

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, CARDI-
PHONIA, 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!
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 VII

THE MORNING LIGHT.

Arise, shine, for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee. For, behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people; but the Lord shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee: and the Gentiles shall come to thy light and kings to the brightness of thy rising. ISAIAH, lx. 1–3.

ONE strong internal proof that the Bible is a divine revelation, may be drawn from the subject-matter, and particularly that it is the book, and the only book, which teaches us to think highly and honourably of God. I say, the only book, for there is no right knowledge of God where the Bible is not known. What is the Jupiter of Homer, compared with the God of Israel, as he is represented to us by his servants the prophets? And if the heathen philosophers, in some detached passages, have sentiments not altogether unworthy of him, history honestly tells us how they obtained them. They travelled, and they are generally said to have travelled into Phoenicia or Egypt, to the confines of that people who alone thought rightly of God, because to them only he had made himself known by a revelation. If such a description as we have in the fortieth chapter of Isaiah, from the twelfth verse to the end, had been known only of late years, recovered, we will suppose, out of the ruins of Herculaneum, there is little doubt but it would have engaged the attention and admiration of the learned world. For the most admired writings of antiquity, upon a candid comparison, are unspeakably inferior to it. The inimitable sublimity of the prophets is natural, just, and unforced, and flows from the grandeur of their subjects, because they were influenced by him who alone can speak worthily of himself.

A song so vast, a theme so high,
Calls for the voice that tuned the sky.

With them, the whole compass of the creation is but as dust upon the balance, in respect of the great Creator. His purpose is fate, his voice is power. He speaks and it is done. Thus he called the universe into being; and thus, as the great Lord and proprietor of all, he still maintains and governs it, directing the frame of nature, and every particular event and contingency, to the promoting of his own glory, the last and highest end of all his works.

The principal of these is, the exhibition of his perfections in the per-

son of his Son. The prophecies we have already considered announce this event, with a gradual increase of clearness and precision, as the period of accomplishment is supposed to draw nigh. We lately heard the command to proclaim his approach from the hills and the tops of the mountains. Here the prophet begins to contemplate the effects of his actual appearance. The earth is considered as involved in a state of gross darkness, but the sun, the Sun of righteousness is about to arise, and to fill it by his beams, with light, life, and glory. These effects, indeed, will not extend to all, for many will love darkness rather than light. But he will not shine in vain. There will be a people prepared to receive him, and to rejoice in his light. They shall arise as from sleep, as from the grave, and his light reflected upon them shall cause them to shine likewise. Darkness shall still cover those who reject him; yea, their darkness will be increased. But the glory of the Lord shall be seen upon all who believe, and their numbers, from age to age, shall be enlarged. Nations shall come to him, and kings shall be subservient to the spreading of his kingdom. Such is the scope of the passage before us. I shall briefly consider a few of the leading particulars contained in it.

I. As the sun is the source of light to the natural world, so is Messiah to the moral and spiritual world. Light, and its opposite, darkness, are figuratively used in scripture. The latter is applied to a state of ignorance, sin, and misery, as in the following texts. "He that walketh in darkness, knoweth not whither he goeth," John xii. 35. "If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth," 1 John i. 6. "Cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth," Matth. xxv. 30. The former, therefore, signifies true knowledge, holiness, and happiness. "Ye were sometime darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of the light," Eph. v. 8. "When I sit in darkness, the Lord shall be a light unto me," Micah vii. 8. "Light is sown for the righteous, and joy for the upright in heart," Psal. xcvi. 11. I select but one instance of each kind; an attentive reader of the scriptures will meet with many expressions of a like import.

