

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 WOOLNOTH,

LOMBARD STREET,

LONDON.

———Ah!

Tantanne rem, tam negligenter, agere ! TER.

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

SERMON XLVIII.

THE SONG OF THE REDEEMED.

—*Thou—hast redeemed us to God, by thy blood (out of every kindred, and tongue, and people and nation).* REV. v. 9.

THE extent, variety, and order of the creation, proclaim the glory of God. He is likewise *maximus in minimis*. The smallest of his works that we are capable of examining, such for instance as the eye or the wing of a little insect, the creature of a day, are stamped with an inimitable impression of his wisdom and power. Thus in his written word there is a greatness, considering it as a whole, and a beauty and accuracy in the smaller parts, analogous to what we observe in the visible creation, and answerable to what an enlightened and humble mind may expect in a book which bears the character of a divine revelation. A single verse, a single clause, when viewed (if I may so speak) in the microscope of close meditation, is often found to contain a fulness, a world of wonders. And though a connected and comprehensive acquaintance with the whole scripture be desirable and useful, and is no less the privilege than the duty of those who have capacity and time at their own disposal to acquire it; yet there is a gracious accommodation to the weakness of some persons, and the circumstances of others. So that in many parts of scripture, whatever is immediately necessary to confirm our faith, to animate or regulate our practice, is condensed into a small compass, and comprised in a few verses; yea, sometimes a single sentence, when unfolded and examined, will be found to contain all the great principles of duty and comfort. Such is the sentence which I have now read to you. In the Messiah it is inserted in the grand chorus taken from the 12th and 13th verses of this chapter. And as it may lead us to a compendious recapitulation of the whole subject, and by the Lord's blessing, may prepare us to join in the following ascription of praise to him that sitteth upon the throne, and to the Lamb; I propose to consider it in its proper connection, as a part of the leading song of the redeemed before the throne, in which the angels cannot share, though from their love to redeemed sinners, and from their views of the manifold wisdom and glory of God in visiting such sinners with such a salvation, they cheerfully take a part in the general chorus.

The redemption spoken of, is suited to the various cases of sinners of every nation, people, and language. And many sinners of divers descriptions, and from distant situations, scattered abroad into all lands, through a long succession of ages, will, by the efficacy of this redemption, be gathered together into one, John xi. 52. They will constitute one family, united in one great Head, Eph. iii. 14, 15. When they shall fully attain the end of their hope,

and encircle the throne, day without night, rejoicing, their remembrance of what they once were, their sense of the happiness they are raised to, and of the great consideration to which they owe their deliverance and their exaltation, will excite a perpetual joyful acknowledgment to this purport. They were once lost, but could contribute nothing to their own recovery. Therefore they ascribe all the glory to their Saviour. They strike their golden harps, and sing in strains, loud as from numbers without number, sweet as from blest voices, "Thou art worthy—for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood, out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation."

But though this song, and this joy, will only be consummated in heaven, the commencement takes place upon earth. Believers, during their present state of warfare, are taught to sing it; in feebler strains indeed, but the subject of their joy, and the object of their praise, are the same which inspire the harps and songs in the world of light. May I not say, that this life is the time of their rehearsal? They are now learning their song, and advancing in meetness to join in the chorus on high, which, as death successively removes them, is continually increasing by the accession of fresh voices. All that they know, or desire to know, all that they possess or hope for, is included in this ascription.

I take the last clause of the verse into the subject. The words suggest three principal points to our consideration:

I. The benefit,—Redemption to God.

II. The redemption price,—By thy blood.

III. The extent of the benefit,—To a people out of every kindred, and tongue, and nation.

I. Thou hast redeemed us to God.—Redemption or ransom is applicable to a state of imprisonment for debt, and to a state of bondage or slavery. From these ideas taken together, we may form some estimate of the misery of our fallen state; a theme, which, if I cannot insist upon at large in every discourse, I would never wholly omit. For we can neither understand the grace, nor enjoy the comfort of the gospel, but in proportion as we have a heart-felt and abiding conviction of our wretched condition as sinners without it. They who think themselves whole know not their need of a physician (Matth. ix. 12), but to the sick he is welcome.

