

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!

Tantanne rem, tam negligenter, agere ! TER.

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

## SERMON XLII.

### THE GENERAL RESURRECTION.

*Behold, I show you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed. In a moment in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump, for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. 1 COR. XV. 51, 52.*

AN object in itself great, and which we know to be so, will appear small to us if we view it from a distance. The stars, for example, in our view, are but as little specks or points of light; and the tip of a finger, if held very near to the eye, is sufficient to hide from us the whole body of the sun. Distance of time has an effect upon us, in its kind, similar to distance of space. It diminishes in our mind the idea of what we are assured is, in its own nature, of great magnitude and importance. If any of us were informed that we should certainly die before this day closes, what a sudden and powerful change would take place in our thoughts? That we all must die, is a truth, of which we are no less certain, than that we are now alive. But because it is possible that we may not die today, or tomorrow, or this year, or for several years to come, we are often little more affected by the thoughts of death, than if we expected to live here for ever. In like manner, if you receive the scripture as a divine revelation, I need offer you no other proof, that there is a day, a great day, approaching, which will put an end to the present state of things, and introduce a state unchangeable and eternal. Then the Lord will descend with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trump of God. The earth and all its works will be burnt up. The great Judge will appear, the tribunal be fixed, the books opened, and all the human race must give an account of themselves to God, and, according to his righteous award, be happy or miserable in a degree beyond expression or conception, and that for ever.

If we were infallibly assured, that this tremendous scene would open upon us tomorrow; or if, while I am speaking, we should be startled with the signs of our Lord's coming in the air, what confusion and alarm would overspread the congregation? Yet, if the scripture be true, the hour is approaching, when we must all be spectators of this solemn event, and parties nearly interested in it. But because it is at a distance, we can hear of it, speak of it, and profess to expect it, with a coolness almost equal to indifference. May the Lord give us that faith which is the evidence of things not seen, that while I aim to lead your meditations to the subject of my text, we may be duly impressed by it: and that we may carry from hence such a consideration of our latter end, as may incline our hearts to that which is our true wisdom!

Many curious inquiries and speculations might be started from this passage, but which, because I judge them to be more curious than useful, it is my intention to waive. I shall confine myself to what is plainly expressed, because I wish rather to profit than to amuse my hearers. The principal subject before us is the resurrection of the dead, in the most pleasing view of it; for my text speaks only of those who shall change the mortal and corruptible, for incorruption and immortality.

I. The introduction,—“Behold I show you a mystery.”

II. What we are taught to expect,—“We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed.”

III. The suddenness of the event,—“In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye.”

IV. The grand preceding signal,—“The trumpet shall sound.”

I. The apostle apprizes the Corinthians that he is about to show them a mystery. As the word mystery has been treated with no small contempt, I shall embrace this occasion of offering you a short explanation of it, as it is used in the scriptures. We are allowed to say, that there are mysteries in nature, and perhaps we may be allowed to speak of mysteries in providence; but though an apostle assures us, that great is the mystery of godliness (1 Tim. iii. 16), many persons will scarcely bear the application of the word to religion. And, a late ingenious writer, who has many admirers in the present day, has ventured to affirm in print, that where mystery begins, religion ends. If the frequency of the case did not, in some degree, abate our wonder, this might seem almost a mystery, that any persons who profess to believe the scripture, should so openly and flatly contradict what the scripture expressly and repeatedly declares: Or that while, as men of reason and philosophy, they are forced to acknowledge a mystery in every part of creation, and must confess it beyond their ability to explain the growth of a blade of grass; they should in opposition to all the rules of analogy, conclude, that the gospel, the most important concern of man, and which is commended to us as the most eminent display of the wisdom and power of God, is the only subject so level to our apprehensions, as to be obvious, at first sight, to the most careless and superficial observers. That great numbers of people are very far from being accurate and diligent in their religious inquiries, is too evident to be denied. How often do we meet with persons of sense who talk with propriety on philosophical, political, or commercial subjects, and yet, when they speak of religion, discover such gross ignorance, as would be shameful in a child of ten years old, and amounts to a full proof that they have not thought it worth their while to acquire even a slight knowledge of its first principles. Can we even conceive the possibility of a divine revelation that should have nothing in it mysterious to persons of this character?

A mystery, according to the notation of the Greek word, signifies a secret. And all the peculiar truths of the gospel may justly be styled mysteries or secrets, for two reasons.

