

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 WOOLNETH,

LOMBARD STREET,

LONDON.

—————Ah!

Tantamne rem, tam negligenter, agere !—TER.

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

TO THE
PARISHIONERS OF ST. MARY WOOLNOTH,
AND
ST. MARY WOOLCHURCH HAW,
LONDON,
THESE SERMONS
ON THE
MESSIAH
ARE AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBED BY THE
AUTHOR,
TO REMAIN AS A TESTIMONY OF HIS RESPECT
FOR THEIR PERSONS,
AND HIS SOLICITUDE FOR THEIR WELFARE,
WHEN HIS PRESENT RELATION
TO THEM, AS THEIR MINISTER,
SHALL BE DISSOLVED.

SERMON V.

IMMANUEL.

Behold a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel, God with us. ISAIAH, vii. 14.

THERE is a signature of wisdom and power impressed upon the works of God, which evidently distinguishes them from the feeble imitations of men. Not only the splendour of the sun, but the glimmering light of the glow-worm, proclaims his glory. The structure and growth of a blade of grass are the effects of the same power which produced the fabric of the heavens and the earth. In his word likewise he is inimitable. He has a style and manner peculiarly his own. What he is pleased to declare of himself by the prophet, may be prefixed as a proper motto to the whole revelation of his will in the Bible. "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts," Isa. lv. 8, 9. This superiority of his thoughts to ours, causes a proportionable difference in his manner of operation. His ways are above our conceptions, and often contrary to them. He sometimes produces great effects by means which, to us, appear unsuitable and weak. Thus he gave Gideon a complete victory, not by providing him an army equal to that of the enemy, but by three hundred men furnished with earthen pitchers and lamps, Judges vii. 19, 20. At other times the greatness of his preparations intimates that there are difficulties in the case, insuperable to any power but his own, where our narrow apprehensions, until enlightened and enlarged by his teaching, can scarcely perceive any difficulty. It is eminently so with respect to the restoration of fallen man to his favour. We have but slight thoughts of his holiness, and therefore are but slightly affected by the evil of sin. But though he be rich in mercy, no wisdom but his own could have proposed an expedient whereby the exercise of his mercy towards sinners might be made to correspond with his justice and truth, and with the honour of his moral government. His gospel reveals this expedient, and points out a way in which mercy and truth meet together; and his inflexible righteousness is displayed in perfect harmony with the peace of sinners who submit to his appointment; and thus God appears not only gracious but just, in receiving them to favour. This is the greatest of all his works, and exhibits the most glorious discovery of his character and perfections. The means are answerable to the grandeur of the design, and are summarily expressed in my text.

I shall not take up your time with attempting to clear the difficulties which have been observed in the context. It may suffice for my purpose to

affirm, that this passage expressly and exclusively refers to the Messiah, for which my warrant is the authority of the evangelists Matthew and Luke (Matth. i. 23; Luke i. 31, 32), who directly apply it to him, and assure us that it was accomplished in him. If sinners are to be saved, without injury to the honour of his law and government (and otherwise they must perish), two things are necessary,

I. That a virgin shall conceive, and bring forth a son.

II. That this son of the virgin shall have a just right to be called Immanuel, God with us.

I. A virgin shall conceive, and bring forth a son. The Mediator, the surety for sinful men, must himself be a man. Because those whom he came to redeem were partakers of flesh and blood, he therefore took part of the same. Had not Messiah engaged for us and appeared in our nature, a case would have occurred which I think we may warrantably deem incongruous to the divine wisdom. I mean, that while fire and hail, snow and vapour, and the stormy wind, fulfil the will of God, while the brutes are faithful to the instincts implanted in them by their Maker, a whole species of intelligent beings would have fallen short of the original law and design of their creation, and indeed have acted in direct and continual opposition to it. For the duty of man to love, serve, and trust God with all his heart and mind, and to love his neighbour as himself, is founded in the very nature and constitution of things, and necessarily results from his relation to God, and his absolute dependence on him as a creature. Such a disposition must undoubtedly have been as natural to man before his fall, as it is for a bird to fly, or a fish to swim. The prohibitory form of the law delivered to Israel from Mount Sinai, is a sufficient intimation that it was designed for sinners. Surely our first parents, while in a state of innocence, could not stand in need of warnings and threatening to restrain them from worshipping idols, or profaning the name of the great God whom they loved. Nor would it have been necessary to forbid murder, adultery, or injustice, if his posterity had continued under the law of their creation, the law of love. But the first act of disobedience degraded and disabled man, detached him from his proper centre, if I may so speak, and incapacitated him both for his duty and his happiness. After his fall, it became impossible for either Adam or his posterity to obey the law of God. But Messiah fulfilled it exactly, as a man, and the principles of it are renewed, by the power of his grace, in all who believe on him. And though their best endeavours fall short, his obedience to it is accepted on their behalf, and he will at length perfectly restore them to their primitive order and honour. When they shall see him as he is, they will be like him, and all their powers and faculties will be perfectly conformed to his image.

