

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.

## SERMON XL.

### THE LORD IS RISEN INDEED.

*But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first-fruits of them that slept.— 1 COR. xv. 20.*

As, in the animal economy, the action of the heart and of the lungs, though very different, are equally necessary for the maintenance of life, and we cannot say that either of them is more essentially requisite than the other; so in the system of divine revelation, there are some truths, the knowledge and belief of which singly considered, are fundamentals with respect to the salvation of a sinner. And though they are distinct in themselves, we cannot determine which of them is of most importance to us; for unless we know, approve, and receive them all, we can have no experience of a life of faith in the Son of God. Such, for instance, is the scriptural doctrine concerning the depravity of human nature. This is a first principle; for unless we understand what our state is in the sight of God, the enormity of our transgressions, and our incapacity for true happiness, until our hearts are changed by the power of his grace, we cannot rightly understand a single chapter in the Bible. Such, likewise, is the doctrine of the atonement. For, if we could know how totally we are lost, without knowing the gracious method which God has appointed for our recovery, we must unavoidably sink into despair. Again, if we were sensible of our state as sinners, and even if we trusted in Christ for salvation, yet the apostle observes in this chapter, that unless he be indeed risen from the dead, our faith in him would be in vain, and we should still be in our sins. The resurrection of Christ, therefore, is a doctrine absolutely essential to our hope and comfort; and it is likewise a sure pledge, that they who believe in him shall be raised from the dead also, by virtue of their union with him, and according to his pattern. For “now is Christ risen from the dead, and is become the first- fruits of them that slept.” Let us at present consider his resurrection.—The sure consequence of it, that his people shall be raised from the dead, will offer to our meditations from the following verses.

The resurrection of Christ, being, as a fact, the great pillar upon which the weight and importance of Christianity rest, it has pleased the Lord to put the indubitable proof of it within our power. There is no one point of ancient uninspired history so certainly and unquestionably authenticated. It may seem unnecessary to prove it, and to many of you it is entirely so. Yet I think it proper to take some notice of it; not so much on account of the weak and trifling cavils of infidels, as for the sake of persons who may be assaulted with temptations. For many plain people, who are not much acquainted with the subtleties of sceptics, are sometimes pestered with difficulties and

objections in their own minds, perhaps more shrewd and powerful than such as are commonly found in books, or retailed in coffee-houses. For unbelief is deeply rooted in every heart; and Satan, our great enemy, can, and if permitted, will work powerfully upon this evil disposition. He endeavours to beat us off from the belief of every truth of scripture, and of this among the rest. And many persons who have been so well convinced that our Lord rose from the dead, as to venture their souls and their all upon it, have found themselves at a loss how to answer the enemy in an hour of sharp and pressing temptation.

Let us suppose, then, that we had lately received the news of some extraordinary and almost incredible event, and let us consider what evidence we should require to satisfy us that the report was true, and apply the same kind of reasoning to the point in hand. That there was, a great while ago, a person named Jesus, who gathered disciples, and died upon a cross, is universally acknowledged. Both Jews and Heathens, who lived at the time, and afterwards, not only admitted it, but urged it as a reproach against his followers. Many testimonies of this kind are still extant.

The turning point between his enemies and his friends, is his resurrection. This has been denied. We acknowledge that he did not appear publicly after he arose, as he did before his death, but only to a competent number of his followers, to whom he showed himself, and satisfied them, by many infallible proofs, that he was alive, and that he was the same person whom they had seen crucified. They reported what they saw, and we believe their report. We are therefore to inquire, Who they were? and on what grounds we receive and rely upon their testimony?

If they were mistaken themselves, or if they were engaged and agreed in a crafty design of imposing upon mankind, we, who depend upon their relation, may be involved in their mistake, or deceived by their artifice. But if neither of these suppositions can possibly be true, if they were competent and impartial witnesses; then we are not only justified in giving credit to their testimony, but it must be unreasonable, and (in a case of this importance) presumptuous, and dangerous to reject it.

I. That they were competent judges of what they asserted, is evident,

1. From their numbers.—The eye-witnesses of this fact were many. “He was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve; after that he was seen of five hundred brethren at once: after that he was seen of James, then of all the apostles; and last of all, he was seen of me also,” 1 Cor. xv. 5–8. Thus Paul wrote when multitudes who lived at the time were still living, and would readily have contradicted him, if he had declared an untruth. Five hundred concurring witnesses are sufficient to establish the credit of a fact, which they all saw with their own eyes, if their word may be depended upon. We can be certain of things which we never saw no otherwise than by the testimony of others.

