

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.

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 WOOLNETH,

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 IV.

THE LORD COMING TO HIS TEMPLE.

The Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the Messenger of the covenant in whom ye delight: behold, he shall come, saith the Lord of Hosts. But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he is like a refiner's fire, and like fuller's soap.—And he shall purify the sons of Levi—that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness. MALACHI, iii. 1–3.

“WHEREUNTO shall we liken the people of this generation, and to what are they like?” Luke vii. 31. I represent to myself a number of persons of various characters, involved in one common charge of high treason. They are already in a state of confinement, but not yet brought to their trial. The facts, however, are so plain, and the evidence against them so strong and pointed, that there is not the least doubt of their guilt being fully proved, and that nothing but a pardon can preserve them from punishment. In this situation, it should seem their wisdom to avail themselves of every expedient in their power for obtaining mercy. But they are entirely regardless of their danger, and wholly taken up with contriving methods of amusing themselves, that they may pass away the term of their imprisonment with as much cheerfulness as possible. Among other resources they call in the assistance of music. And amidst a great variety of subjects in this way, they are particularly pleased with one. They choose to make the solemnities of their impending trial, the character of their judge, the methods of his procedure, and the awful sentence to which they are exposed, the ground-work of a musical entertainment. And, as if they were quite unconcerned in the event, their attention is chiefly fixed upon the skill of the composer, in adapting the style of his music to the very solemn language and subject with which they are trifling. The King, however, out of his great clemency and compassion towards those who have no pity for themselves, prevents them with his goodness. Undesired by them, he sends them a gracious message. He assures them that he is unwilling they should suffer: he requires, yea, he entreats them to submit. He points out a way in which their confession and submission shall be certainly accepted; and in this way, which he condescends to prescribe, he offers them a free and a full pardon. But instead of taking a single step towards a compliance with his goodness, they set his message likewise to music; and this, together with a description of their present state, and of the fearful doom awaiting them if they continue obstinate, is sung for their diversion, accompanied with the sound of cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, dulcimer, and all kinds of instruments, Dan. iii.

5. Surely, if such a case as I have supposed could be found in real life, though I might admire the musical taste of these people, I should commiserate their insensibility!

But is not this case more than a supposition? Is it not, in the most serious sense, actually realized amongst ourselves? I should insult your understandings if I judged a long application necessary. I know my supposition must have already led your thoughts to the subject of the Messiah, and to the spirit and temper of at least the greater part of the performers, and of the audiences. The holy scripture concludes all mankind under sin, Rom. iii. 9. It charges them all with treason and rebellion against the great sovereign Lawgiver and Benefactor, and declares the misery to which, as sinners, we are obnoxious. But God is long-suffering, and waits to be gracious. The stroke of death, which would instantly place us before his awful tribunal, is still suspended. In the meantime he affords us his gospel, by which he assures us there is forgiveness with him. He informs us of a Saviour, and that, of his great love to sinners, he has given his only Son to be an atonement and mediator in favour of all who shall sue for mercy in his name. The character of this Saviour, his unspeakable love, his dreadful sufferings, the agonies he endured in Gethsemane, and upon the cross, are made known to us. And as his past humiliation, so his present glory, and his invitation to come to him for pardon and eternal life, are largely declared. These are the principal points expressed in the passages of the Messiah. Mr. Handel, who set them to music, has been commemorated and praised, many years after his death, in a place professedly devoted to the praise and worship of God; yea (if I am not misinformed), the stated worship of God in that place was suspended for a considerable time, that it might be duly prepared for the commemoration of Mr. Handel. But, alas! how few are disposed to praise and commemorate Messiah himself! The same great truths, divested of the music, when delivered from the pulpit, are heard by many admirers of the oratorio with indifference, too often with contempt.

Having thus, as I conceived myself bound in duty, plainly and publicly delivered my sentiments, of the great impropriety of making the fundamental truths of Christianity the subject of a public amusement, I leave what I have said to your serious reflections, hoping it will not be forgotten; for I do not mean to trouble you often with a repetition of it. Let us now consider the passage before us. If you read it with attention, and consider the great ideas it suggests, and the emphatical language with which they are clothed, you will not, perhaps, think the manner of my introducing it wholly improper.