But there is likewise an intermediate state; light advancing from the early dawn to the perfect day. This twilight, no less than day-light is from the sun. Such was the state of the Old Testament church. Messiah was the source of their knowledge, hope, and joy; but he was (if I may so speak) below the horizon as to them. Though believers under that dispensation were a people saved of the Lord, they were trained up under types and shadows, were influenced by a spirit of comparative bondage and distance, like children under age, and rather longed for than actually possessed the gracious liberty which the children of God enjoy under the

gospel. But the sun arose, and the shadows vanished, when the Son of God incarnate dwelt and conversed with men, honoured his temple with his personal presence, and superseded all the Levitical sacrifices, by the one offering of himself upon the cross. "The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ."

But more especially we date the beginning of his visible kingdom from the day of Pentecost, which followed his ascension. Then he signally bestowed the gifts which, as mediator, he had received for men, and, by the power of his Holy Spirit, authorized and qualified his servants to go forth and preach salvation in his name. Then the partition-wall between Jew and Gentile was taken away, and his righteousness was openly shown in the sight of the Heathen. Abraham, Moses, Elijah, and other servants of God, had been highly favoured and highly honoured; but we are assured by our Lord himself, that none born of woman had been greater than John his forerunner—and yet he added, "the least in the kingdom of heaven," that is, in the New-Testament or gospel-church, "is greater than he," Math. xi. 11. The apostles were happy in the peculiar privilege of attending on his person, yet he told them, "it is expedient for you that I go away," John xvi. 7. There were still greater privileges depending upon the influence of the promised Comforter, who was to abide with the church for ever. By the power of his Holy Spirit, the Lord is now present with all his ministers and people in every place, whether retired in secret from the view of men, or assembled together in his name (Matth. vi. 6, xviii. 20, xxviii. 20); and though the great events upon which their hopes are founded, his life, passion, death, resurrection, and ascension took place long ago, he so realizes the declaration of them in his word to their hearts, that they are no less assured of what they read than the apostles, who saw him with their own eyes. Thus the gospel-state is a dispensation of light. The Sun is risen with life and healing in his beams, and they who have the eyes of their understanding opened, enjoy a bright and marvellous day. They see, admire, adore, rejoice, and love.

II. The subjects of Messiah's kingdom, the living members of his church, are so irradiated by him that they shine likewise, as the moon shines, but with a borrowed light derived from the sun. Beholding, in this glass, the glory of the Lord, they are changed into the same image from glory to glory (2 Cor. iii. 18), according to the measure and growth of their faith. Two points may be observed under this head.

1. The fact that they do thus shine. Though they were once darkness, they are now light, Ephesians, v. 8. A dark, ignorant, wicked, selfish Christian is a contradiction in terms. There may be such, there are too many such, amongst those who make a profession of the name of Christ;

but they who truly know him walk in the light, as he is in the light. They have knowledge, a good understanding, Psal. cxi. 10. Perhaps the greater part of real Christians have little acquaintance with the literature and science of the world: their moral capacities may be weak, and not improved by education; they may be in the esteem of men, as they are in their own, but babes; yet they know more than the wisest philosophers who are destitute of the grace of God. They know themselves, they know the Lord, they know the evil of sin, and the way of salvation; what their proper happiness consists in, and how it is to be obtained. They have learned to endure affliction, to forgive injuries, and to overcome evil with good. They have attained a just sense of the vanity of the world and the importance of eternity. They are instructed to be contented and useful in their stations, to discharge their duties in relative life with propriety, and to meet death with comfort. In all these, many who have dazzling talents, and are celebrated for abilities and endowments, are miserably at a loss. True believers are conformed to the spirit and temper of their Saviour, and therefore are different and distinguished from the world around them. And they have, at least, the beginnings of true peace and solid happiness, in communion with him whom they serve.

