

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.

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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!

Tantanne rem, tam negligenter, agere ! TER.

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

SERMON XLIX.

THE CHORUS OF ANGELS.

Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing. REV. v. 12.

IT was a good report which the queen of Sheba heard, in her own land, of the wisdom and glory of Solomon. It lessened her attachment to home, and prompted her to undertake a long journey to visit this greater king, of whom she had heard so much. She went, and she was not disappointed. Great as the expectations were which she had formed from the relation made her by others, they fell short of what she saw and heard herself, when she was admitted into his presence. Good, likewise, is the report of the gospel. It has a powerful effect upon those who receive it by faith. It is abundantly sufficient to convince them of the comparative insignificance of all that they most admired and esteemed in this world. From that hour they become strangers and pilgrims upon earth. They set out, in the way which God has prescribed, in hopes of seeing him who is greater than Solomon; and the report they have heard of him is their subject, their song, and their joy, while they are on their journey, and their great support, under the difficulties they meet with on the road. What then will it be to see him as he is? As yet, the one half is not told them. Or at least they are not yet capable of conceiving the half, or the thousandth part, of what they read in the scripture, concerning his wisdom, his glory, and his grace. We weaken, rather than enlarge, the sense of such a passage as this, by our feeble comments. We must die before we can understand it. To the bulk of mankind, "Wait the great teacher death," is cold, is dangerous advice. If they are not taught by the gospel while they live, the teaching of death will be too late. Dreadful will be the condition of those who cannot be convinced of their mistakes, till repentance and amendment will be impracticable. But death will be a great teacher, indeed, to a believer; he will then know more by a glance, and in a moment, of the happiness he is now expecting, than by all he could collect from the inquiry and experience of a long course of years, in this world.

The scenery of this chapter, if attentively considered, is sufficient to snatch our thoughts from the little concerns of time, and to give us some anticipation of the employments and enjoyments of heaven. Come, all ye that are wearied and burdened with afflictions and temptations, look up, and for a while, at least, forget your sorrows! The Lamb is upon his throne, surrounded by a multitude of his redeemed people, who once were afflicted and burdened like yourselves; but now all tears are wiped from their eyes. They have a song peculiarly their own, and are represented as taking the first and

leading part in worship and praise. The angels cannot sing their song, they were not redeemed to God by his blood; but they are interested in the subject. Their highest views of the manifold wisdom of God are derived from the wonders of redemption. Therefore they join in the chorus, “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing.” If you have a humble hope of bearing a part in this immortal song, will you hang down your heads like a bulrush, because you have the honour of following your Lord through many tribulations to his kingdom?

The number of the angels is expressed indefinitely, ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands; myriads, and millions; to intimate to us, that, with respect to our capacities and conceptions, they are innumerable. Their number is known to him who telleth the number of the stars and calleth them all by their names (Ps. cxlvii. 4), and to him only. The scripture intimates a diversity of ranks and orders among them, Thrones, dominions, principalities, and powers; but as to particulars, there is little said that might gratify our curiosity. It is enough for us to know, that the highest of them, and that all of them, worship him who is clothed in our nature. My text expressly informs us, that the object of their worship is the Lamb that was slain. Not that the humanity of Christ, which is but a creature, is simply and formally, the object of their worship; but they worship him who has assumed the human nature into personal union with himself; God manifest in the flesh, God in Christ. Though the world censure or despise us for honouring the Son as we honour the Father (John v. 23), we have here a good precedent, as we have in many places of scripture, the warrant of an express command. Whether men are pleased or not, we will, we must, worship the Lamb that was slain. To animate our devotion, let us thankfully consider, Why he was slain, and How he was slain.