If a man, shut up in prison for a heavy debt, which he is utterly incapable of discharging, should obtain his liberty, in consideration of payment made for him by another, he might be properly said to be redeemed from imprisonment. This supposition will apply to our subject. The law and justice of God have demands upon us which we cannot answer. We are therefore shut up, under the law, in unbelief, helpless, and hopeless, till we know and can plead the engagement of a surety for us. For a time, like Peter, we are sleeping in our prison (Acts xii. 6–10), regardless of danger. The first sensible

effect of the grace of God, is to awaken us from this insensibility. Then we begin to feel the horrors of our dungeon, and the strength of our chains, and to tremble under the apprehension of an impending doom. But grace proceeds to reveal the Saviour and friend of sinners, and to encourage our application to him. In a good hour the chains fall off, the bars of iron and brass are broken asunder, and the prison-doors fly open. The prisoner understands that all his great debt is forgiven, blesses his deliverer, obtains his liberty, and departs in peace.

We are likewise in bondage the servants, the slaves of a harder task-master than Pharaoh was to Israel. Satan, though not by right, yet by a righteous permission, tyrannizes over us, till Jesus makes us free, John viii. 34, 36. The way of transgressors is hard, Prov. xiii. 15. Though the solicitations and commands of that enemy who worketh in the children of disobedience (Eph. ii. 2), are in some respects suited to our depraved inclinations, yet the consequences are grievous. A burdened conscience, a wasted constitution, a ruined fortune and character, swiftly and closely follow the habits of intemperance and lewdness; and they who seem to walk in a smoother path, are deceived, mortified, and disappointed daily. If persons who live openly and habitually in a course that is contrary to the rule of God's word, speak swelling words of vanity (2 Pet. ii. 18, 19), and boast of their liberty, believe them not. We are sure they carry that in their bosom which hourly contradicts their assertions. Yea, sometimes their slavery is so galling, that they attempt to escape, but in vain. They are soon retaken, and their bonds made stronger. The issue of their short-lived reformations, which they defer as long as possible, and at last set about with reluctance, usually is, that their latter end proves worse than their beginning. At most, they only exchange one sinful habit for another, sensuality for avarice, or prodigality for pride. The strong one armed will maintain his dominion, till the stronger than he interposes and says, Loose him, and let him go, for I have found a ransom. Then, by virtue of the redemption-price, the prey is taken from the mighty, and the captive is delivered, Is. xlix. 24, 25. Then the enslaved sinner, like the man, out of whom the legion was cast, sits at the feet of Jesus, in peace, and in his right mind, Mark v. 15. He becomes the Lord's freed-man.

For he is not only delivered from guilt and thrall, he is redeemed to God. He is now restored to his original state, as an obedient and dependent creature, devoted to his Creator, conformed to his will and image, and admitted to communion with him in love. These are blessings which alone can satisfy the soul, and without which it is impossible for man to be happy. While he is ignorant of his proper good, and seeks it in creatures, he is and must be wretched. Madness is in his heart, a deceived, disordered imagination turns him aside, and he feeds upon ashes, and upon the wind, Is. xlv. 20. But by grace he is renewed to a sound judgment, his mind receives a right direction,

and he is turned from darkness to light, from the power of Satan to God, Acts xvi. 18.

II. What unspeakably, and beyond conception enhances the value of this deliverance, is the consideration of the means by which it is effected. For it is not merely a deliverance, but a redemption. It is not an act of mere mercy, but of mercy harmonizing with justice. It is not an act of power only, but of unexampled and expensive love.—“Thou hast redeemed us by thy blood!”

The sentence denounced by the law against transgressors, was death. And therefore when Messiah became our surety, to satisfy the law for us, he must die. The expression of *his blood*, is often used figuratively for his death, perhaps to remind us how he died. His was a bloody death. When he was in his agony in Gethsemane, his sweat was as great drops of blood, falling down to the ground, Luke xxii. 44. His blood flowed when he gave his back to the smiters, under the painful strokes of the scourging he endured previous to his crucifixion. It flowed from his head, when the soldiers, having mocked his character of King by crowning him with thorns, by their rude blows forced the thorns into his temples. His blood streamed from the wounds made by the spikes, which pierced his hands and his feet, when they fastened him to the cross. When he hung upon the cross, his body was full of wounds, and covered with blood. And, after his death, another large wound was made in his side, from which issued blood and water. Such was the redemption-price he paid for sinners, his blood, the blood of his heart. Without shedding of blood there could be no remission. Nor could any blood answer the great design, but his. Not any, not all the bloody sacrifices appointed by the law of Moses could take away sin, as it respects the conscience, nor afford a plea, with which a sinner could venture to come before the most high God, Micah vi. 6. But the blood of Messiah, in whom were united the perfections of the divine nature and the real properties of humanity, and which the apostle therefore styles the blood of God (Acts xx. 28), this precious blood cleanses from all sin. It is exhibited as a propitiation of perpetual efficacy, by which God declares his righteousness, no less than his mercy, in forgiving iniquities (Rom. iii. 25, 26), and shows himself just to the demands of his holiness, and the honour of his government, when he accepts and justifies the sinner who believes in Jesus.

