

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, DIS-
COURSES 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.

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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.

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 IX.

CHARACTERS AND NAMES OF MESSIAH.

For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called, Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. ISAIAH, ix. 6.

SUCH was the triumphant exultation of the Old Testament church! Their noblest hopes were founded upon the promise of Messiah; their sublimest songs were derived from the prospect of his advent. By faith, which is the substance of things hoped for, they considered the gracious declarations of the faithful unchangeable God as already accomplished though the actual performance respected a period, as yet future and distant; especially as believers, under that dispensation, already felt the influence of the redemption which Messiah was to consummate in the fulness of time. It was the knowledge of his engagement on the behalf of sinners that gave life and significancy to all the institutions of the ceremonial law, which otherwise, though of divine appointment, would have been a heavy and burdensome yoke, Acts xv. 10. Isaiah, therefore, prepares this joyful song for the true servants of God, who lived in his time; and though it was a day of trial and rebuke, they were provided with a sufficient compensation for all their sufferings, in being warranted to say, "Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder," &c.

This ancient song is still new. It has been, and will be taken up from age to age, by the New Testament church, with superior advantage. I trust many of you understand it well, and rejoice in it daily. Men naturally look for something wherein to rejoice and glory. Little reason have the wise to glory in their supposed wisdom (Jer. ix. 23.), or the strong in their fading strength, or the rich in their transitory wealth; but this is a just and unfailing ground of glory to true Christians, that "Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given," &c.

When a sinner is enlightened by the Holy Spirit, to understand the character and offices of Messiah, his ability and willingness to save those who are ready to perish, and the happiness of all who are brought into subjection to his gracious government, and when he begins to feel the cheering effects of faith in his name, then this song becomes his own, and exactly suits the emotions and gratitude of his heart. But many persons will despise and pity him as a weak enthusiast. And yet, perhaps, they do not think so unfavourably of the rapture of Archimedes, of whom it is related, that having suddenly discovered the solution of a difficult problem while he was bathing, he was so transported with joy, that he forgot his situation, sprung instantly from the bath, and ran through the city, crying, "I have found it, I have found it!" He is not usually charged with madness on this account, though the expression of his joy was certainly over-proportioned to the

cause. The truth is, the world will allow of a vehemence approaching to ecstasy, on almost any occasion, but on that alone, which, above all others, will justify it. A person who would be thought destitute of taste, if he was unaffected by the music to which this passage is set, would, at the same time, hazard his reputation for good sense, with some judges, if he owned himself affected by the plain meaning of the words. Incompetent judges surely! who are pleased to approve of warmth and emotion of spirit, provided the object be trivial, and only condemn it in concerns of the greatest importance! But I trust the character of my auditory is very different, and that the most of you desire to enter into the spirit of this passage, and to have a more lively sense of your own interests in it. May the Lord grant your desire, and accompany our meditations upon it with his power and blessing!

Every clause in this passage might furnish subject for a long discourse; but my plan will only permit me briefly to touch upon the several particulars, which will lead to a recapitulation or summary of what has been already considered more largely concerning the person, offices, and glory of Messiah. We have,

I. His incarnation.—“Unto us a child is born;” in our nature, born of a woman: “Unto us a son is given;” not merely a man-child, but, emphatically, a son, the Son of God. This was the most precious gift, the highest proof and testimony of divine love. The distinction and union of these widely distant natures, which constitute the person of Christ, the God-man, the Mediator, is, in the judgment and language of the apostle, the great mystery of godliness (1 Tim. iii. 16), the pillar and ground of truth. I shall not repeat what I have already offered on this point in the fifth sermon. It is the central truth of revelation, which, like the sun, diffuses a light upon the whole system, no part of which can be rightly understood without it. Thus the Lord of all humbled himself, to appear in the form of a servant for the sake of sinners.

II. His exaltation.—“The government shall be upon his shoulder.” In our nature he suffered, and in the same nature he reigns. When he had overcome the sharpness, the sting of death, he took possession of the kingdom of glory as his own, and opened it to all who believe in him. Now we can say, He who governs in heaven and on earth, and whom all things obey, is the child who was born, the son who was given for us. Some subsequent passages will lead us hereafter to contemplate more directly the glory of the Redeemer’s administration in the kingdoms of providence and grace. At present, therefore, I shall only observe, that the exaltation of the Redeemer infers the dignity and security of the people who are united to him by faith. They have, in one respect, an appropriate honour, in which the angels cannot share. Their best friend, related to them in the same nature, is seated upon the throne of glory. Since he is for them, who can be against them? What may they not expect, when he, who has so loved them as to redeem them with his own blood, has all power committed unto him, both in heaven and on earth! For,

III. The names and characters here ascribed to him, are not only expressive of what he is in himself, but of what he has engaged to be to them.