I. Why he was slain.—The redeemed say, For us. “He loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood,” Rev. i. 5. They were sinners and enemies; they were slaves to sin and Satan; yet he loved them, and died to redeem them. It is by virtue of his blood and death that they are now before the throne. Nothing less than his death could have made them duly sensible of their misery, nothing less could have relieved them from it. He was lifted up upon the cross, that by the powerful magnetism of his dying love, he might, in the hour of his grace, draw their hearts to himself, John xii. 82. This was the design, this was the effect of his sufferings. A crucified Saviour, though a stumbling-block to the self-righteous, and foolishness to vain reasoners, was to them the power and the wisdom of God for salvation. They looked unto him, and were enlightened; they trusted in him, and were not ashamed. By faith in his name, they obtained peace with God, they renounced the ways of sin, they warred the good warfare, they overcame the

world, and were at length made more than conquerors. For his sake they endured the cross, and despised the shame. They met with bad treatment from the world, but it was from the world that crucified him. While they were here their characters were obscured by their own imperfections, and by the misrepresentations and reproaches of their enemies. But now their reproach is removed, and they shine, each one like the sun, in the kingdom of their Father, Matth. xiii. 43. What an immense constellation of suns! This their full salvation was the joy set before him, for the sake of which he became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. And now they see him as he is, they ascribe all their victories and honours to him, and unite in one song of endless praise to the Lamb that was slain.

II. Their praises are heightened, when they consider, How he was slain. He did not die a natural death. He was slain. Nor did he fall like a hero, by an honourable wound in the field of battle. The impression which the death of the late General Wolfe made upon the public is not yet quite forgotten. He conquered for us, but it cost him his life. But he died honourably, and was lamented by his country. Not so the Lamb of God. He died the death of a slave, of a malefactor. Cruelty, malice, and contempt, combined to give his sufferings every possible aggravation. And after he was slain, very few laid it to heart. The world went on as it did before, as though nothing extraordinary had happened. But on this dark ground the perfections of God were displayed in their fullest lustre; and they are the perfections of the great Redeemer, and therefore distinctly ascribed to him by the angels in the words which follow—“Power, and wisdom, and riches, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing.”

Though each of these words have a distinct sense, a nicety in defining them, and stating their precise meaning is of less importance than to feel the combined efficacy of them all, to impress our hearts with sentiments of reverence, confidence and love. The fulness of expression may teach us, that every kind of excellence is the indubitable right and possession of the Lamb that was slain. He is worthy to have them all attributed to him in the most absolute sense, and consequently worthy of our adoration, dependence, and praise.

1. Power,—It is spoken once, yea twice we have heard the same, that power belongeth unto God, Ps. lxii. 11. It belongeth to him eminently and exclusively. All the power of creatures is derived from him. Such is the power of the Lamb. He styles himself the “Omnipotent”, the Upholder and Possessor of all things, Rev. i. 8, 11. He exerciseth this power in the human nature, Matth. xxviii. 18. He doeth what he pleaseth in the armies of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth (Dan. iv. 35); and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou? He has, therefore, all sufficiency, and uncontrollable authority, for the discharge of his office, as the Mediator

and head of his church. The divine perfections, being infinite, are not distinct in themselves, though the scripture, in condescension to our weakness, authorizes us to speak of them as distinguishable. God is one. And the power which can preserve and govern the world, involves in the idea of it every other excellence, which are separately mentioned in this passage.

2. Wisdom.—He is the only wise God, and our Saviour, Jude 25. His knowledge is perfect, his plan is perfect. In himself he is essentially the wisdom of God (Prov. viii. 22), and he is our wisdom, 1 Cor. i. 30. It is life eternal to know the only true God (John xvii. 3), and therefore it is life eternal to know Jesus Christ whom he hath sent. For he is the only way, and the only door to this knowledge; no one can come unto God, or attain to any just conceptions of him, but in and by the Son of his love, who so perfectly represents God to us, is so completely the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, that whoso hath seen him, hath seen the Father, John xiv. 9. By him is opened to us the unsearchable wisdom of the divine counsels, particularly in the great work of redemption. “No one hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he hath revealed him,” John i. 18; John xv. 15. It is by wisdom communicated from him, that his people are made wise unto salvation. Though there are few scholars and philosophers among them, and many of them are despised for their ignorance and weakness, yet in truth they have all a good understanding, for they know the Lord and his will; they know wherein their proper happiness consists, and how it is to be obtained. They are instructed how to walk and to please God, how to bear afflictions with patience, and to meet death with composure. This wisdom is far superior to that of the schools. But he bestows and maintains it. The eyes of their mind are opened, and they see by his light; but they have no light of their own, or in themselves. They wait upon him for direction in every difficulty, for the solution of every hard question which perplexes their spirits; and he makes the crooked straight, teaches them to avoid the snares that are laid for them, or extricates them when entangled. Therefore in time, and to eternity, they will admire and adore his wisdom.