If these things were understood and attended to, would it be thought wonderful that this Saviour is very precious to those who believe in him, and who obtain redemption by his blood? How can it possibly be otherwise? Grace like this, when known, must captivate and fix the heart! Not only to save, but to die, and to die for his enemies! Such costly love, productive of such glorious consequences, and to such unworthy creatures! Surely the apostle's mind was filled and fired with these considerations, when authenticating an epistle with his own hand, he subjoined this emphatical close, “If any man

love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha!” 1 Cor. xvi. 22. Do you think, my brethren, that the apostle took pleasure in denouncing so severe a sentence against all those who did not see (as we say) with his eyes? Had he so little affection for sinners, that he could thus consign them to destruction by multitudes, for differing from him in what some persons only deem an opinion? Rather consider him, not as breathing out his own wishes, but as speaking in the name and on the behalf of God. He knew it must be, and he declared it would be so. It was no pleasure to him to see them determined to perish. On the contrary, he had great grief and sorrow of heart for them, even for the Jews, who had treated him with the greatest cruelty. Even for their sakes, he could have been content to be made an anathema himself (Rom. ix. 3), that they might be saved. But upon the whole, he acquiesced in the will of God, and acknowledged it to be just, right, and equal, that if any man would not love the Lord Jesus Christ, after all that he had done and suffered for sinners, he should be accursed. By this comparison of the apostle’s severe language with his compassionate temper, I am led to digress a little farther. It suggests an apology for ministers of the gospel in general. When we declare the terrors of the Lord, when we assure you that there is but one solid foundation for hope, and that, unless you love the Lord Jesus Christ, you must perish, some of our hearers account us bigoted, uncharitable, and bitter. But if you could see what passes in secret, how faithful ministers mourn over those who reject their message, how their disobedience cuts them to the heart, and abates the comfort they would otherwise find in your service; if you could believe us when we say (I trust truly) that we are ready to impart unto you, not the gospel of God only, but our own souls also, because you are dear to us (1 Thes. ii. 8), and we long for your salvation; then you would think more favourably of us. But after all we cannot, we dare not, soften our message to please men. What we find in the word of God, we must declare. It would be at the peril of our souls, to speak smooth things, to prophesy deceits (Is, xxx. 10) to you; and, so far as we preach the truth, it will be at the peril of your souls, if we are disregarded.

III. The benefits of this redemption extend to a numerous people, who are said to be redeemed out of every kindred, tongue, and nation. I have, upon a former occasion, (Sermon xvi.) offered you my sentiments concerning the extent of the virtue of that blood which taketh away the sin of the world. But the clause now before us invites me to make a few additional observations upon a subject which, I conceive, it much concerns us rightly to understand.

The redeemed of the Lord are those who actually experience the power of his redemption, who are delivered from the dominion of sin and Satan, and brought into a state of liberty, peace, and holiness. That the people of every kindred, nation, and tongue, are not redeemed in this sense universally,

is as certain as evidence of facts, and express declarations of scripture, can make it. "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord." Multitudes, thus disqualified, will be found trembling, on the left hand of the Judge, at the great day. But a remnant will be saved, according to the election of grace. For they who differ, who are redeemed to the service of God, while others live and die in the love and service of sin, do not make themselves to differ, 1 Cor. iv. 7. It becomes the potsherd of the earth to ascribe to their Maker the glory of his sovereignty, and to acknowledge, that, if they have a good hope, it is because it pleased the Lord to make them his people who were once not his people, Hos. ii. 23. Yet a way of conceiving of the doctrines of the divine sovereignty, and of a personal election unto life, has often obtained, which seems to have a tendency to render the mind narrow, selfish, and partial, and to straiten the exercise of that philanthropy which the genius and spirit of the gospel powerfully inculcate. The best of us, perhaps, are more prone than we are aware of to assimilate the great God to ourselves, and to frame our ideas of him too much according to our own image. So that often much of a man's natural disposition may be observed in the view of the forms of the divine perfections and conduct; as, on the other hand, his conceptions of the character of God strengthen and confirm him in his own tempers and habits. There are persons, who being persuaded in their own minds (we would hope upon sure grounds) that they themselves are of the elect, appear to be little concerned what may become of others. Their notions of God's sovereignty, and his right to do what he will with his own, though often insufficient to preserve them from repining and impatience under the common events of human life, raise them above all doubts and difficulties on a subject which the apostle speaks of as unsearchable and untraceable; where he acknowledges depths which he was unable to fathom (Rom. xi. 33), all appears to them quite plain and easy; where he admires and adores, they arrogantly dispute, and determine *ex cathedra*, and harshly censure all who are not so eagle-sighted as themselves. Methinks they who know the worth of a soul, from its vast capacity for happiness and misery, and its immortal duration, cannot justly be blamed for allowing no limits to their benevolent wishes for the salvation of mankind, but the will of God, as it is plainly made known to us in his word. To this we are to submit, not as of necessity only, but cheerfully, assured that his will is wise, holy, and good; that the Judge of all the world will do right; and to wait for the day when he will condescend to clear up every difficulty, and give us that satisfaction which, in our present state of ignorance and weakness, we are incapable of receiving. Shall mortal man be more just, or can he be more merciful, than God? It is a false compassion, founded in a blameable disregard of what is due to the glory of his great name, that prompts us to form a wish that his unerringly wise appointments could be otherwise than they are. Yet it is a comfort to think that his mercy, in which he delights, in which he