And certainty may be attained in this way. For though some persons would appropriate the word demonstration to mathematical evidence, yet moral evidence may be in many cases equally conclusive, and compel assent with equal force. I am so fully satisfied by the report of others, that there are such cities as Paris or Rome, though I never saw them, that I am no more able seriously to question their existence, than I am to doubt the truth of a proposition in Euclid which I have seen demonstrated.

2. From the nature of the fact, in which it was not possible that so many persons could be mistaken or deceived. Some of them saw him, not once only, but frequently. His appearance to others was attended with peculiar striking circumstances and effects. His disciples seem not to have expected his resurrection, though he had often foretold it previous to his sufferings. Nor did they hastily credit the women who first saw him in their way from the sepulchre. Thomas refused to believe the report of all his brethren, to whom our Lord had shown himself. He would see for himself; he required more than ocular proof, for he said, "Except I put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe," John xx. 25. It is no wonder, that when these proofs were offered him, he fully yielded to conviction, and with gratitude and joy addressed his risen Saviour in the language of adoration and love, "My Lord, and my God!" But his former conduct showed that he was not credulous, nor disposed to receive the report as a truth, however desirable, without sufficient evidence.

II. As they were competent judges, so they were upright and faithful witnesses. There is no more room to suspect that they had a design to deceive others, than that they were mistaken or deceived themselves. For,

1. If we judge of them by their writings, we must at least allow them to have been well-meaning men. They profess to aim at promoting the knowledge and honour of the true God, and thereby to promote the morality and happiness of mankind. Their conduct was uniformly consistent with their profession, and their doctrines and precepts were evidently suited to answer their design. The penmen of the New Testament were confessedly men in private life, most of them destitute of literature, and engaged in low occupations, till they became the disciples of Jesus. Is it probable that men, who speak so honourably of God, who inculcate upon their fellow-creatures such an entire devotedness to his will and service, should be impostors themselves? Is it at all credible, that a few men, in an obscure situation, should form a consistent and well concerted plan, sufficient to withstand and overcome the prejudices, habits, and customs, both of Jews and Heathens; to institute a new religion, and, without the assistance of interest or arms, to spread it rapidly and successfully in a few years throughout the greatest part of the Roman empire? Or is it possible that such men could, at their first effort, exhibit a scheme of theology and morality, so vastly superior to the

united endeavours of the philosophers of all ages? A learned man in France attempted to prove (for what will not learned men attempt?) that most of the Latin poems which are attributed to those whom we call the classic writers, and particularly the *Æneid* of Virgil, were not the production of the authors whose names they bear, but gross forgeries, fabricated by monks in the dark ages of ignorance, and successfully obtruded upon the world as genuine, till he arose to detect the imposture. He gained but few proselytes to his absurd paradox. Yet, to suppose that men who could only express their own dull sentiments in barbarous Latin, were capable of writing with the fire and elegance of Virgil, when they undertook to impose upon the world; or to affirm that the *Principia* of Sir Isaac Newton was in reality written by an ignorant plowman, and only sent abroad under the sanction of a celebrated name, cannot be more repugnant to true taste, sound judgment, and common sense, than to imagine, that the Evangelists and Apostles were, from their own resources, capable of writing such a book as the New Testament; the whole of which must stand or fall with the doctrine of our Lord's resurrection.

2. But farther, they could not possibly propose any advantage to themselves in their endeavours to propagate the Christian religion, if they had not been assured that the crucified Jesus, whom they preached, was risen from the dead, and had taken possession of his kingdom. Knowing whom they had believed, filled with a constraining sense of his love, and depending upon his promise and power to support them in the service to which he had called them, they were neither ashamed nor afraid to proclaim his gospel, and to invite and enjoin sinners everywhere to put their trust in him; otherwise they had nothing to expect but such treatment as they actually met with, for professing their belief of his resurrection, and especially for the pains they took to publish it, first among the people who had put him to death, and afterwards among the Heathens. It required no great sagacity to foresee that this doctrine would be an offence to the Jews, and foolishness to the Greeks, 1 Cor. i. 23. They were in fact despised, hated, opposed, and persecuted, wherever they went; and those who espoused their cause were immediately exposed to a participation in their sufferings. Nor was there the least probability that the event could be otherwise. Impostures there have been many; but we cannot conceive that any set of men would deliberately, and by consent, contrive an imposture, which, in the nature of the thing, could procure nothing to them, or to their followers, but contempt, stripes, imprisonment, and death.

