

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 L.

### THE UNIVERSAL CHORUS.

*(And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I, saying), Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb, for ever and ever! REV. v. 13.*

MEN have generally agreed to dignify their presumptuous and arrogant disquisitions on the works and ways of God with the name of wisdom, though the principles upon which they proceed, and the conclusions which they draw from them, are for the most part evident proofs of their depravity and folly. Instead of admiring the effects of his wisdom and power in the creation, they have rashly endeavoured to investigate the manner of its production. A variety of hypotheses have been invented to account for the formation of the world, and to state the laws by which the frame of nature is governed; and these different and inconsistent accounts have been defended with a magisterial tone of certainty, and an air of demonstration, by their respective authors, as though they had been bystanders and spectators when God spoke all things into being, and produced order out of confusion by the word of his power. They have, however, been much more successful in shewing the absurdity of the schemes proposed by others, than in reconciling their own to the sober dictates of plain common sense.

But if, by indulging their speculations on the creation of the world, the causes of the deluge, and similar subjects, their employment has been no better than weaving spiders webs, the result of their reasoning on morals has been much worse. Here they have with much industry hatched cockatrice-eggs (Is. lix. 5); and their labours have been not only fallacious, but mischievous. Their metaphysical researches, while they refuse the guidance of revelation, if pursued to their just consequences, will always lead into the labyrinths of scepticism, weaken the sense of moral obligation, rob the mind of the most powerful motives of right conduct, and of the only consolations which can afford it solid support in an hour of trouble. One insuperable difficulty which they will undertake to solve, though it does not properly lie in their way, is concerning the origin of evil. That evil is in the world, is felt and confessed universally. The gospel points out an effectual method of deliverance from it; but alas, the simple and infallible remedy is neglected, and men weary themselves with vain inquiries,

And find no end, in wandering mazes lost

The more they reason, the more they involve themselves in uncertainty and error, till at last they make lies their refuge, and adopt, with implicit credulity, as so many undoubted axioms, opinions, which are equally dishonourable to God, and contradictory to truth and experience, 2 Thess. ii. 11. Thus much is certain, that by the occasion of evil, the character of God is manifested with superior glory to the view of angels and men, who are in a state of holiness and allegiance, and a higher accent is thereby given to their praises; for now his justice and his mercy, which could not have been otherwise known, are revealed in the strongest light; and the redemption of sinners affords the brightest display of his wisdom and love.

The redeemed are represented as taking the first part in this sublime song, verses 8—10. The angels join in the chorus, verses 11, 12, which now becomes universal. All the angels, all the saints upon the earth, in the state of the dead, or *hades*, whether their bodies are buried under the earth, or in the sea, with one heart, aim, and voice, unite in worship and praise. In the preceding verse, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, are ascribed unto the Lamb; but here the ascription is unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb. I shall not add to what I have already observed to you from the words of the doxology. A few remarks, which offer from this verse taken in connection with the former, will bring me to a conclusion of the whole subject. And oh! for a coal of fire from the heavenly altar to warm your hearts and mine, that our love, joy, and gratitude may be awakened into lively exercise, and that the close of our meditations on the Messiah may leave us deeply impressed with desires and well-grounded hopes of meeting ere long before the throne, to join with the angels and the redeemed in singing the praise of God and the Lamb!

I. The Lord Jesus is not only the Head of the church redeemed" from among men, but of the whole intelligent creation that is in willing subjection to God. It belonged to his great design to gather together in one (to reduce under one head, as the Greek expression is), even in himself, all things that are in heaven and upon earth, Eph. i. 10. He is the Lord and the life both of angels and of men. Mutability and dependence are essential to the state of creatures, however exalted; and the angels in glory owe their preservation and confirmation in holiness and happiness to him. Hence they are styled the elect angels (1 Tim. v. 21), in distinction from those who left their first habitation, and sunk into sin and misery. Angels therefore constitute a branch of that great family which is named of him in heaven and earth. And having made peace by the blood of his cross, he has effected a reconciliation, not only between God and sinners, but also between angels and men. How those inhabitants of light are disposed to sinful men, considered as sinful, we may learn from many passages of scripture. They are devoted to God, filled with zeal for his honour, and wait but for his command to execute vengeance upon