2. The cause.—They shine wholly by his light. If their own words may be taken, the proof of this is easy. They are free to confess that they are wise only by his wisdom, strong by his power working in them, and that without him they have not sufficiency to think a good thought, 2 Cor. iii. 5. Experience has taught them that they cannot stand unless he upholds them, nor watch unless he watcheth with them, nor be safe or happy a single day without fresh communications from him. But this their experience and acknowledgment is the express and current doctrine of scripture. There is a real, though mystical union between Christ and his people. He is the vine (John xv. 1), they the branches: he is their head, they the members of his body. They dwell in him by faith, he dwells in them by his Spirit. He is their root and their life; all their springs are in him, and it is out of his fulness that they receive, John i. 16. Therefore the apostle says, “I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me” (Gal. ii. 20); “I can do all things through Christ strengthening me,” 2 Cor. xii. 9. And our Lord himself, who comforted Paul with that promise, “My grace is sufficient for thee,” apprised all his followers of their entire dependence upon him, by saying, “Without me ye can do nothing,” John xv. 5. The language of the Old Testament is to the same purport. “They looked unto him and were enlightened,” Psal. xxxiv. 5. “In the Lord Jehovah I have righteousness and strength,” Isaiah xlv. 24. “He giveth power to the faint, and to them that have no might he increaseth strength,” Isaiah xl. 29. Thus things are constituted and conducted, that no flesh should glory in

his presence, but that he who glorieth may glory in the Lord, 1 Cor. i, 29–31.

III. They who wilfully refuse and turn from this light, do thereby involve themselves in double darkness, and become more infatuated and wicked than those to whom the light has not been proposed. Their evils, likewise, are more aggravated than they would have been if the light had not visited them. Thus our Lord Messiah speaks of the Jews, “If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin; but now they have no cloak for their sin,” John xv. 22. And again, “For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see, and they which see might be made blind,” John ix. 39. He came to make the ignorant wise unto salvation; but they who, from a proud conceit of their own wisdom and sufficiency, disdain his instruction, being left to themselves, give abundant evidence that the light they boast of is but gross and palpable darkness. The grossest errors, the greatest obduracy of heart, the most extreme profaneness of spirit, and the most abominable wickedness in practice, may be expected, and will certainly be found where the gospel is despised.

It is evident, that the morality which is so highly admired by the Christian world, and set in opposition to the gospel of Christ, is much leaner and more scanty than the morality of the Heathens. I speak of the idea only; for neither have the Heathens of old, nor of the present day, acted up to their own rules. But I do not hesitate to affirm, that none of our modern moralists who have disowned the gospel revelation, have given us a system of morality equal to that of Tully the Pagan. Many of the Heathens acknowledged the desirableness and necessity of revelation; though infidels, born in a Christian land, think it a high mark of their wisdom to despise it; and avowed atheists, that is, men who deny either the being or the providence of God, or the obligations mankind are under to obey him, are seldom to be met with but in countries where the Bible is known. The heart must have obstinately and repeatedly resisted light and conviction, before it can ordinarily proceed to these dreadful lengths. But while the blind stumble in the noon of day, Messiah’s people shall walk in confidence and peace (Psal. lxxxix. 15, 16.), and shine as lights in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, Phil. ii. 15.

IV. The third verse of this chapter foretells, and therefore secures, the conversion of the Gentiles or Heathens. The times and the seasons are in the disposal of God, but the scriptures must be fulfilled. Much was done in the first age of Christianity. A single instrument, the apostle Paul, as he himself informs us, preached the faith, which he formerly laboured to destroy, “from Jerusalem round about to Ulyricum” (Rom. xv. 19.), and probably much farther afterwards. And the Lord, who appointed him to

this service, accompanied his message with his own power; so that he had signal success, in turning men from darkness to light, and from the worship of dumb idols, to serve the living and true God; and in planting the gospel, and gathering churches in every province. The gospel found an early reception at Rome, which facilitated its spread into the different parts of the Roman empire. And we have reason to believe it was introduced into our island in a few years after our Lord's ascension. And though what was called the conversion of heathen nations in some following ages, went little farther than to prevail on them to assume the name of Christians, and left them considered as nations, as destitute of the spirit and blessings of Christianity as it found them; yet I cannot doubt, that wherever the New Testament, and the sufferings of Messiah, were known, some individuals at least experienced a real and saving change. And we are warranted to hope for still greater things; for a time when the gross darkness, which as yet covers a great part of the world, shall be dispelled; and the Redeemer's kingdom, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, as a stone cut out without hands, shall become a great mountain, and fill the whole earth, Dan. ii. 35. But this pleasing subject will come more directly under our consideration hereafter.

V. The call in my text may be taken in a general sense, like that of the apostle, "Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light," Eph. v. 14. Natural light requires eyes to perceive it. It would be absurd to point out the beauties of an extensive prospect to a blind man. To him the face of nature presents only a universal blank. But the light of the gospel not only discovers the most important objects to those who can see, but has a marvellous efficacy to open the eyes of the blind. It is the appointed instrument of divine power for this purpose. In vain would be the labour and expectation of the husbandman, if God did not afford the rain, and the snow, to water the earth, and the enlivening influences of the sun, to draw forth the tender blade, and to ripen the corn. Equally unsuccessful would the preaching of the gospel prove to sinful men, though in itself it be eminently the truth and wisdom of God, exactly suited to their state, and of the highest importance to their welfare, if he had not promised that his word, where simply and faithfully delivered in dependence upon his blessing, shall not be spoken in vain, but shall certainly accomplish the end for which he has sent it, Is. iv. 10, 11. This promise, together with the experience of its truth in our own case, and our knowledge of its uniform effects in every age and country where the doctrine of the cross has been preached, encourages ministers to persevere in publishing the glad tidings, in defiance of all the opposition and disappointments we meet with. We lament, but cannot wonder, that the gospel is so generally neglected. As a dispensation of grace, it

offends the pride of man, as a dispensation of holiness, it contradicts his desires and passions. His spirit is degraded, his heart is pre-engaged, he loves the present world, and has no more taste or inclination for a life of communion with God here, and such a heaven as the scriptures propose hereafter, than the beasts of the field. But the Lord has said, "I will work, and who shall let it?" Is. xliii. 13. When he is pleased to clothe the word preached with the influences of his Holy Spirit, and to apply it to the conscience, it is quick, powerful, penetrating, and irresistible as lightning; it conveys a voice, which the deaf, yea, the dead, must hear: it forces a light upon the mind which cannot be evaded. Then things are seen as they are. The nature and desert of sin is apprehended, and then the gospel is found to be the only balm for a distressed and wounded conscience. Therefore, having the Lord's command and promise, we are not to be discouraged by the carelessness or obstinacy of those who know not what they do. We are aware of the difficulty, yea, the impossibility of succeeding in our endeavour to save the souls of our hearers, if we had only to depend upon our own arguments or earnestness. We are not to reason, but to obey. Our business is to deliver our message, and in our happier moments to water it with our prayers and tears. When we have done this we can do no more. The event must be left with him in whose name we speak. We must not suppress nor disguise what we are commanded to declare; nor wilfully make any additions of our own, to accommodate it to the taste or prejudice of our hearers, 2 Cor. iv. 2. Let those preach smooth things who will venture to answer at the great tribunal, for the souls that have miscarried under their ministry, we dare not. Let those be ashamed of the gospel of Christ (Rom. i. 16.), who feel no obligations to him for his dying love; we cannot, and by the grace of God, we will not; we will glory in it. God forbid that we should glory in anything else! (Gal. vi. 14.) Like Ezekiel, we are commanded to preach and prophesy to dry bones, and he who sends us can cause the dry bones to live. "O ye dry bones, hear the word of the Lord! Ezek. xxxvii. 4. The word of his salvation is sent to you. The Lord is risen indeed! Arise, shine, for your light is come! In his name we proclaim pardon and peace to all who will seek him. But seek him today, while it is called today; tomorrow is not yours. Seek him now, while he may be found. Harden not your hearts. Tremble, lest a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should finally come short of it, Heb. iv. 1.