Malachi confirms and unites the prophecies of Isaiah and Haggai, which were the subject of our two last discourses. John is the messenger, spoken of in the beginning of the first verse, sent to prepare the way of the Lord. Then

the Lord himself shall come suddenly to his temple, that is, immediately after the appearance of his forerunner, and with regard to the people in general, unexpectedly.

The question, “Who may abide the day of his coming?” intimates the greatness and solemnity of the event. If we take his coming in an extensive sense to denote the whole of his sojourning upon earth, from his incarnation to his ascension, it is unspeakably the greatest of all events recorded in the annals of mankind; and though he lived in the form of a servant, and died the death of a malefactor, the vast consequences which depend upon his appearance under these humiliating circumstances, rendered it a manner of coming every way worthy of himself. It afforded a more awful discovery of the majesty, glory, and holiness of God, than was displayed upon Mount Sinai, and proved a closer and more searching appeal to the hearts and consciences of men. To enter more into the spirit and meaning of the question here proposed, we shall briefly take notice of the following points, which the words offer to our serious meditation. May the Holy Spirit whose office it is to glorify the Saviour, enlighten our hearts to understand them, with application to ourselves!

I. The names which are here ascribed to Messiah.

II. The suddenness of his coming.

III. The searching power of it in general, expressed by “a refiner’s fire,” and by “fuller’s soap.”

IV. Its purifying power on the sons of Levi, the priesthood in particular.

I. The names ascribed to Messiah.

The Lord.—It is a general rule with our translators to express LORD in capital letters, where it answers to Jehovah in the Hebrew, and there only. The word here is not Jehovah, but Adonai. It is however a name of God, though not incommunicable like the other, being frequently applied to kings and superiors. It properly implies authority and rule, as we say, A Lord and Master. In this connection it is undoubtedly a divine name. The Lord is said to come to his temple, to his own temple. It was a house consecrated to the God of Israel. The first temple he honoured with tokens of his presence; the second he visited in person; on which account it exceeded the first in glory. Messiah, therefore, who appeared in our nature, and was known amongst men as a man, and who is now worshipped both in heaven and upon earth, is the God of Israel. He came to his own. This doctrine of God manifest in the flesh, is the pillar and ground of truth: the only foundation on which a sinner, who knows the just desert of his sin, can build a solid hope of salvation, is, that Jesus Christ is the true God and eternal life, 1 John v. 20. Unless this be admitted, the whole tenor both of the Old and New Testament, is unintelligible. To say that this doctrine approves itself to human reason in its present

fallen depraved state, would be to contradict the apostle, who asserts, that no man can say that Jesus Christ is Lord, but by the Holy Ghost, 1 Cor. xii. 3. But it is highly reasonable to those who see that they must perish, without such an atonement as shall declare the righteousness of God, no less than his mercy, in the forgiveness of sin; who feel the necessity of holiness in order to happiness; and are acquainted with the nature and variety of the snares, temptations, and enemies to which they are exposed. Such persons cannot venture their eternal concerns upon the dignity, or care, or power, or patience of a mere creature, however exalted and excellent. They must be assured that their Saviour is almighty, or they dare not trust in him; nor would they dare to honour the Son as they honour the Father, to love him with all their heart, and soul, and strength, to devote themselves absolutely to his service, and to expect their supreme happiness from his favour and approbation, if they did not know that he is over all, God blessed for ever.