his enemies. When Herod, infatuated by his pride, and by the flattery of the multitude, received their idolatrous compliment with complacency, an angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory, Acts xii. 23. The pestilence which destroyed the people towards the end of David's reign, was under the direction of an angel (2 Sam. xxiv. 16, 17), and David saw him with his arm stretched out against Jerusalem. And in this prophecy angels are spoken of as employed in pouring forth the vials of wrath upon the earth. And still they are ready, we may believe, to avenge their Maker's cause upon the wicked when they are commissioned. And if the history of modern times was written by an inspired pen and events, as in the scriptures, were assigned to their proper causes, perhaps the death of many a haughty worm would be recorded in words to this effect—"And an angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory." But, viewing sinners as the subjects of redemption, the angels copy from their Lord. They regard them with benevolence, and rejoice over every one that repenteth, Heb. i. 14. They willingly attend on them, and assist them, in ways beyond our conception. They esteem believers in Jesus as their fellowservants, Rev. xxii. 9. We have reason to think, that they are present in our worshipping assemblies; and perhaps, always so present, that they could discover themselves to us in a moment, were it consistent with the rules of the divine government established in this lower world, suited to the state of those who are to walk by faith, not by sight. Thus far however differing in other respects, the angels and the redeemed are united and related in one common head, and have fellowship in worship and service. When sinners are enabled by grace to renounce this world, they are admitted to an honourable alliance with a better.

IL From hence we may form some judgment of the true nature and high honour of that spiritual worship, which is the privilege and glory of the church of God under the gospel-dispensation. When we meet in the name of Jesus, as his people, and with a due observance of his institutions, we come to the innumerable company of angels, and to the general assembly and church of the first born (Heb. xii. 22, 23), the first born ones (for the expression is plural). We draw nigh by faith, to the very gate of heaven, to the holiest of all. Men unacquainted with spirituality, are soon weary even of the form of worship, unless their minds are amused by a splendid ceremonial. The first rise and subsequent increase of that pomp and pageantry, which in some countries has quite obscured the simplicity and beauty of gospel-worship, is to be ascribed to this indisposition of the human mind. Our thoughts while we are in a natural state, are too weak and wavering, and too gross to be pleased with a worship, in which there is nothing suited to affect the imagination by sensible objects. And therefore, when men think themselves wise, and profess to despise the pageantry which captivates the vulgar, their wisdom affords them no real advantage, if they have nothing better to

substitute in the room of what they reject as insignificant. The very appearance of devotion will languish, they will grow remiss, and neglect the sabbath and public assemblies, for want of something to keep up their attention. We have abundant proof of this in our own land, and at this time. Protestants pride themselves in not being Papists, but, when the Protestant religion is understood to mean no more than a renunciation of the superstitious ceremonies of the church of Rome, it is, with respect to individuals, little, if at all, better than Popery itself. Among us enlightened Protestants, no expedient but preaching the gospel of Christ will be found sufficient to retain people in a stated observance of the Lord's day. But true believers, who understand and love the gospel, do indeed draw nigh to God; and they account a day in his courts better than a thousand (Ps. lxxxiv. 10), because they can take a part in the songs of heaven, and in spirit and in truth, worship him that sitteth upon the throne, and the Lamb who redeemed them to God by his blood. They know by happy experience, that his promise, to be in the midst of those who assemble in his name, is truth. Their worship is not a mere bodily service, a lifeless form, a round of observances, which neither warm the heart, nor influence the conduct; but they are instructed, comforted, and strengthened, by waiting upon God. Their spiritual senses are exercised; they behold his glory in the glass of the gospel, they hear his voice, they feel an impression of his power and presence, they taste his goodness, and the virtue of that name, which is as ointment poured forth, perfumes their tempers and conversation.

III. Though the Lamb is worthy of all blessing, and honour, and glory, and power; there is a distinct ascription of praise to Him that sitteth upon the throne.

The scripture, which alone can teach us to form right conceptions of God, and to worship him acceptably, guides us in a medium, between opposite errors and mistakes. Too many persons, ignorant of their own state as sinners, and of the awful majesty and holiness of the Most High, presume to think of him, to speak of him, and in their way, to speak to him, without being aware of the necessity of a Mediator. But they who are without Christ, who is the only door and way to the Father are without God, atheists in the world, Eph. ii. 12. There is a mistake likewise on the other hand, when, though the Deity of the Saviour be acknowledged, yet what we are taught of the ineffable distinction in the Godhead, is not duly attended to. It is written, "In the beginning,—the Word was God," John i. 1. It is likewise written, "The Word was with God." This latter expression undoubtedly has a meaning, which though perfectly consistent, is not coincident with the former. The truth contained in it is proposed, not to our curiosity as a subject of speculation, but to our faith. I do not attempt to explain it. But, what God expressly declares, we are bound, upon the principles of right reason, to believe. For he is Truth, and cannot deceive us. - "There are three that bear record in heaven, the Father,