Again, Messiah must not only be a man, but a partaker of our very nature. It had been equally easy to the power of God to have formed the body of the second Adam, as he formed the first, out of the dust of the earth. But though, in this way, he would have been a true and perfect man, he would not have been more nearly related to us than to the angels. Therefore, when God sent forth his Son to be made under the law, to redeem us from the curse of the law, that we might receive the adoption of children (Gal iv. 4, 5), and be re-admitted into his happy family, he was made of a woman. Thus he became our God, our near kinsman, with whom the right of redemption lay.

But farther, if he had derived his human nature altogether in the ordinary way, from Sinful parents, we see not how he could have avoided a participation in that defilement and depravity which the fall of Adam had entailed upon all his posterity. But his body, that holy thing, conceived and born of a virgin, was the immediate production of God. Therefore he was perfectly pure and spotless, and qualified to be such a high priest as became us, holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners (Heb. vii. 26); who needed not, as the typical high-priests of Israel, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sin, and then for the sins of the people, Heb. vii. 27. These difficulties were obviated by a virgin's conceiving and bearing a son. His obedience was without defect, his nature without blemish, and, having no sin of his own, when he voluntarily offered himself to make an atonement for the sins of his people, his sacrifice was, so far, answerable to the strict and extensive demands of the law and justice of God.

Let us make a solemn pause, and call upon our souls to admire and adore the wisdom and power of God in this appointment. Thus the Lord created a new thing upon the earth!

II. But surely our admiration and gratitude will be raised still higher, if we rightly understand the latter part of my text. This son of the virgin shall be called Immanuel, God with us. Though the human nature of Christ was absolutely perfect, his obedience commensurate to the utmost extent of the law, and his substitution and sufferings for sinners voluntary, yet, had he been no more than a man, he would not have been equal to the great undertaking of saving sinners. A due consideration of the majesty, holiness, authority, and goodness of God will make sin appear to be, as the apostle expresses it, exceedingly sinful, Rom. vii. 13. Whoever has a right sense of the nature and effects of that rebellion against the Most High, which the scripture intends by the term sin, will not need many arguments to convince him that the Mediator between God and man must be possessed of such dignity and power as cannot be attributed to a creature without destroying the idea of a created and dependent being, by ascribing to him those perfec-

tions which are incommunicably divine.

If Messiah had been a sinless and perfect man, and no more, he might have yielded a complete obedience to the will of God, but it could have been only for himself. The most excellent and exalted creature cannot exceed the law of his creation. As a creature, he is bound to serve God with his all, and his obligations will always be equal to his ability. But an obedience acceptable and available for others, for thousands and millions, for all who are willing to plead it, must be connected with a nature which is not thus necessarily bound. A sinner, truly convinced of his obnoxiousness to the displeasure of God, must sink into despair, notwithstanding the intimation of a saviour, if he were not assured by the scripture that it was a divine person in the human nature who engaged for us. It is this alone affords a solid ground for hope, to know that he who was before all, by whom all things were made, and by whom they consist, assumed the nature of man; that the great Lawgiver himself submitted to be under his own law. This wonderful condescension gave an immense value and dignity to all that he did, to all that he suffered: thus he not only satisfied but honoured the law. So that we may, without hesitation, affirm, that the law of God was more honoured by Messiah, in his obedience to it, during the few years of his residence upon earth, and terminated by his last and highest act of obedience in submitting to the death of the cross, than it could have been by the un-sinning obedience of all mankind to the end of time.

But Messiah was not only to obey the law for us, but he was likewise to expiate, to sustain and to exhaust the curse due to sin, Gal. iii. 13. In this attempt no mere creature could have endured. Nor could the sufferings of a creature have been proposed to the universe, to angels, and men, as a consideration sufficient to vindicate the righteousness and truth of God in the remission of sin, after he had determined and solemnly declared that the wages of sin is death. The apostle assures us that it is impossible for the blood of bulls and of goats to take away sin, Heb. x. 4. They who differ from the apostle in their judgment, who think it very possible for God, if he pleased, to forgive the sinner who should offer a bull or a goat, or even without any offering, by the sovereign exercise of his mercy, may be reminded that the question is not simply what God can do, but what it becomes him to do, agreeable to his perfections, and to his character as governor of the world. Of this his infinite wisdom is the only competent judge; and we learn from his word, that it is impossible any blood, but that of his own Son, can cleanse us from guilt, or save us from misery. The blood of a bull or a goat, of a man or an angel (if angels could bleed), are all equally insufficient to the great purpose of declaring his righteousness, of manifesting to all intelligent creatures his inflexible displeasure against sin, in the

very act of affording mercy to sinners. But since the atoning blood is the blood of Immanuel, of him who is God with us, the sinner who makes it his plea, builds his hope upon a rock which cannot be removed; and obtaining forgiveness in this way, he likewise obtains by it such a knowledge of the heinousness of sin, as disposes him from that hour to fear, hate, and forsake it.

But though forgiveness be an essential part of salvation, it is not the whole. We cannot be happy, except the power of sin be likewise destroyed. A well-grounded hope in the mercy of God, is connected with a thirst for sanctification, and a conformity to his image. But neither this hope nor this desire is natural to us. Our case requires the help of an almighty arm, of the power which can cause the blind to see, the deaf to hear, the dead to arise; which can take away the heart of stone, and create a heart of flesh. So likewise the difficulties attendant on our Christian profession, arising from the spirit of the world around us, the snares to which we are exposed in every situation, our weakness, the deceitfulness of our hearts, the subtilty, vigilance, and power of our spiritual enemies, are so many and great, that unless he, on whom we depend for salvation, be able to save to the uttermost, we can have no security, either for our progress, or our perseverance, in the grace of God. Unless the Saviour of sinners be omnipresent, omniscient, unchangeable, "the same yesterday, today, and for ever," that is, unless he be God, how can he answer the prayers, satisfy the wants, and relieve the distresses of all who trust in him in every age, and of all who in every place equally need his support at the same moment? Or how can he engage to give rest to every weary soul, to secure them from perishing, and to bestow upon them eternal life? David comfortably concluded, that because the Lord was his shepherd, he should not want, and had no reason to fear (Psal. xxiii. 1. 4.), not even when passing through the valley of the shadow of death. To us Jesus is made known as the great shepherd of the sheep; but how can we place the like confidence in him, unless we likewise are assured that our shepherd is the Lord?

I shall not attempt to vindicate this doctrine largely from the exceptions of those who call themselves men of reason. It is a point of revelation, and it is expressly revealed. It demands our assent upon the authority of God, who requires us to receive this record which he has given us of his Son. Thus far it approves itself to our reason, that however difficult it may be to our conceptions, yet thus it must be, upon a supposition that sinners can be saved without prejudice to the honour of the divine government. If we affirm, that he who was born in a stable, and suffered as a malefactor upon Mount Calvary, is the true God and eternal life, many will think it a hard saying. But it is the doctrine of scripture, the very pillar and ground of

truth; the only foundation of hope for an awakened conscience, the only standard by which we can properly estimate the evil of sin, the worth of the soul, and the love of God. We do not, however, say, that the human nature of Christ, considered in itself, possesses the attributes of Deity, or is the proper object of worship; nor do we suppose that God could suffer, bleed, or die. But we say with the apostle, “that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself,” 2 Cor. v. 19. We believe that the human nature was so intimately and indissolubly united to the divine, that the properties and actings of each nature are justly ascribed to the one person of Christ, God-man, Immanuel, God with us. Thus we read that the final judgment of the world is committed to a *man* and that God hath purchased his church with his *own blood*, Acts xvii. 31; xx. 28.

Behold then the character of Messiah in this prophecy! a man! a God! a divine person in the human nature! God manifested in the flesh! Immanuel, God with us!

As fallen creatures, we had lost the true knowledge of God, and were unable to form such conceptions of his greatness and goodness, as are necessary to inspire us with reverence, to engage our confidence, or produce obedience to his will. His glory shines in the heavens and fills the earth; we are surrounded by the tokens of his power and presence; yet, till we are instructed by his word, and enlightened by his Holy Spirit, he is to us an unknown God. The prevalence of idolatry was early, and (with an exception to the people of Israel) soon became universal. Men who boasted of their reason, worshipped the sun and moon, yea, the works of their own hands, instead of the Creator. And even where revelation is vouchsafed, the bulk of mankind live without God in the world. But he is known, trusted, and served, by those who know Messiah. To them his glory is displayed in the person of Jesus Christ, 2 Cor. iv. 6. His agency is perceived in the creation, his providence is acknowledged, and his presence felt as God with us.

As fallen creatures, God is against us, and we are against him. The alienation of our hearts is the great cause of our ignorance of him. We are willingly ignorant. The thoughts of him are unwelcome to us, and we do not like to retain him in our knowledge. Guilt is the parent of atheism. A secret foreboding, that if there be a God, we are obnoxious to his displeasure; and that if he takes cognizance of our conduct, we have nothing to hope, but everything to fear from him, constrains many persons to try to persuade themselves that there is no God; and many more to think, or at least to wish, that if there be a God, he does not concern himself with human affairs. What a proof is this of the enmity of the heart of man against him, that so many persons who would tremble at the thought of being in a ship, driven by the winds and waves, without compass or pilot, should yet

think it desirable, if it were possible, to be assured, that in a world like this, so full of uncertainty, trouble, and change, all things were left at random, without the interference of a supreme governor! But this enmity, these dark apprehensions, are removed, when the gospel is received by faith. For it brings us the welcome news, that there is forgiveness with him; that God is reconciled in his Son to all who seek his mercy. In this sense, likewise, Messiah is Immanuel, God with us, on our side, no longer the avenger of sin, but the author of salvation.

Immanuel is God with us, God in our nature still. He suffered as a man, and as a man he now reigns on the throne of glory, exercising all power and authority, and receiving all spiritual worship both in heaven and upon earth. He is the head of all principalities and powers, thrones and dominions. Thus man is not only saved, but unspeakably honoured and ennobled. He is brought into the nearest relation to him, who is over all blessed for ever. The angels adore him; only redeemed sinners can say, "He loved us, and gave himself for us; he has washed us from our sins in his own blood" (Gal. ii. 20; Rev. i. 5); he is our Saviour, our shepherd, our Immanuel, God with us.

I shall conclude with a few obvious reflections which offer from this important subject.

1. What a cold assent is paid to the doctrine of the Godhead of Christ by many who profess and receive it as a truth! They have received from education, from books or ministers, what is called an orthodox scheme of religious sentiments, and with this they are contented. They have not been accustomed to doubt of it, and therefore take it for granted that they really believe it. But as I have already hinted, it is so contrary to our natural apprehensions, that no man can, from his heart, say that Jesus Christ is Lord, unless he be taught of God. And a cordial belief of this point will and must produce great and abiding effects. They who know the Saviour's name, will so trust in him, as to renounce every other ground of confidence. They will love him supremely, and forsake everything that stands in competition with his favour. They will glory in his cross, they will espouse his cause, and devote themselves to his service. They will make continual application to him, that they may receive out of his fulness grace according to their need. They will obey his precepts, and walk in his Spirit. Happy were it, indeed, if all who join in repeating the Creed, and who bow their knee at the mention of his name, were thus minded. But the lives, tempers, and pursuits of thousands, give too sure an evidence, that when they express their assent with their lips, they neither know what they say, nor whereof they affirm. Their acknowledgment of his character, has no more salutary influence, than that of the evil spirits when he was upon earth, who said and perhaps

with a much fuller conviction, “We know thee who thou art, the holy one of God,” Mark i. 24.

2. What a strong foundation does this doctrine afford for the faith and hope of those who indeed know Messiah, and have put their trust in him! This truth is the rock upon which the church is built, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. “If God be for us, who shall be against us?” The difficulties of our warfare are great, the enemies of our peace are many. The world may frown, and Satan will rage, but Jesus has overcome the world, and is greater than all our foes. He will guide his people with his unerring wisdom, support them with his almighty arm, supply them out of the inexhaustible riches of his grace, revive them when fainting, heal them when wounded, plead for them above as their great high priest, manage for them upon earth as their great shepherd, and at last make them more than conquerors, and give them a crown of life.

3. On the contrary, how dreadful must be the state of those who finally reject him, and say in their hearts, “We will not have this man to rule over us!” He is now proposed as a Saviour, he invites sinners to come to him, that they may have life, and assures us, “that him that cometh he will in nowise cast out,” John vi. 37. Happy are they who hear and obey his voice today, while it is called today. Tomorrow is uncertain. Death may be at the door, and at death our state will be determined for eternity. They who refuse him now, in the character of a Saviour, must then appear at his tribunal, and stand before him as their Judge; and must answer, in their own persons, for all their transgressions of the holy law, and for their contempt of the gospel of the grace of God.