With respect to the inferior character he sustains in our nature, and for our sakes, as the Father's servant, he is styled, The Messenger of the covenant. He is the gift, promise, head, and substance of the everlasting covenant. And he came himself to establish the covenant, and to declare and bestow the blessings it contained. God, who had before spoken at divers times and in sundry manners by his prophets, spoke in the fulness of time by his Son (Heb. i. 1); testifying to him by a voice from heaven, This is my beloved Son, hear him; in him I am well pleased, Mat. iii. 17. To the same purpose our Lord spake of himself. He prefaced his gracious invitation to all, without exception, who are weary and heavy laden, to come to him for rest (Mat. xi. 27), with a declaration of his commission and authority, saying, "All things are delivered unto me of my Father, and no one knoweth the Son but the Father, neither knoweth any one the Father, save the Son, and he to whom the Son will reveal him." The law was given by Moses (John i. 17); the moral law, to discover the extent and abounding of sin; the ceremonial law, to point out, by typical sacrifices and ablutions, the way in which forgiveness was to be sought and obtained but grace, to relieve us from the condemnation of the one, and truth answerable to the types and shadows of the other, came by Jesus Christ.

It is farther said, "The Lord whom ye seek, and the Messenger in whom ye delight."—Messiah was the hope and desire of the true Israel of God, from the earliest times; and when he was born into the world, there was a prepared people waiting and longing for him, as their consolation. The people at large likewise professed to expect great things from the coming of Messiah. But their expectations were low and earthly. They supposed that he would deliver them from the Roman yoke, and give them victory and power over the hea-

then nations. The more grievous bondage of sin under which they were enslaved, they were not sensible of, nor had they a disposition suited to the privileges and honours of the kingdom which he designed to establish; and therefore, their understandings being darkened by prejudice and prepossession, they could not discern his character. The prophecies which were read in their synagogues every sabbath, marked out the time and circumstances of Messiah's appearance, the places which he should principally visit, the doctrine he should teach, and the works which he should perform: but though all these particulars exactly applied to Jesus, they obstinately rejected him, and proceeded to fulfil what was farther foretold of his sufferings and death, with such a minute punctuality, as if they had designedly taken the prophecies for the rule of their conduct. Thus, by giving neither more nor less than thirty pieces of silver to his betrayer, by buying the potter's field, and no other, with the money afterwards; by casting lots for one of his garments, and making a distribution of the rest; by piercing his side contrary to the custom in such punishments, and by omitting to break his legs, which, from their treatment of the malefactors who suffered with him, seems to have been usual—in these and several other instances, they acted, though unwittingly, as if it had been their design and study to accomplish the scriptures to their own confusion and condemnation.

II. This was the reason why his coming to his temple was to them sudden. Though long foretold and long expected, and though the precise time of his advent, and the accompanying signs, were accurately defined and described, yet when the season arrived, he came suddenly, unlooked for, and unknown. He came upon them in an hour that they thought not of, and in a manner of which they were not aware. When he stood in the midst of them, they knew not that it was he. How dreadfully does sin harden and infatuate the hearts of men! The Jews, in our Saviour's time, furnish us with a striking instance, that it is possible for people fatally to miscarry with the greatest advantages and means for information in their possession. They accounted themselves the people of God, made their boast of his law, and their relation to Abraham. But they hated Messiah, and crucified him, who was the object of Abraham's faith. The opposition of their leaders and teachers was the most malicious, for many of them acted against the light of their minds, and were often convicted in their consciences, though they refused to be convinced. But an ignorant attachment to these blind guides was ruinous to their blind followers, who, though they sometimes, from a view of his mighty works were struck with astonishment and constrained to say, "Is not this the son of David?" were at length influenced by their priests to prefer a murderer to him, and, with a clamorous importunity, to compel Pilate to put him to death. The like misapprehensions produce the like effects among professed Christians at this

day.

We likewise have the scriptures: but how many who admit their authority in words, live willingly ignorant of their contents, and act in direct contradiction to their tenor! The power of the Saviour is likewise displayed among us, his preached gospel is daily made effectual to the great purposes for which it is vouchsafed; yet multitudes reject it with no less pertinacity than the Jews rejected him in person. At length death surprises them, and they sink into darkness beyond recall. To them the Lord may be said to come suddenly, for they think not of him till they actually find themselves at his tribunal. And this not only when they are cut off by a sudden stroke, but often when their dissolution is most gradual, and every one about them can perceive its approach by their countenances; they themselves, though wasting with disease, and worn out with pain, still flatter themselves with hopes of amendment and recovery to their last gasp; and a lingering death is to them no less sudden than if they were killed by a flash of lightning.

III. It is asked, "Who may abide the day of his coming? The effect is compared to a refiner's fire, and to fuller's soap. The refiner's fire penetrates the metal, and thereby searches, discovers, and consumes the dross. The fuller's soap also, though it does not destroy the texture of the cloth, cleanses it, by removing, and as it were consuming the spots and defilement which are found in it. The idea conveyed by these illustrations is the same. The day of his coming is a day of trial, a trial which issues in the purification of the work of God in his church, and in the detection and destruction of everything in it which is contrary to his will.

The coming of Messiah may be taken in several senses.

To the Jews, according to the promise of God repeated from age to age, he came in person. The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among them, John i. 12. The term in the original alludes to the visible symbol of the divine presence, which resided in the tabernacle and temple. Thus for a season he resided among them, in a temple not made with hands, but formed, by the immediate agency of the Holy Spirit, in the womb of a virgin. This was a happy time to those who received and acknowledged him. But the bulk of the nation could not abide the trial which his appearance exposed them to, they were proved by it to be but reprobate and counterfeit silver. The thoughts of many hearts were revealed, Luke ii. 35. Many specious characters were detected. The pretended sanctity and outward strictness of the Scribes and Pharisees, was evidenced to be mere hypocrisy. He exposed them in their true colours, and upon many occasions put them to shame and to silence. And where his word did not cleanse like soap, it burnt like fire, and the persons and places that rejected him were rendered inexcusable. Their great privilege of seeing his wonderful works, and hearing his gracious

words, being abused, aggravated their guilt and condemnation, and made their doom heavier than that of Sodom and Gomorrah. To them the day of the Lord, which in their own sense they professed to desire was darkness, and not light, Amos v. 18. If he had not come and spoken to them himself, they had not had sin, John xv. 22. That is, comparatively, he found them great sinners, and they would have been such if he had not visited them. But after he had spoken to them, and spoken in vain, they had no cloak for their sin. From that time they were deprived of every shadow of plea, excuse, or extenuation. And all their former wickedness was light, compared with the enormous crime they were guilty of in rejecting and crucifying the Son of God. By refusing him, they rendered their case helpless and hopeless, because there is no other name but his, given among men, whereby they may be saved. But he cleansed those who received him, he removed their guilt, their fears, their ignorance. He gave them a clean heart and a new spirit. Yet to these also he was as a refiner's fire, and as fuller's soap. They likewise had prejudices and selfish tempers, which were not at once removed. He called them to a state of suffering and self-denial, to forsake all, and to take up their cross daily for his sake.

In another sense, his coming is not restrained to a particular time. Wherever his gospel is preached, the Lord is come. It is by the gospel he rides forth prosperously, conquering and to conquer, Psal. xlv. 4. Thus he has promised to be present with his ministers, and wherever two or three are met in his name, to the end of the world. Thus he is come to us. And the effects are the same as when he was personally upon earth. His gospel still discovers the thoughts of many hearts. Many persons who till then were reputed religious, by the contempt they cast upon this wonderful expedient of infinite wisdom and love to save sinners, manifest their ignorance and hatred of the law and holiness of God, and that the religion they pretend to is an empty lifeless form, destitute of love and power. To them, though in itself a savour of life, it proves a savour of death. It provokes their enmity, increases their obduracy, and leaves them without excuse. But it is life indeed to those who receive it. They are raised by it from a death of sin, unto a life of righteousness and peace. Their tempers, desires, pursuits, and hopes are changed and elevated. Old things pass away, and all things become new to them, according as it is written, "If any man be in Christ Jesus, he is a new creature," 2 Cor. v. 17.

He comes to individuals by the power of his Spirit. This makes the word of his gospel effectual. For the kingdom of God is not in word only, but in power. When he thus visits the hearts of sinners, his word is like fire and soap; "quick and powerful, sharper than a two-edged sword," Heb. iv. 12. Then they feel and tremble, and cry out with the prophet, "Wo is me, I am

undone!" But in this way their dross is consumed, their defilement removed. When he thus wounds, he likewise heals. He gives them faith; by faith they look unto him, and are enlightened and saved.

We surely expect that he will come again. Not as he once came, in a state of humiliation. The Babe of Bethlehem, the Man of sorrows, who hung, and bled, and died upon the cross for our sins, will return in glory. "Behold, he cometh in the clouds, and every eye shall see him," Rev. i. 7. Concerning this day, emphatically called the day of the Lord, we may well say, "Who may abide it?" To those who have not been the subjects of his refining operations here, he will then be a consuming fire. That great day (for which all other days were made), "when the Lord shall descend with the voice of the archangel and the trump of God, will burn like an oven, and all the proud, and all that do wickedly, shall be as stubble, and the day that cometh shall burn them up," Mal. iv. 1. Where, then, shall the impenitent ungodly sinner appear? But it will be a joyful day to them that love his appearing. He will arise upon them, as the Sun of righteousness, with healing in his wings; he will wipe away their tears, vindicate their characters, acknowledge them before an assembled world, and say unto them, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you," Matth. xxv. 34.

IV. It is particularly said, "He will purify the sons of Levi,—that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness." The sons of Levi, the priests, the officiating ministers of God, were gone out of the way, and had corrupted the covenant of the Lord, and thereby had caused many to stumble, Mal. ii. 8, 9. They dishonoured their office, and became themselves vile and contemptible. Thus they went on from bad to worse, till the men of that generation filled up the measure of the iniquity of their forefathers, by the rejection of Messiah. He also rejected them. The blasted barren fig-tree (Matth. xxi. 19.), which withered to the very root at his word, was an emblem of their condition. In a little time, wrath came upon them to the uttermost. They saw the temple in which they had trusted, and which they had profaned, destroyed by fire, and the greater part of them perished. But a remnant of them was purified. We read, that after his ascension, a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith, Acts vi. 7. And his apostles and disciples were sent forth with a new spirit, and a new character, to offer and to serve in righteousness. The purport of this passage has been repeatedly exemplified under the Christian dispensation. A declension from the simplicity and purity of worship, principles, and morals, was visible very early in the church. The progress of it was rapid, especially from the time of Constantine. When persecution ceased, and a tide of wealth and worldly honours flowed in upon those who, by their profession, were bound to be patterns of humility and

self-denial to others; from that period, till the Reformation, ecclesiastical history affords us little more than a detail of such instances of pride, intrigue, oppression, and cruelty, under the pretext of religion, as had not been known among the heathens. And the nations which were relieved from the chains and darkness of Popery at the Reformation, did not long preserve much more than a name and a form to distinguish them. In most countries, the state became the idol of the church, and the church the creature of the state. How it is with us in this nation, I need not say. Facts speak for themselves. It is a mournful fact, that the ministry is become contemptible; nor is it difficult to assign the cause. But we are favoured with the gospel, and are eye-witnesses of its purifying power. It still produces the effects which marked its progress when it was preached by the apostles. It enlightens the dark mind, softens the hard heart, heals the wounded spirit; and many persons who before were burdensome to society, are rendered by it ornamental and useful. When every other argument and motive has failed of success, the consideration of the mercies of God in Christ, revealed by the gospel, constrains the believing sinner to present himself a living, willing, holy sacrifice unto God. Thus, being purified by the blood of Jesus, he offers to the Lord a sacrifice in righteousness. Such principles and aims are essential to a Christian minister. He knows the terrors of the Lord, and has tasted of his goodness. He is constrained by love, the love of Christ, and the love of souls. He preaches, as the apostle did, Jesus Christ, and him crucified; a subject which, though despised and reproached by the formal Jew and the sceptical Greek, is evidenced by its efficacy to be the wisdom and power of God. Such ministers may be, and frequently are, depreciated and disregarded; but they cannot be contemptible, until integrity, benevolence, and usefulness, are the proper objects of contempt.