the Word, and the Holy Ghost,” 1 John v. 7. These three are frequently spoken of in the scripture—to each of them a distinct part in the economy of salvation is ascribed; to each of them the perfections and honours of Deity are attributed. Yet there are not three Gods, but one. Consequently these three are one God. This doctrine may be above our comprehension, but cannot be contrary to our reason, if it be contained in a revelation from God. If it be simply received upon the authority of the revealer, it approves itself to be true, for it is found to be a key to the whole scripture, which renders the general sense and scope everywhere consistent and plain. They who proudly reject it, and yet admit the Bible to be a divine revelation, are involved in difficulties from which all their sagacity and learning cannot free them. In vain they labour by singular interpretations, by the minutiae of criticism, and by an appeal to various readings and ancient versions, which, in a few passages, differ from the copies more generally received—in vain they endeavour by these refinements, to relieve themselves, when pressed by the obvious and natural sense of a thousand texts, which confirm the faith and hope of plain Christians. The gospel is designed for the poor. But the poor and unlearned would be at a great disadvantage, if the scripture could not be rightly understood without the assistance of such learning and such criticism as we often see pressed into the service. But the Holy Spirit graciously leads those who pray for his teaching, into such views of this high subject as are sufficient to comfort their hearts, and to animate their obedience. The faith of those who are taught of God, is exercised in their approaches to him, under two different modifications. Both are scriptural, and therefore both are safe, and witnessed to by his gracious acceptance and blessing.

1. They come to God by Christ. They have access through him, Eph. ii. 18. Unworthy to speak for themselves, they bow their knees in his name, Phil. ii. 10. Christians are sufficiently distinguished and described by saying, They come to God by him, Heb. vii. 25. They come to God, they cannot live without him in the world, as they once did. They are now conscious of wants and desires, which only God can satisfy; but they are conscious likewise that they are sinners, and therefore they durst not approach him, if they had not the invitation of his promise, and an assurance of an Advocate with the Father, 1 John ii. 2.

2. They come to God in Christ. He is the great Temple, in whom all fullness dwells (Col. i. 19; ii. 9): and they are not afraid of idolatry, when they worship and honour the Son even as the father. This distinct application to God, in the person of the Son of his love, perhaps becomes more frequent and familiar as they advance in the knowledge of their Lord and Saviour, 2 Peter iii. 18. They who seek to him for deliverance from sin and misery, at first, I believe, chiefly consider him as the Advocate and High Priest, who, by the virtue of his atonement, and the prevalence of his intercession, is able

to save to the uttermost. But when the apostle distributes Christians, according to their growth in grace, into the state of babes, young men, and fathers (1 John ii. 4), he speaks of a more distinct and appropriate knowledge of him who is from the beginning, as the peculiar privilege and distinguishing attainment of the fathers. He speaks of him who is from the beginning so often, that we can be at no loss to determine whom he intends by the expression. He applies it to him who was in the beginning with God (John i. 1), and whom he and the other apostles had heard, had seen with their eyes, and touched with their hands, 1 John i 1–3. An eminent divine\* points out some special seasons in the Christian life, in which he thinks the peculiar pressures of the soul may obtain the most sensible and immediate relief, by direct application to the Saviour. But there are some believers who find themselves almost continually in one or other of the situations which he marks as occasional. However this may be, I am ready to take it for granted, that they who really and cordially believe the Deity of Christ, do at least at some seasons, and upon some occasions, expressly direct their prayers to him. If precedents be required to warrant this practice, the New Testament will furnish them in abundance.

I shall select but a few. The apostle Paul bowed his knees to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus; but he often prayed to the Lord Jesus. He prayed to him in the temple (Acts xxii. 17–21), and when he obtained that answer, “My grace is sufficient for thee,” 2 Cor. xii. 9. To him the prayer of the apostles and disciples was addressed previous to the lot, which was to determine a successor to Judas, Acts i. 24. And to him Stephen committed his departing spirit (Acts vii. 59), an act of trust and worship of the highest kind, and at the most solemn season. In short, it is a strange inconsistency, if any, who acknowledge his Deity, question the propriety of praying to him. What is it, more or less, than to question the propriety of praying to God?

IV. This solemn worship and praise is referred ultimately to him who sitteth upon the throne—to the great and glorious God, thus known and manifested in, and by, and with the Lamb that was slain.

The mediatorial kingdom of Christ will have a period. He will reign as Mediator, till he has subdued all enemies under his feet, and perfected his whole work. Then his kingdom in this sense will cease; he will deliver it up to the Father, that God may be all in all, 1 Cor. xv. 28. This passage is difficult, that is, the subject is too great for our faculties in their present state of imperfection fully to comprehend; for the difficulties we meet with in scripture are more properly to be ascribed to our ignorance. The Son, as man, is even now subject to the Father; and God is undoubtedly all in all, at present, and from everlasting to everlasting. But his kingdom here is to be taken

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\* Dr Owen, in his *Christologia*.



figuratively for the subjects of his kingdom, his people, whom he received as a trust and a treasure. These he will deliver up, and the form of his administration and government over them will be changed. They will then have no more sins to confess; there will be no more dangers requiring the care and tenderness of a Shepherd, no enemies to be controlled, and the ordinances and means of grace, accommodated to their wants and weakness, while in this world, will be no longer necessary. But Messiah, the Lamb that was slain, will ever be the head and Lord of the creation, the medium of communication of the light and love of God to his people, and God in him, the object of their eternal adoration and praise.

