

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.

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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.

SERMON XLI.

DEATH BY ADAM, LIFE BY CHRIST.

*For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead.
For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. 1 COR.
XV. 21, 22.*

FROM Mr. Handel's acknowledged abilities as a composer, and particularly from what I have heard of his great taste and success in adapting the style of his music to the subject, I judge that this passage afforded him a fair occasion of displaying his genius and powers. Two ideas, vastly important in themselves, are here represented in the strongest light, by being placed in contrast to each other. Surely the most solemn, the most pathetic strains must be employed, if they accord with the awful words, "By man came death,"— "In Adam all die." Nor can even the highest efforts of the heavenly harpers, more than answer to the joy, the triumph, and the praise which the other part of my text would excite in our hearts, if we are interested in it, provided we were capable of comprehending the full force and meaning of the expressions, "By man came also the resurrection,"—"In Christ shall all be made alive."

By one man came death. "By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin," Rom. v. 12. Sin opened the door to death. The creation, at the beginning, was full of order and beauty. "God saw every thing that he had made, and behold it was very good," Gen. i. 31. Adam, happy in the image and favour of his maker, breathed the air of immortality in paradise. While moral evil was unknown, natural evils, such as sickness, pain, and death had no place. How different has the state of things been since! Would you account for the change? Charge it upon man. He sinned against his Creator, Lawgiver, and Benefactor, and thus, by him, came death. The fact is sure, and therefore our reasonings upon it, in order to account for it, farther than we are enlightened and taught by scripture, are unnecessary and vain. God is infinitely wise, and therefore this change was foreseen by him. He doubtless could have prevented it, for to omnipotence every thing that does not imply a contradiction is possible, is easy. But he permitted it, and therefore it must have been agreeable to his wisdom, holiness, and goodness to permit it. He can over-rule it to the purposes of his own glory, and to ends worthy of himself, and he has assured us that he will do so. Thus far I can go, nor do I wish to go farther. And to endeavour to vindicate the ways of God to man, to fallen man, upon the grounds of what he proudly calls his reason, would be an impracticable, and, in my view, a presumptuous attempt. In proportion as his grace enlightens our minds, convinces us of our ignorance, and humbles our pride, we shall be satisfied, that in whatever he appoints or permits, he acts

in a manner becoming his own perfections. Nor can we be satisfied in any other way. We see, we feel that evil is in the world. Death reigns. It has pleased God to afford us a revelation, to visit us with the light of his gospel. If, instead of reasoning, we believe and obey, a way is set before us, by which we may finally overcome every evil, and obtain a happiness and honour, superior to what belonged to man in his original state. They who refuse his gospel must be left to their cavils and perplexities, until the day in which the great Judge and Governor of all shall arise to plead his own cause, and to vindicate his proceedings from their arrogant exceptions. Then every mouth will be stopped, Job xxxv. 5. Let us look to the heavens, which are higher than we, and attend to what we may learn from sure principles, that the earth with all its inhabitants, is but as dust upon the balance, if compared with the immensity of God's creation. Unless we could know the whole, and the relation which this very small part bears to the rest of his government, we must be utterly incompetent to judge how it becomes the great God to act. We are infected with the sin, and we are subject to the death, with all its concomitant evils, which came into the world by the first man. But we are likewise invited to a participation of all the blessings which the second Man has procured, by his atonement for sin, and by his victory over death. "For as by man came death, so by man came also the resurrection from the dead."

Let us take a survey, first of the malady, and then of the remedy.

I. The malady, the effect and wages of sin, is death. Many ideas are included in this word, taken in the scriptural sense.

1. The sentence annexed to the transgression of that commandment which was given as an especial test of Adam's obedience, and which affects all his posterity, is thus expressed, "In the day that thou eatest—thou shalt surely die," Gen. ii. 17. But man was not, ordinarily, to die by a stroke of apoplexy, or by a flash of lightning. The sentence includes all the natural evils, all the variety of woe which sin has brought into the world. The rebellious tempers and appetites which so often cut short the life of man, together with the sufferings and troubles, which, sooner or later, bring him down with sorrow to the grave, being the consequences of sin, may be properly considered as belonging to that death in which they terminate. Even the earth and the elements partook in the effects of man's disobedience. Thorns and thistles were not the produce of the ground till after he had sinned, Gen. iii. 18. Nor can I suppose that hurricanes, floods, and earthquakes were known in a state of innocence. But had the whole earth been a paradise, man having sinned must have been miserable. It is not in situation to make that heart happy, which is the seat of inordinate passions, rage, envy, malice, lust, and avarice. And were the earth a paradise now, it would be stained with blood, and filled with violence, cruelty, and misery, while it is inhabited by sinners. Many persons at present, who dwell in stately houses, and have every thing