1. Because the discovery of them is beyond the reach of fallen man, and they neither would nor could have been known without a revelation from God. This is eminently true of the resurrection. The light of nature, which we often hear so highly commended, may afford some faint glimmerings of a future state, but gives no intimation of a resurrection. The men of wisdom at Athens, the Stoic and Epicurean philosophers, who differed widely in most parts of their respective schemes, united in deriding this sentiment, and contemptuously styled the apostle Paul a babbling (Acts xvii. 18) for preaching it. But this secret is to us made known. And we are assured, not only that the Lord will receive to himself the departing spirits of his people, but that he will give commandment concerning their dust, and, in due time, raise their vile bodies to a conformity with his own glorious body.

2. Because, though they are revealed expressly in the scripture, such is the grossness of our conceptions, and the strength of our prejudices, that the truths of revelation are still unintelligible to us, without a farther revelation of their true sense to the mind, by the influence of his Holy Spirit. Otherwise, how can the secret of the Lord be restrained to those who fear him (Psal. xxv. 14), when the book which contains it is open to all, and the literal and grammatical meaning of the words is in the possession of many who fear him not?

Books in the arts and sciences may be said to be full of mysteries to those who have not a suitable capacity and taste for them; or who do not apply themselves to study them with diligence, and patiently submit to learn gradually one thing after another. If you put a treatise on mathematics, or a system of music, into the hands of a plowman or labourer, you will not be surprised to find that he cannot understand a single page. Shall the works of a Sir Isaac Newton, or of a Handel, be thus inexplicable to one person, while another peruses them with admiration and delight? Shall these require a certain turn of mind, and a close attention? and can it be reasonably supposed, that the Bible is the only book that requires no peculiar disposition, or degree of application, to be understood, though it is designed to make us acquainted with the deep things of God? 1 Cor. ii. 10. In one respect, indeed, there is an encouraging difference. Divine truths lie thus far equally open to all, that though none can learn them unless they are taught of God, yet all who are sensible of their own weakness may expect his teaching, if they humbly seek it by prayer. Many people are, perhaps, incapable of being mathematicians. They have not a genius for the science. But there is none who teacheth like God. He can give not only light, but sight; not only lessons, but the capacity necessary for their reception. And while his mysteries are hidden from the wise and prudent, who are too proud to wait upon him for instruction, he reveals them unto babes.

It may perhaps be thought, that a belief of the doctrine of the resurrection does not require the same teaching of the Holy Spirit that is necessary to the right knowledge of some other doctrines of the gospel. But such a belief as may affect, cheer, and animate the heart must be given us from above, for we cannot reason ourselves into it. Nay, this divine teaching is necessary to secure the mind from the vain reasonings, perplexities, and imaginations, which will bewilder our thoughts upon the subject, unless we learn to yield in simplicity of faith, to what the scripture has plainly revealed, and can be content to know no farther before the proper time.

II. What we are here taught to expect is thus expressed—“We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed.” We are not to suppose that the whole human race will die, and fail from the earth, before the resurrection. Some will be living at the time, and among them some of the Lord’s people. Of the living, it cannot properly be said that they will be raised from the dead; but they will experience a change, which will put them exactly in the same state with the others. Their mortality shall be swallowed up in life. Thus we conceive it to have been with Enoch and Elijah. They did not die like other men; but their mortal natures were frail and sinful, like ours, and incapable of sustaining the glories of heaven without a preparation. Flesh and blood in its present state cannot inherit the kingdom of God, neither can corruption inherit incorruption; but the dead shall arise, and the living shall be changed. Here is a wide field for speculation, but I mean not to enter it. Curiosity would be glad to know how our bodies, when changed, shall still be the same. Let us first determine how that body, which was once an infant, is the very same when it becomes a full grown man, or a man in extreme old age. Let us explain the transmutation of a caterpillar or silk-worm, which from a reptile becomes a butterfly. What a wonderful change is this both in appearance and in powers? Who would suppose it to be the same creature? Yet who can deny it? It is safest and most comfortable for us, to refer to the wisdom and power of God the accomplishment of his own word.

III. These great events will take place unexpectedly and suddenly—“In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye.” We have reason to believe, that a part at least of mankind will be employed as they are now, and as they were in the days of Noah and Lot (Luke xvii. 26–30), eating and drinking, buying and selling, building, and planting; having nothing less in their thoughts than the calamity and destruction which shall overwhelm them without warning. For while they are promising themselves peace, the day of the Lord shall come upon them like a thief in the night, unlooked for, and, like the pangs of a labouring woman, unavoidable. “In that day the lofty looks of man shall be humbled, and the haughtiness of man shall be bowed down, and the Lord alone shall be exalted,” Is. ii. 6. So large a part of divine prophecy remains yet to be fulfilled, that I apprehend it is not probable that any of us shall be alive when this great and terrible day of the Lord shall be revealed. But are