Then the grand, ultimate, final cause of all the manifestations of God will be completely obtained. The glory of the great Creator and Lawgiver, the splendour of all his perfections, will for ever shine, without a veil or cloud, and with a brightness which could not have been known by creatures, had not the entrance of evil given occasion for a display of his wisdom and love, in over-ruling it to the praise of his glorious grace.

Thus, according to the measure of my ability and experience, I have endeavoured to point out to you the meaning and importance of the well-chosen series of scriptural passages which are set to music in the Oratorio of the Messiah. Great is the Lord Messiah, and greatly to be praised! I have attempted to set before you a sketch of what the scripture teaches us concerning his person, undertakings, and success,—the misery of those whom he came to save, the happiness to which he raises them, and the wonderful plan and progress of redeeming love. But who is sufficient for these things? Alas! how small a portion of his ways are we able to trace! But I would be thankful, that the desire of attempting this great subject was put into my heart, and that having obtained help of God, I have been preserved and enabled to finish my design. Imperfect as my execution of it has been, I cannot doubt that the various topics I have been led to insist on are the great truths of God. For what is properly my own, the defects and weaknesses which mix with my best services, I entreat his forgiveness, and request your candour. But I do not hesitate to say, that the substance of what I have advanced deserves and demands your most serious attention.

It is probable, that those of my hearers who admire this Oratorio, and are often present when it is performed, may think me harsh and singular in my opinion, that of all our musical compositions this is the most improper for a public entertainment. But while it continues to be equally acceptable, whether performed in a church or in the theatre, and while the greater part of the performers and of the audience are the same at both places, I can rate it no higher than as one of the many fashionable amusements which mark the character of this age of dissipation. Though the subject be serious and solemn in the highest sense, yea, for that very reason, and though the music is, in a

striking manner, adapted to the subject, yet, if the far greater part of the people who frequent the Oratorio, are evidently unaffected by the Redeemer's love, and uninfluenced by his commands, I am afraid it is no better than a profanation of the name and truths of God, a crucifying the Son of God afresh. You must judge for yourselves. If you think differently from me, you will act accordingly.—Yet permit me to hope and to pray, that the next time you hear the Messiah, God may bring something that you have heard in the course of these sermons, nearly connected with the peace and welfare of your souls, effectually to your remembrance.

I would humbly hope, that some persons, who were strangers to the power and grace of Messiah, when I entered upon this service, are now desirous of seeking him with their whole hearts. Yes, I trust I have not laboured wholly in vain. The gospel is the rod of his strength (Psal. ex. 2), which, when accompanied by the power of his Spirit, produces greater effects than the wonder-working rod of Moses. It causes the blind to see, the deaf to hear, and the dead to live. A faithful minister will account a single instance of success a rich recompense for the labour of a life. May this joy be mine! May the Lord encourage you to go on seeking him I Then he will surely be found of you. An open door is set before you (Rev. iii. 8), and if you are truly willing to enter, none shall be able to shut it.

But may I not fear, that I am still speaking to others, who, to this hour, have no cordial admiring thoughts of the great Saviour? Alas! should you die in your present frame of mind! let me, once more, entreat you to consider what your situation and employment will be, when all his redeemed people, and all his holy angels, shall join in worshipping and praising him, in the great day of his appearance.

Unless you repent, lay down your arms, and submit to his golden sceptre, your doom is already pronounced. Awful are the words of the Lord, by the prophet, and very applicable to your case, if (which may his mercy prevent!) you should die in your sins. "Therefore, thus saith the Lord God, behold my servants shall eat, but ye shall be hungry: behold, my servants shall drink, but ye shall be thirsty: behold my servants shall rejoice, but ye shall be ashamed: behold, my servants shall sing for joy of heart, but ye shall cry for sorrow of heart, and shall howl for vexation of spirit," Isa. lxxv. 13, 14. If the scribes and Pharisees were filled with envy and grief when the children in the temple sung Hosanna to the Son of David (Matth. xxi. 15), what must be their anguish and remorse, their rage and despair, when the whole creation shall join in his praise? If your thoughts of him now are like theirs, tremble at your danger; for unless you repent, your lot must be with them hereafter.