around them that is suited to gratify and please their senses, know by painful experience, how little happiness these external advantages afford, while their minds are tortured with disappointments and anxiety. Thus the outward afflictions which everywhere surround and assail the sinner, and the malignant passions, which, like vultures, continually gnaw his heart, all combine to accelerate the execution of the sentence of death.

2. Death, in a very important sense, entered immediately with sin. Besides the rational life which still distinguishes man from the brute creation, he originally possessed a spiritual and divine life, for he was created in the image of God. in righteousness and true holiness. He was capable of communion with God, of rejoicing in his favour, and of proposing his will and glory as the great end of his actions. In a word, the presence and life of God dwelt in him as in a temple. As the soul is the life of the body, which becomes a carcase, a prey to worms and putrefaction, when the soul has forsaken it, so God is the life of the soul. Sin defaced his temple, and he forsook it. In this sense, when Adam had transgressed the law, he died instantly, in that very day, in that very moment. He lost his spiritual life, he lost all desire for communion with God. He no longer retained any love for his benefactor. He dreaded his presence, he sought to hide himself from him, and when obliged to appear and answer, stood self-condemned before him, till revived and restored by the promise of grace. And thus his posterity derive from him what may be called a living death. They are dead while they live, dead in trespasses and sins (Eph. ii. 1), till they are again quickened by his Holy Spirit. This is not a subject of common-place declamation; it is to be proved by the tenor of scripture, the nature of redemption, and the very reason of things. Unless we allow that man in his present state is thus fallen, depraved, and dead, we must be reduced to the absurdity of supposing that God made him such a creature as he now is; that when he formed him for himself, and endued him with a capacity and desires which nothing short of his own infinite goodness can satisfy, he should at the same time create him with a disposition to hate his Maker, to seek his satisfaction in sensuality upon a level with the brutes, and to confine his views and pursuits within the limits of this precarious life, while he feels, in defiance of himself, an instinctive thirst for immortality. Man considered in this view would be a solecism in the creation; and they who do not acquiesce in the cause which the scripture assigns for the inconsistencies and contradictions which are found in his character, will never be able to assign any other cause, which will bear the trial of sober and rational examination. What the poet says of Beelzebub, "majestic though in ruins," may be truly affirmed of man. His faculties and powers are proofs of his original greatness; his awful misapplication of them equally prove that he is a fallen and ruined creature. He has lost his true life, he is dead in sin; and

unless renewed and revived by the grace of God, can only, in a future state, be fit for the company of the fallen angels.

3. Death, as the wages of sin, extends still farther. There is the second death, the final and eternal misery of soul and body in hell. This we know is the dreadful lot of the impenitent. We need no other proof that this was included in the sentence; for certainly, the righteous Judge would not inflict a greater punishment than he had denounced. Indeed, it follows of course in the very nature of things, if we admit the soul to be immortal, a resurrection both of the just and the unjust, and that there remains no other sacrifice for sin, in favour of those who reject the gospel. For to be disowned of God in the great day, to be separated from his favourable presence, and conscious of his endless displeasure; to be abandoned to the unrestrained rage of sinful dispositions and hopeless despair; to be incessantly tormented by the stings of a remorseful conscience, must be, upon the principles of scripture, the unavoidable consequences of being cut off by death, in an unhumbled, unpardoned, unsanctified state.

II. But, blessed be God, the gospel reveals a relief and remedy fully adapted to the complicated misery in which sin has involved us. "As by man came death, by man came also the resurrection from the dead." Messiah has made an end of sin, and destroyed the power of death. They who believe in him, though they were dead shall live. John xi. 25. For he is the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the living.

1. He raises the soul from the death of sin unto a life of righteousness. By his blood he procures a right and liberty, and by his Spirit he communicates a power, that those who were afar off, may draw nigh to God. Thus, even at present, believers are said to be risen with him, Col. iii. 1. Their spiritual life is renewed, and their happiness is already commenced, though it be as yet subject to abatements.