3. Even if we could for a moment suppose them capable of so wild and wicked an undertaking, as, under pretence of the service of God, to provoke and dare the hatred of mankind, by asserting and propagating an offensive falsehood, it would be impossible upon that ground to account for the success which they met with. If this counsel and cause had not been of God, it must have come to nought, Acts v. 38. But by preaching Jesus and his resurrection,

in defiance of all the arts and rage of their enemies, they mightily prevailed over the established customs and inveterate prejudices of mankind, and brought multitudes into the belief of their doctrine against all disadvantages. The Lord confirmed their word with signs following. The miracles which were wrought in the name of Jesus were numerous, notorious, and undeniable; and the moral effects of their preaching, though too frequent and universal to be styled miraculous, were such as can only be with reason ascribed to a divine power. The pillars of Paganism, the superstitions of idol worship, though in every country connected and incorporated with the frame of civil government, and guarded for ages, not more by popular veneration than for reasons of state, were very soon shaken, and in no great space of time subverted. Within about two hundred years after Tacitus had described the Christians as the objects of universal contempt and hatred, Christianity became the established religion of the empire. And in a letter of Pliny to Trajan on the subject, we have indisputable evidence, that even in the time of Tacitus, hated, vilified, and persecuted, as the Christians were, their religion so greatly prevailed, that in many places the idol temples were almost deserted.

4. But the proof of the resurrection of Christ, which is the most important and satisfactory of any, does not depend upon arguments and historical evidence, with which multitudes of true Christians are unacquainted, but is, in its own nature, equally convincing in all ages, and equally level to all capacities. They who have found the gospel to be the power of God to the salvation of their souls, have the witness in themselves; and are very sure that the doctrine, which enlightened their understandings, awakened their conscience, delivered them from the guilt and dominion of sin, brought them into a state of peace and communion with God, and inspired them with a bright and glorious hope of eternal life, must be true. They know that the Lord is risen indeed, because they are made partakers of the power of his resurrection, and have experienced a change in themselves, which could only be wrought by the influence of that Holy Spirit which Jesus is exalted to bestow. And many believers, though not qualified to dispute with philosophers and sceptics upon their own learned ground, can put them to shame and to silence, by the integrity and purity of their conduct, by their patience and cheerfulness under afflictions; and would especially silence them, if they were eye-witnesses of the composure and elevation of spirit with which true believers in a risen Saviour welcome the approach of death.

This is the evidence which I would principally recommend to my hearers to seek after. If the resurrection of Christ be a truth and a fact, much depends upon the right belief of it. I say a right belief; for though I have offered you a brief view of the external evidence in proof of this point, I am aware that I am not preaching to Jews or Mahommedans. If I should ask you, Believest thou the resurrection? Might I not answer myself, as the apostle did on

another occasion, “I know that thou believest?” Acts xxvi. 27. But so powerful is the effect of our depravity, that it is possible, yea very common, for people most certainly to believe the truth of a proposition, so as not to be able to entertain a doubt of it, and yet to act as if they could demonstrate it to be false. Let me ask you, for instance Do you believe that you shall die? I know that you believe it. But do you indeed live, as if you were really assured of the certainty of death, and (which is equally undeniable) the uncertainty of life? So in the present case—If Christ be risen from the dead, according to the scriptures, then all that the scripture declares of the necessity and design of his sufferings, of his present glory, and of his future advent, must be true likewise. What a train of weighty consequences depend upon his resurrection! If he rose from the dead, then he is the Lord of the dead and of the living— then he has the keys of death and hades— then he will return to judge the world, and you must see him for yourself, and appear at his tribunal—then, it is he with whom you have to do—and then, finally, unless you really love, trust, and serve him, unless he is the beloved and the Lord of your heart, your present state is awfully dangerous and miserable.

But let those who love his name be joyful in him: your Lord who was dead, is alive, and because he liveth, you shall live also. If ye be risen with him, seek the things which are above, where he sitteth on the right hand of God. And, when he, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory.