

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!

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 VI.

SALVATION PUBLISHED FROM THE MOUNTAINS.

O Zion, that bringest good tidings, get thee up into the high mountains: O Jerusalem, that bringest good tidings, lift up thy voice with strength, lift it up, be not afraid: say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God!

ISAIAH, xl. 9.

IT would be improper to propose an alteration, though a slight one, in the reading of a text, without bearing my testimony to the great value of our English version, which I believe, in point of simplicity, strength, and fidelity is not likely to be excelled by a new translation of the whole scriptures. But there are undoubtedly particular passages where a small change in the expression might render the sense clearer, and be equally answerable to the original Hebrew or Greek. The address of this verse as it stands in the Messiah is, “O thou that tellest good tidings,” &c. as the Bishop of London has lately translated it. Zion and Jerusalem are considered by the prophet, not as bringing, but as receiving good tidings; and the publisher of these good tidings is written with a feminine construction. The sense may be thus expressed, “Let her that bringeth good tidings to Jerusalem and Zion, get up into the high mountains and lift up her voice.” But the apostrophe is more animated. That it was the custom in Israel for the women to publish and celebrate good news with songs and instruments is well known. We have an early instance in the book of Exodus. When the Lord had delivered them from the power of Pharaoh, and they saw their enemies, who had so lately threatened them, dead upon the sea shore, Miriam, the sister of Aaron, took a timbrel in her hand, and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances; and Miriam answered them, “Sing ye to the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea,” Exod. xv. 20, 21. So afterwards, when David returned from the slaughter of the Philistines, the women came out to meet him and Saul, with tabrets and instruments of music; and they answered one another as they played, “Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands,” 1 Sam. xviii. 6, 7. Thus likewise Deborah, in her sublime song, represents the mother of Sisera (Judges v. 28, 29) and her women singing alternately, from a confident, though vain expectation, that Sisera would return a conqueror. In my text, the prophet, in prospect of Messiah’s appearance, speaks of it as an event suited to excite a general joy. The gospel (as the word imports) is good news, glad tidings indeed! the best news that ever reached the ears, or cheered the heart of man. The women are therefore called upon to proclaim his approach, on the tops of the hills and mountains, from

whence they may be seen and heard to the greatest advantage, for the spreading of the tidings throughout the whole country. Zion is as a besieged city, but let her know that relief is at hand; say unto her, "Behold your God!" The Lord God will come with a strong hand, or against the strong one, and his people shall know him as their shepherd, full of care, kindness, and power.

The promise of Immanuel, God with us, is now to be spread like the morning from the tops of the mountains. The day is breaking, and this passage prepares for the following, "Arise, shine, for thy light is come!" The welcome news is to be dispersed from Jerusalem to Samaria, from Jew to Gentile, from one kingdom to another people, till all the nations and ends of the earth shall see the salvation of God, Psal. xcvi. 3.

The cause of this exultation arises from the character of Messiah, compared with the design of his appearance, and this is answerable to the condition in which he finds mankind.

The deplorable state of fallen man by nature is largely described both in the Old Testament and in the New. It may suffice to take notice of three principal features which characterise our whole species, and apply to every individual of the race of Adam, until the grace of God, which bringeth salvation, affords relief. These are guilt, alienation of heart, and misery.

1. Guilt.—All have sinned. We are the creatures of God. He made us, and he preserves us. Our life, faculties, and comforts are all from him. He is therefore our great Lord, our supreme benefactor. Of course we belong to him. His we are, and not our own. It follows, that dependence, gratitude, submission, and obedience are incumbent on us, as they must be upon all intelligent creatures, from the very nature of things. The relation which subsists between an infinitely wise and good Creator and his creatures, if capable of knowing him, necessarily implies this subjection; and the obligation is indissoluble. But we have evidently broken this law of our creation. We have violated the order of God's government. We have implicitly, if not formally, renounced our allegiance, disowned his right over us, and set up for ourselves. A dependent creature affecting independence; a worm presuming upon its own power, making itself its own end; a rebel against the divine government, boasting of morality and goodness, and trusting to his own conduct to recommend him to the favour of his Maker; a being formed for immortality, proposing his whole happiness in things which he feels to be unsatisfying, knows to be uncertain, and from which he is conscious he must, in a few years at most, be finally removed. These are solecisms which strongly prove the depravity, degeneracy, and demerit of man. It is possible that, had we been wholly left to ourselves, we should never have been aware, while in this world, of the just and inevitable consequences of our rebellion. Having lost all right thoughts of God, and conceiving of him, as if he were altogether like ourselves, we might have felt neither fear nor remorse. But there is a revelation, by which we are

informed of his determined purpose to avenge disobedience, and to vindicate the honour of his government; and we are assured that he is not an indifferent spectator of our opposition to his established order. His justice and truth are engaged to punish transgressors, and our obnoxiousness to punishment is what we mean by guilt. If the scripture be true there is no way of escape, unless he himself be pleased to appoint one. This he has done, and the declaration of this appointment is a part of the good tidings contained in my text. Proclaim it from the tops of the mountains that there is forgiveness with him. Say unto Jerusalem, Behold Messiah! Behold your God! He comes to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself, Heb. ix. 26. He can do it, for he is God; and he will do it, for he has taken on him our nature for this very purpose, 2 Cor. v. 21. Behold the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sin of the world!