1. His name shall be called Wonderful.—In another place the word is rendered Secret, Judges xiii. 18. It is true of him in both senses. He is Wonderful in his person, obedience, and sufferings; in his grace, government, and glory. So far as we understand his name, the revelation by which, as by a name, he is made known, we may, we must, believe, admire, and adore. But how limited and defective is our knowledge! His name is Secret. Who can by searching find him out? Job xi. 7. His greatness is incomprehensible, his wisdom untraceable, his fullness inexhaustible, his power infinite. No one knoweth the Son but the Father. But they have a true, though not an adequate knowledge of him, who trust, love, and serve him; and in their view he is Wonderful! The apostle expresses the sentiment of their hearts, when he says, “Yea, doubtless, I count all things but loss and dung for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord.”

2. Another of his names is Counsellor.—The great councils of redemption, in which every concern respecting the glory of God and the salvation of sinners was adjusted, were established with him, and in him, before the foundation of the world. And he is our Counsellor or Advocate with the Father, who pleads our cause, and manages all our affairs in perfect righteousness, and with infallible success; so that no suit can possibly miscarry which he is pleased to undertake. To him likewise we must apply (and we shall not apply in vain) for wisdom and direction, in all that belongs to our duty, and the honour of our profession in the present life. In all our difficulties, dangers, and cares, we must look to him for guidance, and support. This is to be wise unto salvation. His secret is with them that consult him; so that though the world may deem them weak and ignorant as babes (and he teaches them to think thus of themselves), they have a cheering and practical knowledge of many important subjects, which are entirely hidden from those who are wise and prudent in their own eyes.

3. He is the Mighty God.—Though in the office of mediator, he acts in the character of a servant, his perfections and attributes are truly divine. Only the mighty God could make a provision capable of answering the demands of the holy law, which we had transgressed. Only the mighty God could be a suitable Shepherd to lead millions of weak, helpless creatures to glory, through the many difficulties, dangers, and enemies, they are exposed to in their passage. Add to this, the honour, dependence, and obedience, which this great Shepherd claims from his sheep, are absolute and supreme; and they would be guilty of idolatry, if they did not know that he is the mighty God. Though real Christians, who are enlightened and taught by the Holy Spirit, may, and do differ in their views and explanations of some revealed truths, I conceive they must be all agreed in this point. It is not only necessary to be known as the only solid foundation of a

sinner's hope, but it immediately respects the object of divine worship. For if the Redeemer is not possessed of the incommunicable perfections of Deity, the New Testament, in its most obvious and literal signification, would be chargeable, not only with countenancing, but with expressly teaching and enjoining idolatry.

4. Farther, he shall be called the Everlasting Father.—He is not ashamed to call them brethren (Heb. ii. 11), having condescended to assume their human nature. But they are also his children. They are born into his family by the efficacy of his own word and Spirit. From him they derive their spiritual life, being united to him by faith, and receiving from first to last out of his fulness. And he is an everlasting Father. Our fathers according to the flesh are subject to death. But his relation to them subsists unchangeably and therefore they cannot be destitute: and he is thus equally to them all. They live upon the earth, and are removed from it, in a long succession of ages; but he is the Father of the everlasting age, the same yesterday, today, and for ever. All generations shall call him blessed. To him, therefore, the apostle teaches us to apply that sublime passage of the Psalmist: “Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of thy hands. They shall perish, but thou remainest; and they all shall wax old as doth a garment; and as a vesture shalt thou fold them up, and they shall be changed; but thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail,” Psal. cii. 25–27. Heb. i. 10–12.

5. Lastly, he shall be called the Prince of Peace,—whose sovereign prerogative it is, to speak peace to his people (Psal. lxxxv. 8); and there is no peace, deserving the name, but that which he bestows. The scripture expressly declares, that there is no peace to the wicked, Is. lvii. 21. By whatever name we call that thoughtless security and insensibility, in which mankind generally live, while ignorant of God and of themselves, we cannot allow it to be peace. It is the effect of blindness and hardness of heart; it will neither bear reflection nor examination. Can they be said to possess peace, however fatally regardless they may be of futurity, who are at present under the dominion of restless, insatiable, and inconsistent passions and appetites? But the kingdom of Messiah is a kingdom of peace, and in him, his happy subjects enjoy a peace which passeth all understanding (Phil. iv. 7), such as the world can neither give nor take away. He has made peace by the blood of his cross (Col. i. 20), for all that come unto God by him. Until they are in trouble and distress, until they feel the bitterness and fear the consequences of their sins, and see the impossibility of helping themselves, they will not apply to him; but whenever they do seek him, thus weary and heavy-laden, he hears their prayer. Their minds, for a season, are like the sea in a storm, they are distressed with guilt, fears, and temptations; but when he reveals his mighty name and boundless grace to their hearts, and says, Peace be still (Mark iv. 39), then there is a great calm. Being justified by faith, they have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. He gives them peace likewise in

a changing troublesome world, by inviting and enabling them to cast all their cares upon him, and to trust all their concerns in his hands, upon the assurance his word gives them, that he careth for them, and will manage and over-rule every thing for their good. In proportion as their faith realizes his promises, they feel a composure and satisfaction. Knowing that the hairs of their head are numbered, that their afflictions, no less than their comforts, are tokens of his love, that he will give them strength according to their day, that he will be their guide and their guard even unto death; they are not greatly moved by any events, or disturbed by apprehensions, because their hearts are fixed (Psal. cxii. 7), trusting in the Lord.