is peculiarly said to be rich, and which is higher than the heavens, will, in its exercise, far exceed the bounds which some fallible mortals would peremptorily assign to it. We must not indulge conjecture and hypothesis farther than the scripture will warrant; but while we humbly depend upon this infallible light, we need not be afraid to follow it, though it should, in some particulars, lead us a little beyond the outlines of some long received, and in the main very valuable, human systems of divinity.

I have repeatedly expressed my belief, that many prophecies respecting the spread and glory of the kingdom of Messiah upon earth have not yet received their full accomplishment, and that a time is coming when many (perhaps the greater part of mankind) of all nations, and people, and languages, shall know the joyful sound of the gospel, and walk in the light of the Redeemer's countenance. At present, I would confine myself to consider what ground the scripture affords us to hope that there are many of every nation, people, and tongue, even now, singing this song before his throne.

The revelations vouchsafed to the beloved disciple in Patmos exhibit a succession of great events, extending (I suppose) from the apostles days to the end of time. But while only the learned can so much as attempt to ascertain from history the dates and facts to which the prophecies already fulfilled refer, or to offer probable conjectures concerning the events as yet future (in which the most judicious commentators are far from being agreed), there are passages interspersed which seem designed to administer consolation to plain believers, by representations suited to raise their thoughts to the state of the church triumphant. Though they are unable to explain the particulars of what they read, there is a glory resulting from the whole, which animates their hope and awakens their joy. Of this kind I think is that vision (Rev. vii. 9, *ad finem*), in which the apostle saw the servants of God, who were sealed in their foreheads, in number a hundred and forty-four thousand; and besides these a great multitude which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands, and cried with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation to our God, which sitteth upon the throne, and to the Lamb," &c. I confess myself unable to expound this sublime passage, and to give the full or even the principal sense of it with certainty. But that it has some reference to what is now passing within the veil, which hides the unseen world from our view, I cannot doubt. I propose my thoughts upon it with caution and diffidence. I dare not speak with that certainty which I feel myself warranted to use, when I set before you from scripture the great truths which are essential to a life of faith in the Son of God; yet I hope to advance nothing that is contrary to scripture, or to any deductions fairly and justly drawn from it.

Having premised this acknowledgment of my incompetence to decide positively, I venture to say, that by the hundred and forty-four thousand sealed in their foreheads (a definite for an indefinite number, which is frequent in scripture-language), I understand those, who, living to mature age, and where the gospel is afforded, are enabled to make a public and visible profession of religion, and are marked as it were in their foreheads, and know to whom they belong, by their open and habitual separation from the spirit and customs of the world which lieth in wickedness. And the exceeding great multitude, contradistinguished from these, I conceive to be those who are elsewhere styled the Lord's hidden ones: and that these are a great multitude indeed, gathered by him, who knows them that are his, out of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues. I may distribute them into the following classes.