2. Alienation of mind.—Not only is it true that we have sinned against the Lord, but a principle of aversion from him is deeply rooted in our hearts. Therefore one part of our natural character is, haters of God, Rom. i. 30. This is thought a hard saying. Many who will admit that their conduct is blameable, and that they are not altogether what they ought to be, will by no means plead guilty to this charge. If they fall short of their duty, and in some instances transgress his commandments, they say it is their infirmity, they are sorry, and hope to do better some time or other. However, they are willing to think that their hearts are tolerably good, they mean well, and are shocked at the idea of hating God. They rather presume that they love him, though they are not so careful to please him as they should be. I do not assert that we hate God under that character which our vain imaginations form of him. If we can persuade ourselves, in direct contradiction to the testimony of scripture, that he is not strict to mark what is amiss; that he will dispense with the strictness of his law; that he will surely have mercy upon us, because we are not openly abandoned and profligate in our conduct; that he will accept of lip-worship, in which the heart has no concern, reward us for actions in which we had no intention of pleasing him, permit us to love and serve the world with all our mind, and soul, and strength, while we live, and make us happy in another world, when we can live in this no longer. If we form such an image of God, it is too much like our own to provoke our enmity, for it is destitute of holiness, justice, and truth. But the carnal mind is and must be enmity against God (Rom. viii. 7), according to the character he has given of himself in his word. We have an inbred dislike to all his moral attributes, to the rule of his government, and to the methods of his grace. We cannot, that is, we will not propose either his glory as our chief end, or his favour as our chief good. The proof is plain. The ends which we actually pursue, and the supposed good which we deliberately prefer, are utterly inconsistent with the plan which he has prescribed for us. His ways, though truly pleasant in themselves, appear unpleasing to us, and we think we can plan better for ourselves. We do not like to

retain God in our thoughts (Rom. i. 28), which is a sure sign of enmity. Nay, this enmity is so strong in us naturally that we cannot bear others should think more highly of God than we do, or be more attached to him than we are. This was the ground of the first murder. Abel loved God, and God was pleased to testify his approbation of Abel, and therefore Cain killed him, 1 John iii. 12. This has been the great cause of the opposition and ill-treatment which the servants of God have met with from the men of the world in all succeeding ages; a cause which still subsists, and will continue to operate upon posterity yet unborn. Can we show a stronger mark of dislike to a person than by hating all who profess a regard to him, and when that is the only cause of our resentment? Such is the prevailing enmity against God. For how often do we see, that, when his grace enables a sinner to forsake the spirit and practice of the world, his former friends are immediately offended, and perhaps those of his own household become his inveterate enemies?

But, O thou that bringest good tidings, lift up thy voice! Say to poor sinners, Behold your God! He comes to take this enmity away! The cross of Christ subdues it, when every other expedient has been found ineffectual. The heart, too hard to be softened by a profusion of temporal benefits, and too stout to be subdued by afflictions, is melted by the dying love of a Saviour, and by that discovery of the divine perfections which is exhibited in redemption. We have a striking instance of this effect, in the case of Saul of Tarsus, Acts ix. 1–20. His misguided conscience, under the influence of prejudice, persuaded him, that he ought to do many things against Jesus of Nazareth. Instigated with rage, and not satisfied with the injuries he had offered to his disciples at Jerusalem, but still breathing out threatenings and slaughter, he journeyed towards Damascus, designing to harass and persecute them wherever he found them. In this temper of mind, he was suddenly arrested on his way, by a light, and a voice from heaven. He fell to the ground. But Jesus, whom he had ignorantly persecuted, instructed him in the knowledge of his person and love, pardoned his sin, and commissioned him to preach the faith he had laboured to destroy. How sudden, how evident, how abiding was the change which then took place in his heart and in his conduct! From that moment he accounted “all things loss and dung, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus his Lord,” Phil. iii. 8. Unwearied by labour and hardship, undismayed by opposition and danger, he spent the remainder of his life in the cause of his Master; and like Cæsar, accounting nothing done while anything remained to do, his active and intrepid spirit was continually meditating new services, Acts xix. 21. And, though he knew that bonds and afflictions awaited him in every place, he was always upon the wing to publish to his fellow-sinners the grace and glory of him whom he had so long opposed, only because he knew him not. And although the circumstances attending the apos-

tle's case were extraordinary, the case itself, as to the substance, is not singular. I trust many persons in this assembly have been the subjects of a like change. The doctrine which Paul preached, has enlightened your understandings, has inspired you with hopes and desires to which you were once strangers, and given a new direction to the conduct and aims of your life. You were once afar off from God, but you are now brought nigh by the blood of Christ. You once lived to yourselves, but now you feel that you are no longer your own, and have devoted yourselves to him who died to save you from the present evil world, and from the wrath to come.