3. Riches.—All the stores of mercy, grace, and comfort, are in him, as light in the sun, or water in the ocean. The apostle, speaking of the unsearchable riches of Christ (Eph. iii. 8), gives us the idea of a mine, the height, length, depth, and breadth of which cannot be investigated, nor the immense wealth it contains exhausted. Of this fulness the poor are invited to receive freely, and multitudes from age to age have been enriched, and the treasure is still undiminished. None are sent away empty; and when all have been supplied, it will be full as at first.

4. Strength.—That energy and efficacy of his power, by which he accomplishes his holy purposes. Who can conceive of this? How just is the psalmist’s reasoning, “He that formed the eye, shall not he see? He that planted the

ear, shall not he hear?" Ps. xciv. 9. So we may say, How strong is he from whom all created strength is derived, and before whom the strength of all creatures, if collected into one effort, would be as chaff before the whirlwind! The Lord of all power and might speaks, and it is done; he commandeth, and it standeth fast. Though the waves of the stormy sea toss themselves, they cannot prevail (Ps. xciii. 3, 4); he checks them in the height of their rage, setting bounds to their violence which they cannot pass, saying, "Hitherto shalt thou come and no farther, and here shall thy proud billows be stayed," Job xxxviii. 10, 11. With equal sovereignty, certainty, and ease, he rules over moral agents. He formed the heart of man, and he can fill it with terror or with comfort in a moment, in any assignable circumstances. He can make it happy in a dungeon (Acts xvi. 25), or impress it with dismay and despair upon a throne, Dan. v. 5, 6. All hearts are thus incessantly under his influence. And the hedge of his promise and protection surrounds those who trust in him, as with mountains, and walls of brass and fire, impenetrable to the assaults of the powers of darkness, unless so far as he, for wise and holy ends, is pleased to give permission. With the arm of his strength he upholdeth them that are falling, and raiseth up them that are bowed down (Ps. cxlv. 14), and is, in one and the same instant, a present and immediate help in trouble to all who call upon him, Ps. xlvi. 1. Therefore they that abide under his shadow are safe; they pass unhurt through floods and flames, because their Redeemer is strong. And when, in defiance of all their enemies, he has brought them together in his heavenly kingdom, they will, with one consent, ascribe unto the Lord glory and strength.

5. Honour.—He is the fountain of it. All the honour of his creatures, and of his people, is from him; as the sun beautifies and gilds the objects he shines upon, which, without him, are opaque and obscure. Because his people are precious in his sight, they are honourable. He clothes them with the garments of salvation, covers them with a robe of righteousness as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with jewels, Is. lxi. 10. But who can speak of his own inherent honour, as God-man and Mediator! We must wait till we see him, without a cloud or veil, receiving the homage and adoration of angels and men. For as yet the one half cannot be told us. Then, however, it will be universally known, that he who possesses the fulness of wisdom and power, riches and strength is worthy to receive all honour. Ah! how different will he then appear, from that humble form he once assumed, when, for our sakes, he was a man of sorrows, despised, rejected, and nailed to the ignominious cross!

6. Glory.—The manifestation of God, that by which he is known and magnified, in the view of finite intelligences: the result, the combined effulgence of his holiness, grace, wisdom, truth, and love: this is his glory, and this glory is revealed and displayed in Christ. He is glorious in his works of

creation and providence, but these do not fully exhibit his character. But in the Lamb upon the throne his glory shines, full-orbed. And all in heaven, and all in earth, who behold it, take up the song of Moses and the Lamb, "Who is like unto thee, O Lord? Who is like unto thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders!—Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty! just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints!" Exod. xv. 11; Rev. xv. 3.