(1.) Though when they are made partakers of his grace, and thereby delivered from the condemning power of the law, sin has no longer dominion over them, as formerly; yet it still wars and strives within them, and their life is a state of continual warfare. They now approve the law of God, as holy, just, and good, and delight in it after the inward man (Rom. vii. 12–19), yet they are renewed but in part. They feel a law in their members warring against the law of their minds. They cannot do the things that they would, nor as they would; for when they would do good, evil is present with them. They are conscious of a defect and a defilement attending their best services. Their attainments are unspeakably short of the desires which love to the Redeemer has raised in their hearts. They are ashamed, and sometimes almost discouraged. They adopt the apostle's language, "Oh, wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death? But with him they can likewise say, "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord." They know he is

on their side, and expect that he will at last make them more than conquerors: yet while the conflict lasts, they have much to suffer, and much to lament.

(2.) They are subject, like other people, to the various calamities and distresses incident to this state of mortality; and they have, more or less, troubles peculiar to themselves, arising from the nature of their profession and conduct (if they are faithful to their Lord) while they live in a world that lieth in wickedness. But the curse and sting is taken out of their afflictions, and they are so moderated and sanctified by the wisdom and grace of him whom they serve, that in the event they work for their good. But though they yield the peaceable fruit of righteousness (Heb. xii. 11) in themselves, and at the time, they are not joyous, but grievous.

(3.) They are still subject to the stroke of death, the separation of soul and body. But this death has lost its sting as to them. And therefore they are said not to die, but to sleep in Jesus. Death is not their enemy, but their friend. To them, instead of being an evil, it proves a deliverance from all evil, and an entrance into everlasting life.

2. That new life to which they are raised is surely connected with life eternal; the life of grace, with the life of glory. For Christ liveth in them, and being united to him by faith, they shall live while he liveth. They only shut their eyes upon the pains and sorrows of this world, to open them immediately in his presence, and so they shall be for ever with the Lord. How wonderful and happy is the transition! From disease and anguish, from weeping friends, and often from a state of indigence and obscurity, in which they have no friends to compassionate them, they remove to a state of glory, honour and immortality, to a mansion in the realms of light, to a seat near the throne of God. In the language of mortals, this ineffable honour and happiness is shadowed out to us, by the emblems of a white robe, a golden harp, a palm-branch (the token of victory), and a crown, not of oak or laurel, of gold or diamonds, but a crown of life. Such honour have all the saints. However afflicted or neglected, despised or oppressed, while upon earth, soon as their willing spirits take their flight from hence, they shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Thus Lazarus lay for a time, diseased, necessitous, and slighted, at the rich man's gate. Yet he was not without attendants. A guard of angels waited around him, and when he died conveyed his spirit into Abraham's bosom, Luke xvi. 22. The Jews thought very highly of Abraham, the father of their nation, the father of the faithful. Our Lord therefore teaches us by this representation, that the beggar Lazarus was not only happy after death, but highly exalted by him who seeth not as man seeth; for he was placed in Abraham's bosom, a situation which, according to the custom of the Jews, was a mark of peculiar favour, intimacy, and distinction. Thus the beloved disciple was seated in the bosom of our Lord, when he celebrated his last passover with his disciples, John xiii. 22–25. 3. Their dead bodies

shall be raised at the great day, not in their former state of weakness and corruption, but that which was sown in weakness shall be raised in power, and the mortal shall put on immortality. He shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned according to the likeness of his own glorious body. So that his own resurrection is both the pledge and the pattern of theirs. I have only farther to observe upon this subject at present, that as Adam is the root and head of all mankind, from whence they all derive a sinful and mortal nature; so Jesus, the second Adam, is the root of a people who are united to him, planted and engrafted in him by faith. To these the resurrection, considered as a blessing, is to be restrained. There will be a resurrection of the wicked likewise (John v. 29), but to condemnation, shame and everlasting contempt, Dan. xii. 2. But the connection is close and indissoluble between Christ the first-fruits, and them that are Christ's at his coming.

May we be happily prepared for this great event, that when he shall appear we may have confidence in him, and not be ashamed before him, 1 John ii. 28. Happy they who shall then be able to welcome him in the language of the prophet, "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. But how awful the contrast of those (many of them once the great, mighty, and honour, able of the earth) who shall behold him with horror, and in the anguish of their souls shall call (in vain) to the rocks and mountains to fall on them and hide them from his presence, saying, "The great day of his wrath is come, and who shall be able to stand?" Rev. vi. 16, 17.