance to judge the world; or whether he is only declaring his own personal faith and hope in him. These several senses are not so discordant, that if we determine for one, we must exclude the rest. I shall content myself with the words as I find them. And I hope, that if we should miss some of the precise ideas which Job might have when he spoke, we shall not greatly mistake his general meaning, nor wander far wide from the scope of the text.

Four things are observable:

- I. The title of *Redeemer*.
- II. The appropriating word *My*,
- III. His standing upon *the earth*.
- IV. Job's expectation of seeing him *in his flesh*.

I. The title. There is no name of Messiah more significant, comprehensive, or endearing, than the name Redeemer. The name of Saviour expresses what he does for sinners. He saves them from guilt and wrath, from sin, from the present evil world, from the powers of darkness, and from all their enemies. He saves them with an everlasting salvation. But the word Redeemer, intimates likewise the manner in which he saves them. For it is not merely by the word of his power, as he saved his disciples when in jeopardy upon the lake, by saying to the winds and the seas, "Peace, be still: and there was a great calm" (Mark iv. 39); but by price, by paying a ransom for them, and pouring out the blood of his heart, as an atonement for their sins. The Hebrew word for Redeemer, *Gael*, primarily signifies, a near kinsman, or the next of kin; he with whom the right of redemption lay (Numbers xxxv. 19, 21. Ruth

iv. 1–3), and who, by virtue of his nearness of relation, was the legal avenger of blood. Thus Messiah took upon him our nature, and by assuming our flesh and blood, became nearly related to us, that he might redeem our forfeited inheritance, restore us to liberty, and avenge our cause against Satan, the enemy and murderer of our souls. But thus he made himself also responsible for us, to pay our debts, and to answer the demands of the justice and law of God on our behalf. He fulfilled his engagement. He suffered, and he died on this account. But our Redeemer, who was once dead, is now alive, and liveth for evermore, and has the keys of death, and of hades, Rev. i. 18. This is he of whom Job saith, I know that he liveth (was then living), though he was not to stand upon the earth, until the latter day. He is the living One, having life in himself, the same yesterday, today, and for ever, Heb. xiii. 8. Such was his own language to the Jews, “Before Abraham was, I am,” John viii. 58. Therefore the Redeemer is mighty, and his redemption is sure. He is able to save to the uttermost. His power is unlimited, and his official authority, as Mediator, is founded in a covenant, ratified by his own blood, and by the oath of the unchangeable God, Ps. cx. 4.

II. But Job uses the language of appropriation. He says, *My Redeemer*. And all that we know, or hear, or speak of him, will avail us but little, unless we are really and personally interested in him as our Redeemer. A cold speculative knowledge of the gospel, such as a lawyer has of a will or a deed, which he reads with no farther design than to understand the tenor and import of the writing, will neither save nor comfort the soul. The believer reads it, as the will is read by the heir, who finds his own name in it, and is warranted by it to call the estate and all the particulars specified his own. He appropriates the privileges to himself, and says, the promises are mine; the pardon, the peace, the heaven, of which I read, are all mine. This is the will and testament of the Redeemer, of my Redeemer. The great Testator remembered me in his will, which is confirmed, and rendered valid by his death (Heb. ix. 16), and therefore I humbly claim, and assuredly expect, the benefit of all that he has bequeathed. But how shall we obtain this comfortable persuasion, and preserve it against all the cavils of our enemies, who will endeavour to litigate our right? I seem to have before me a proper occasion of discussing a point, very important, and by too many misunderstood; I mean, the nature of that assurance of hope, which the scripture speaks of as attainable, which has been happily experienced by many believers, and which all are exhorted and encouraged to seek after, in the methods of God’s appointment. But my plan will only permit me to offer a few brief hints upon the subject.

1. Many respectable writers and preachers have considered this assurance as essential to true faith. But we have the scripture in our hands, and are not bound to abide by the decisions of any man, farther than as they agree with this standard. The most eminent properties, or effects ascribed to faith, are,

that it works by love (Gal. v. 6), purifies the heart (Acts xv. 9), and overcomes the world, 1 John v. 4. I think it cannot easily be denied, by those who are competent judges in the case, that there are persons to be found, who give these evidences that they are believers, and yet are far from the possession of an abiding assurance. They hope they love the Lord, but there is such a disproportion between the sensible exercise of their love, and the conviction they have of their obligations to him, that they are often afraid they do not love him supremely; and if not, they know that in the scriptural sense they do not love him at all. They can say from their hearts that they desire to love him, but they dare not go farther. But there is a weak and a strong faith; they differ not in kind, but only in degree. Faith is compared to a grain of mustard-seed (Matt. xvii. 20), which, under the cultivation of the heavenly Husbandman, who first sows the seed in the heart, grows up to assurance. But in its infant and weak state it is true and acceptable faith. Far from breaking the bruised reed (Is. xlii. 3), he will strengthen it. He will not quench the smoking flax, but will in due time fan it into a flame.