1. Infants.—I think it at least highly probable, that when our Lord says, "Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven" (Math. xix. 14), he does not only intimate the necessity of our becoming like little children in simplicity, as a qualification without which (as he expressly declares in other places) we cannot enter into his kingdom, but informs us of a fact, that the number of infants, who are effectually redeemed to God by his blood, so greatly exceeds the aggregate number of adult believers, that, comparatively speaking, his kingdom may be said to consist of little children. The apostle speaks of them as not having "sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression" (Rom. v. 14), that is, with the consent of their understanding and will. And when he says, "We must all appear before the judgment, seat of Christ," he adds, "that every man may give an account of what he has done in the body, whether it be good or bad," 2 Cor. v. 10. But children who die in their infancy have not done any thing in the body, either good or bad. It is true, they are by nature evil, and must, if saved, be the subjects of a supernatural change. And though we cannot conceive how this change is to be wrought yet I suppose few are so rash as to imagine it impossible that any infants can be saved. The same power that produces this change in some, can produce it in all; and therefore I am willing to believe, till the scripture forbids me, that infants, of all nations and kindreds, without exception, who die before they are capable of sinning after the similitude of Adam's transgression, who have done nothing in the body of which they can give an account, are included in the election of grace. They are born for a better world than this; they just enter this state of tribulation; they quickly pass through it; their robes are washed white in the blood of the Lamb, and they are admitted, for his sake, before the throne. Should I be asked to draw the line, to assign the age at which children begin to be accountable for actual sin, it would give me no pain to confess my ignorance.—The Lord knoweth.

2. A people hidden among the most degenerate communities, civil or ecclesiastical, that bear the name of Christian; where ignorance and superstition, or errors, which, though more refined, are no less contrary to the gospel, have a prevailing dominion and influence. What can be more deplorable, in the view of an enlightened and benevolent mind, than the general state of the Roman and Greek churches! where the traditions, inventions, and doctrines of men, a train of pompous and burdensome ceremonies, a dependence upon masses, penance, and pilgrimages, upon legends and fictitious saints, form the principal features of the public religion. Many nations are involved in this gross darkness, but they are not wholly destitute of the scripture; some portions of it are interwoven with their authorized forms of worship; and we cannot with reason doubt but a succession of individuals among them have been acquainted with the life and power of true godliness, notwithstanding the disadvantages and prejudices of their education. There are likewise amongst Protestants schemes of doctrine, supported by learning and by numbers, which are not more conformable to the standard of the New Testament than the grossest errors of Popery; and yet here and there persons may be met with, who, by the agency of the Holy Spirit, enabling them to understand the scriptures, are made wiser than their teachers; and who, though still fettered by some mistakes and prejudices, give evidence in the main, that their hopes are fixed upon the only atonement, that they are redeemed to God, and are partakers of that faith which worketh by love, purifies the heart, and overcometh the world.

3. I will go one step farther. The inferences that have been made by some persons from the apostle Peter's words, that "God is no respecter of persons, but in every nation, he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him" (Acts x. 34, 35), are, undoubtedly, rash and unscriptural. They would conclude from thence, that it is of little importance what people believe, provided they are sincere in their way; that the idolatrous Heathens, even the most savage of them, whose devotion is cruelty, who pollute their worship with human blood, and live in the practice of vices disgraceful to humanity, are in a very safe state, because they act, as it is supposed, according to their light. "But if the light which is in them be darkness, how great is that darkness!" Such a lax candour as this tends to make the gospel unnecessary; if they who have it not are therefore excusable, though they neither love nor fear God, and live in open violation of the law of their nature. The declaration, that "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord" (Heb. xii. 14), holds universally, and without a single exception. But if we suppose a Heathen, destitute of the means of grace, by which conversion is usually wrought, to be brought to a sense of his misery, of the emptiness and vanity of worldly things, to a conviction that he cannot be happy without the favour of the great Lord of the world, to a feeling of guilt, and a desire of mercy;

and that though he has no explicit knowledge of a Saviour, he directs the cry of his heart to the unknown Supreme to this purport, "*Ens entium, miserere mei*, Father and source of beings, have mercy upon me!"—who will prove that such views and desires can arise in the heart of a sinner, without the energy of that Spirit which Jesus is exalted to bestow? Who will take upon him to say, that his blood has not sufficient efficacy to redeem to God a sinner who is thus disposed, though he has never heard of his name? Or who has a warrant to affirm, that the supposition I have made is, in the nature of things, impossible to be realized? But I stop—I do not often amuse you with conjecture. And though for want of express warrant from scripture, I dare not give the sentiments I have now offered a stronger name than probable, or conjectural, I hope I do not propose them for your amusement. They will prove to your advantage and my own, if they are helpful to guard us against a narrow, harsh, and dogmatical spirit; and if, without abating our reverend submission to the revealed will of God, they have a tendency to confirm our views of his goodness, and the power and compassions of the great Redeemer.