7. Blessing.—He is the author of all blessings, of all the happiness and good which his people receive, and he is the deserved object of their universal praise. The different senses in which we use the word *blessing*, taken together, may express that intercourse or communion which is between the head and the mystical members of his body. He blesses them effectually with the light of his countenance, with liberty, grace, and peace. He blesses them daily. His mercies are renewed to them every morning. He will bless them eternally. Blessed are the people who have this Lord for their God. They can make him no suitable returns, yet in their way they bless him. They admire, adore, and praise him. They call upon all the powers of their souls to bless him. They proclaim his goodness, and that he is worthy to receive the ascription of power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing. In proportion to their attainments in this delightful exercise of worship, love, and gratitude, they enjoy a heaven upon earth; and to stand before him continually, to behold his glory, to live under the unclouded beams of his favour, and to be able to bless and praise him as they ought, without weariness, abatement, interruption, or end, is what they mean when they speak of the heaven they hope for hereafter. Such is the blessedness of those who have already died in the Lord. They see his face, they drink of the rivers of pleasure which are at his right hand, they cast down their crowns before him, and say, thou art worthy—Let us not be slothful (Heb. vi. 12), but followers of them who, through faith and patience, have finished their course, and are entered into the joy of their Lord.

Of all this glory and honour the scripture declares the Lamb that was slain to be worthy. Wisdom, riches, and strength, are his. His power is infinite, his authority supreme. He is the author and giver of all good. He has life in himself, and he is the life of all that live; the Lord and Head of the church and of the universe. Can language express, or can heart conceive, a higher ascription and acknowledgment than this? Can all this be due to a creature? to one of a derived and dependent character? Then surely the scripture would have a direct tendency to promote idolatry. Far be the thought from us! The scripture teaches us the knowledge of the true God, and the worship due to him. Therefore Messiah, the Lamb that was slain, is the true God, the proper and immediate object of the worship of angels and of men.

Let us therefore take up a lamentation for those who slight the glorious Redeemer, and refuse him the honour due to his name. Their mistake should excite, not our anger or scorn, but our pity and prayers. Are there any such amongst us? Alas, my fellow-sinners, you know not what you do! Alas! you know him not, nor do you know yourselves. I am well aware that a thousand arguments of mine will not persuade you; but I can simply tell you what would soon make you at least desirous of adopting our sentiments upon this subject. If he who has that power over the heart which I have been speaking of, was pleased to give you this moment a sense of the holiness and authority of God, and of your conduct towards him as his creatures, your strongest objections to the high honours we attribute to the Saviour would this moment fall to the ground, and you would be immediately convinced, that either Jesus Christ is the true God and eternal life, or that you must perish. You would no longer expect mercy, but in a way perfectly consonant with the righteousness and truth of God, declared in his word, and with the honour and purity of his moral government. This would lead you to perceive the necessity of an atonement, and the insufficiency of any atonement but that which the Lamb of God has made by the sacrifice of himself (Heb. ix. 26), and that the efficacy even of his mediation depends upon his divine character. The scriptural doctrines of the depravity of man, the malignity of sin, the eternal power and Godhead of the Saviour, the necessity and efficacy of his mediation, and the inevitable, extreme, and endless misery of those who finally reject him, are so closely connected, that if the first be rightly understood, it will open the mind to the reception of the rest. But till the first be known and felt, the importance and certainty of the others will be suspected, if not openly denied.

Though the doctrines I have enumerated are, in these sceptical days, too generally disputed and contradicted, I am fully confident that it is impossible to demonstrate them to be false. Upon the lowest supposition, therefore, they possibly may be true; and the consequences depending upon them, if they should be found true at last, are so vastly momentous, that even the peradventure, the possibility of their truth, renders them deserving of your most serious consideration. Trifle with yourselves no longer. If they be truths, they are the truths of God. Upon the same authority stands the truth of that gracious promise, that he will give his Holy Spirit to them that ask him. Let me entreat you to make the experiment. This is the proper point to begin with. Instead of indulging reasonings and speculations, humble yourselves before the Lord, and pray for the light and influence which he has said he will afford to them who are willing to be taught. Read the scripture with deliberation, and do not labour to fortify yourselves against conviction. Break off from those practices, which your own consciences admonish you cannot be pleasing to him who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity. Then shall you know if you will sincerely follow on to know the Lord, Hos. vi. 3. But if not, if you

will, in a spirit of levity, presume to decide upon points which you will not allow yourselves seriously to examine, should you at last perish in your obstinacy and unbelief, your ruin will be of yourselves. You have been faithfully warned, and we shall be clear of your blood.