2. I will go a step farther. Were I to define the assurance we are speaking of, I should perhaps say, it is, in our present state, the combined effect of faith and ignorance. That assurance which does not spring from true faith in the Son of God, wrought by the operation of the Holy Spirit, is no better than presumption. But I believe what we call assurance, even when it is right, is not entirely owing to the strength of our faith, but in a great measure to our having such faint and slight views of some truths, which, if we had a more powerful impression of them, unless our faith was likewise proportionably strengthened at the same time, might possibly make the strongest assurance totter and tremble. I will explain myself. Admitting that I had a right to tell you, that I am so far assured of my interest in the gospel-salvation, as to have no perplexing doubt either of my acceptance or of my perseverance, you would much over-rate me, if you should suppose this was a proof that my faith is very strong. Alas! I have but a very slight perception of the evil of sin, of the deceitfulness of my own heart, of the force and subtlety of my spiritual enemies, of the strictness and spirituality of the holy law, or of the awful majesty and holiness of the great God with whom I have to do. If, in the moment while I am speaking to you, he should be pleased to impress these solemn realities upon my mind, with a conviction and evidence tenfold greater than I have ever known hitherto (which I conceive would still be vastly short of the truth), unless my faith was also strengthened by a tenfold clearer and more powerful discovery of the grace and glory of the Saviour, you would probably see my countenance change and my speech falter. The Lord, in compassion to our weakness, shows us these things by little and little, as we are able to bear them; and if, as we advance in the knowledge of ourselves and of our dangers, our knowledge of the unsearchable riches of

Christ advances equally, we may rejoice in hope, we may even possess an assured hope. But let not him who hath put on his harness, boast as though he had put it off, 1 Kings xx. 11. We are yet in an enemy's land, and know not what changes we may meet with, before our warfare is finished.

3. How far our assurance is solid, may be estimated by the effects. It will surely make us humble, spiritual, peaceful, and patient. I pity those who talk confidently of their hope, as if they were out of the reach of doubts and fears, while their tempers are unsanctified, and their hearts are visibly attached to the love of the present world. I fear they know but little of what they say. I am better pleased when persons of this character complain of doubts and darkness. It proves at least that they are not destitute of feeling, nor, as yet, lulled into a spirit of careless security. And there are professors, whom, instead of endeavouring to comfort in their present state, I would rather wish to make still more suspicious of themselves than they are; till they are convinced of the impossibility of enjoying true peace, while their hearts are divided between God and the world. For though sanctification is not the ground of a good hope, it is the certain concomitant of it. If it be true, that without holiness no man shall see the Lord (Heb. xii. 14), it must likewise be true, that without holiness no man can have a scriptural and well-founded hope of seeing him.

4. But to give a direct answer to the inquiry, How shall I know that he is my Redeemer? I may use the prophet's words, "Then shall ye know, if you follow on to know the Lord," Hos. vi. 3. Our names are not actually inserted in the Bible, but our characters are described there. He is the Redeemer of all who put their trust in him. You will not trust in him, unless you feel your need of him; you cannot, unless you know him, as he is revealed in the word; you do not unless you love him, and are devoted to his cause and service. If you know yourself to be a sinner deserving to perish, if you see that there is no help or hope for you but in Jesus, and venture yourself upon his gracious invitation, believing that he is able to save to the uttermost; and if you really include holiness and a deliverance from sin, in the idea of the salvation which you long for, then he is your Redeemer. If, among us, an act of grace was published, inviting all criminals to surrender themselves, with a promise of mercy to those who did; though no one was mentioned by name in the act, yet every one who complied with it, and pleaded it, would be entitled to the benefit. Such an act of grace is the gospel. The Lord says, "This is my beloved Son, hear him," Matth. iii. 17. If you approve him, he is yours. If you are still perplexed with doubts, they are owing to the weakness of your faith. But there are means appointed for the growth of faith. Wait patiently upon the Lord in the use of those means, and you shall find he has not bid you seek his face in vain. Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness. Live not in the omission of known duty. Do not perplex yourself with vain

reasonings, but believe and obey, and the Lord shall be with you. There are some peculiar cases. Allowances must be made for the effects of constitution and temperament. Some sincere persons are beset and followed, through life, with distressing temptations. But in general, simplicity and obedience lead to assurance. And they who hearken to the Lord, and walk in the way of his commandments, go on from strength to strength (Isa. xlviii. 18); their peace and hope increase, like a river, which from small beginnings, runs broader and deeper, till it falls into the ocean. But to return to Job—