not some of us exposed to a similar dreadful surprise! If you die in your sins, the consequences will be no less deplorable to you, than if you saw the whole frame of nature perishing with you. Alas, what will you do, whither will you flee for help, or where will you leave your glory, if, while you are engrossed by the cares or pleasures of this world, death should arrest you, and summon you to judgment? The rich man in the gospel is not charged with any crimes of peculiar enormity. It is not said that he ground the faces of the poor, or that he, by fraud or oppression, kept back the hire of the labourers who had reaped his harvest; he only rejoiced in his wealth, and in having much goods laid up for many years, and that therefore he might securely eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, "Thou fool, this night shall thy soul be required of thee," Luke xii. 20. Awful disappointment! Thus will it be, sooner or later, with all whose hearts and portions are in this world, but are not rich towards God! Consider this, you that are like minded with him. Tremble at the thought of being found in the number of those who have all their consolation here, and who, when they die, must leave their all behind them. Now is the acceptable time, the day of salvation. Now, if you will seek the Lord, he will be found of you. Now, if you pray for grace and faith, he will answer you. But when once the Master of the house shall arise, and with his own sovereign authoritative hand shall shut the door of his mercy, it will then be in vain, and too late, to say, "Lord, Lord, open unto us," Luke xiii. 25.

IV. The great scene will be introduced by a signal—"At the last trump; for the trumpet shall sound." Thus the approach of a king or a judge is usually announced; and the scripture frequently borrows images from our little affairs and customs, and, in condescension to our weakness, illustrates things in themselves too great for our conceptions, by comparing them with those which are more familiar to us.

It will indeed be comparing great things with small, if I attempt to illustrate this sublime idea by local customs which obtain in this kingdom. At a time of assize, when the judges, to whom the administration and guardianship of our laws are entrusted, are making their entrance, expectation is awake, and a kind of reverence and awe is felt, even by those who are not immediately concerned in their inquest. The dignity of their office, the purpose for which they come, the concourse of people, the order of the procession, and the sound of the trumpet, all concur in raising an emotion in the hearts of the spectators. Happy are they then upon whom the inflexible law has no demand! But who can describe the terror with which the sound of the trumpet is heard by the unhappy criminal; and the throbbings of his heart, if he be already convicted in his own conscience, and knows or fears that there is sufficient evidence at hand to fix the fact upon him, and to prove his guilt? For soon the judge will take his seat, the books will be opened, the cause tried, and the criminal sentenced. Many circumstances of this kind are alluded to in the scripture, to assist us in forming some conception of what will

take place, when all the race of Adam, small and great, shall stand before the sovereign Judge, the one Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy. But the concourse, the solemnity, the scrutiny, the event, in the most weighty causes that can come before a human judicature, are mere shadows, and trivial as the sports of children, if compared with the business of this tremendous tribunal. "The Lord himself will descend with the voice of the archangel, and the trump of God." What a trumpet will that be, whose sound shall dissolve the frame of nature, and awaken the dead? When the Lord is seated upon his great white throne (Rev. xx. 11), the heavens and the earth shall flee from his presence; but the whole race of mankind shall be assembled before him, each one to give an account of himself, to him, from whose penetrating knowledge no secret can be hidden, and from whose unerring inflexible sentence there can be no appeal. "Where then shall the wicked and the ungodly appear?"

But it will be a joyful day to believers: they shall be separated as the wheat from the tares, and arranged at his right hand. When the Lord shall come, attended by his holy angels, his redeemed people will reassume their bodies, refined and freed from all that was corruptible; and those of them who shall be then living will be changed, and caught up to meet him in the air. He will then own them, approve and crown them, before assembled worlds. Every charge that can be brought against them will be over-ruled, and their plea, that they trusted in him for salvation, be admitted and ratified. They will be accepted and justified. They will shine like the sun in his full train, and attend, as assessors with him, when he shall pass final judgment upon his and their enemies. Then he will be admired in and by them that believe. Their tears will be for ever wiped away, when he shall say to them, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world," Matth. xxv. 34.

Beloved, if these things are so, what manner of persons ought we to be in all holy conversation and godliness? 2 Pet. iii. 11. Should we not give all diligence to make our calling and election sure, that we may be found of him in peace? He who will then be seated upon the throne of judgment, is to us made known as seated upon a throne of grace. It is time, it is high time, and blessed be God it is not yet too late, to seek his mercy. Still the gospel invites us to hear his voice, and to humble ourselves before him. Once more you are invited, some of you perhaps for the last time: how know you but sickness or death may be at the very door? Consider, Are you prepared? Examine the foundation of your hope,—and do it quickly, impartially, and earnestly, lest you should be cut off in an hour when you are not aware, and perish with a lie in your right hand.