Farther, he teaches them (what can only be learnt of him) how to seek and maintain peace among men. His love subdues the power of self, and forms them to a spirit of philanthropy and benevolence, which has often such an effect, that they who dislike them for their attachment to him and to his precepts, and would willingly speak evil of them, are ashamed, and put to silence, by their perseverance in well-doing. Thus their peace increases as a river, which runs with a deeper and a broader stream as it approaches the ocean. For their peace is then strongest and most unshaken, when they draw near to death, and are upon the point of resigning their souls into his hands. This is the time, when, if not before, the false peace of the worldling, will give way to terror and dismay. But “mark the perfect man, and behold the upright, for the end of that man is peace,” Psal. xxxvii. 37. It must be allowed, that many of his people, through the power of temptation and remaining unbelief, have, at some seasons, uncomfortable fears concerning a dying hour; but when the time of their dismissal actually arrives, we seldom see them afraid of the summons. There is a strength necessary to support the soul at the approach of death, which is usually withheld till the time of need. But then it is vouchsafed. They who have frequently access to the beds of dying believers, can bear testimony, as eye-witnesses, to the faithfulness of their Lord. How often have we seen them triumphing in the prospect of immortality! as happy, in defiance of pain and sickness, as we can well conceive it possible to be while in the body, and as sure of heaven, as if they were already before the throne.

Such is the character of Messiah! This is the God whom we adore; our almighty, unchangeable Friend! His greatness and goodness, his glory and his grace, when once known, fix the heart, no more to rove, and fill it with admiration, gratitude, and desire. From hence spring a cheerful, unreserved obedience to his commands, and a deliberate voluntary submission to his holy will. For his people do not serve him or yield to him by constraint; at least it is only the pleasing constraint of love, which makes their duty their delight, and their burden and grief is that they can serve him no better.

May we be all thus minded! I dare not hope it is so with us all at present. But this is the day of his grace. For this cause he came into the world, that he

might draw many hearts to himself, John xii. 32. And for this purpose he favours us with his gospel, by which he still says, "Look unto me, and be ye saved," Isaiah, xlv. 22. "Come unto me, and I will give you rest," Matth. xi. 28. To be found among his faithful followers, in the great day when he shall come to judge the world, is the one thing which, above all others, deserves our solicitude.

Hear then his voice today. Perhaps you are apprised of the necessity of a change of heart and life, at some future period, in order to die safely. Such a change is equally necessary if you wish to live comfortably. While you are unfit to die, you can have no true enjoyment of life. It were easy to prove at large that procrastination is highly dangerous. Admitting that, according to your present feelings, you really think yourself determined to seek the Lord at some future time, do you consider how many uncertainties you presume upon? Are you sure that you shall not be suddenly cut off by an unexpected and unthought-of stroke, or visited by a fever which may quickly bring you into a state of delirium or stupefaction, and render your projected repentance impracticable? Yea, it will in any circumstances be impracticable, unless God is pleased to influence your mind by his good Spirit. If you grieve this Spirit now, by resisting his operations, what reason have you to expect that he will then return? Do we not see many instances of what the poet, with great propriety, calls, "A slow sudden death?" How many people, while pining away under the power of some incurable disease, amuse themselves with the hope of recovery to the last gasp; and though their acquaintance read death in their countenance for weeks or months, in defiance of such repeated and long-continued warnings, they die as suddenly, with respect to their own apprehensions, as if killed by lightning. Tremble, lest such be your last end, if you trifle with God, who now calls you by his gospel, to seek him today, while it is called today.

But I would lead you to consider your delay not only as dangerous but as unreasonable. Why are you afraid of being happy too soon? What strange and hard thoughts have you of God, if you suppose you can find more pleasure in living according to your own wills than in obedience to his commands! Can the world give you such peace and satisfaction as I have attempted to describe? Do you think a real persuasion that God is your friend, and that heaven will be your home, will spoil the relish of your earthly enjoyments, or make your lives uncomfortable? What hard thing does the Lord require of you, that you are so unwilling to comply? If we set aside, for a moment, the consideration of a future state and a final judgment, yet even in a temporal view you would be great gainers, if your spirit and your conduct were regulated by the gospel. What heart-breaking troubles, what losses, contests, pains of body, and remorse of conscience, would some of you have avoided, if you had believed and obeyed the word of God! What distresses may your headstrong passions soon plunge you into, if you presume to go on in your sins! For that the way of transgressors is hard, is not only declared in scripture, but proved by the history and observation

of every day. Forsake the foolish, therefore, and live. And while the door of mercy is still open before you, pray to him who is able to bless you indeed, by delivering you from the guilt and from the power of your iniquities; lest, if being often reprov'd (Prov. xxix. 1), and still hardening your hearts, you should suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.