III. Another article of his creed concerning the Redeemer, is, He shall stand in the latter day upon the earth. The latter or last days, in the prophetic style, usually denote the Messiah's day, the times of the gospel. To this time Job looked forward. He beheld the promises afar off. Thus Messiah was the consolation of his people of old, as he who was to come. And it should be our consolation, to know that he is come. His standing upon the earth may include the whole of his appearance in the flesh; his life, passion, and resurrection. The manner of expression intimates something important and wonderful. Had Job, in the spirit of prophecy, spoken of any individual of Adam's race, of Isaiah, or Paul, there would have been nothing extraordinary predicted by saying he shall stand upon the earth, for all men do so in their successive generations. But that the Redeemer, the Lord of glory, the Maker of all things, should condescend to visit his creatures, to dwell with men for a season, to stand and walk upon the earth with them, clothed in a body like their own, is an event which never could have been expected, if it had not been revealed from heaven. It was the object of Job's faith, and well deserving the solemn preface with which he introduces his firm persuasion of it, "Oh! that my words were graven with an iron pen in the rock for ever!" When Solomon had finished the temple of the Lord of Hosts, instead of admiring the magnificence of the building, he was struck with the condescension of the Lord, who would vouchsafe to notice it, and honour it with a symbol of his presence, "Will God indeed dwell with men upon the earth? Behold the heaven of heavens cannot contain him, how much less this house which I have built!" 1 Kings viii. 27. But what was the visible glory which appeared in that temple, if compared with the glory of the only begotten Son of God, when he tabernacled in our flesh! The human nature of Christ is that true temple, not made with hands, in which God is manifested upon a throne of grace, that sinners may approach him without dismay, and receive, out of his fulness, grace for grace. To him all the prophets gave witness, on him the desire and hope of his people, in all ages, have been fixed. He was to stand upon the earth, as Mediator between God and man. And in the same office, now he is upon the throne of glory, he is, and will be, admired, adored, and trusted in, by all his believing people, to the end of time.

IV. From the Redeemer's appearance upon earth, Job infers the restoration and resurrection of his own body. His trials had been great—bereaved of his children and substance, afflicted with grievous boils, harassed with temptations, reproached by his friends: out of all these troubles the Lord his Redeemer delivered him, and his latter days were more prosperous than his beginning. But he knew that he must go the way of all the earth, that his body must lie in the grave, and return to dust. But he expected a future time after his dissolution, when in the flesh, for himself, and with his own eyes, he should see God. The expressions are strong and repeated. He does not speak the language of hesitation and doubt, but of confidence and certainty. It likewise appears that he placed his ultimate happiness in seeing God. His words are not very different from those of the apostle, "When he shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is," 1 John iii. 2. To behold the glory of God, as our Redeemer, to be in a state of favour and communion with him, and, according to the utmost capacity of our nature, to be conformed to him in holiness and love, is that felicity which God has promised, and to which all his servants aspire. Some foretastes of it they enjoy in the present life, which cheer them under their trials, and raise them above the grovelling pursuits of those who have their portion only in this world. But their chief possession is in hope. They look forward to a brighter period, when they shall awaken from the sleep of death, to behold his face in righteousness, Ps. xvii. 15. Then, and not till then, they shall be completely satisfied. The expectation of Job, therefore, affords a sufficient proof that the doctrines of an immortal state, and of a resurrection unto life, were included in the revelations which God afforded to his people in the earliest times, and, consequently, that the religion of the Old Testament and of the New is substantially the same.

The great inquiry this subject should impress upon us, is, are we thus minded? What think you, my dear friends, of Christ? Have you accepted him as your Redeemer; and have you a good hope that you shall see him to your comfort, when he shall return to judge the world? If so, you may rejoice. Changes you must expect. You must die, and your flesh must be food for worms. But he has promised to "change our vile bodies, that they may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the mighty power whereby he is able to subdue all things unto himself, Phil. iii. 21.