3. Misery.—If we are guilty in the sight of God, and alienated from him in our hearts, we must be miserable. Guilt entails a burden, and a foreboding of evil upon the conscience. And our alienation from the fountain of living waters (Jer. ii. 13) compels us (for we are insufficient to our own happiness) to seek our resources from broken cisterns, and pits which will hold no water. Farther, sin has filled the world with woe. The whole creation travails and groans; and natural evil is inseparable from moral, as the shadow from the body. Though the earth be filled with tokens of the goodness, patience, and forbearance of God, it likewise abounds with marks of his displeasure. I think we have sufficient reason to attribute earthquakes, hurricanes, famine, and pestilence, to sin as their original and proper cause. We can hardly conceive, that if mankind had continued in that happy state of love and obedience to God, in which our first parents were created, they would have been exposed to such calamities. When God at the beginning, surveyed everything that he had made, "behold it was very good," Gen. i. 31. All was beauty and harmony, till sin introduced disorder and a curse. But far worse than what we suffer immediately from the providence of God, are the evils which we bring upon ourselves and upon each other. The dreadful consequences of war, rapine, discord, hatred, ambition, avarice, and intemperance, furnish part of every page in the mournful history of human life, and are felt in every nation, city, village, and family. Want, cares, and diseases, prey upon individuals. Disappointment, dissatisfaction, vanity, and vexation of spirit, are experienced by persons of every rank, and in every stage of human life. How much more desirable would it be, were it not for the hope of the gospel, to share with the brute creation, than to bear the name of man in his fallen state! The brutes have few wants; their propensities and the means of gratifying them, are suited to their natures, adapted to their powers, and conducive to the preservation of the species. They neither regret the past, nor tremble under apprehensions of the future. It is far otherwise with man. His boasted pleasures end with a sting, and often he cannot bear his own reflections on them. He suffers almost as much from imaginary fears, as from real afflictions. The more he possesses, the more are the sources of his anxieties multiplied and enlarged. And after having been long wearied with a train of mortifications, pains, and

inquietudes, he must at last, however unwilling, yield to that stroke of death, the thought of which, when strongly realized to his mind, was always sufficient to embitter the happiest hours of his life.

But publish the glad tidings from the mountains, and let the joyful sound diffuse over the plain.—Your God cometh! Messiah establishes a new, a spiritual kingdom upon the earth, and his happy subjects are freed from the misery in which they were involved. They commit all their concerns to him, and he manages for them. Their fears are removed, their irregular desires corrected, and all that is really good for them, is secured to them by his love, promise, and care. Afflictions still await them, but they are sanctified. To them the nature of affliction is changed. They are appointments graciously designed for their advantage. Their crosses, no less than their comforts, are tokens of God's favour (Heb. xii. 6, 7); they have them only because their present situation requires discipline, and they could not be so well without them. They are assured of support under them (2 Cor. xii. 9), and a final deliverance out of them all: for there is a happy hour approaching, when all their troubles shall cease, and they shall enter upon a state of eternal, uninterrupted, inconceivable joy, (Isa. lx. 20; Rev. xxi. 4.)

For these purposes the Son of God was revealed. The prophets saw his day afar off, and proclaimed his approach.—Thy God cometh! Though truly a man, he is truly God. Neither man nor angel could remove our guilt, communicate to us a spiritual life, relieve us from misery, and give us stable peace in a changing world, hope and triumph in death, and eternal life beyond it. But his wisdom and power are infinite, and his purpose unchangeable. He would not have invited the weary and heavy laden to come to him, if he was not able and determined to give them rest. None that seek him are disappointed, or sent empty away: a sufficient proof that his compassion, his bounty, his fulness are properly divine. Therefore the apostle, speaking of the riches of his grace, uses the epithet, "unsearchable," Ephes. iii. 8. His treasury of life and salvation is inexhaustible, like a boundless, shoreless, bottomless ocean; like the sun, which having cheered the successive generations of mankind with his beams, still shines with undiminished lustre, is still the fountain of light, and has always a sufficiency to fill innumerable millions of eyes in the same instant.

Does the language of my text cause joy to spring up in your hearts? or is it nothing to you? If you heard the Messiah you were, perhaps, affected by the music of the passage; how much are you to be pitied, if you were hitherto unaffected by the sentiment! Yet once more, hear,—Thy God cometh! He did come in the fulness of time, according to the prophecy, and the word of prophecy assures us that he will come again. "Behold he cometh in the clouds: and every eye shall see him, and they also that pierced him, Rev. i. 7.—Prepare to meet thy God, Amos, iv. 12.