

A
S E R M O N,

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F A S T S E R M O N.



ISAIAH XXVI. 21.

For behold, the Lord cometh out of his place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity : The earth also shall disclose her blood, and shall no more cover her slain.

THE book of Isaiah is a very extensive and ancient prophecy. It was probably given at a number of times, and by the compilers of the Old Testament brought together in one book, without noting the particular times or the exact succession in which the several parts were written by the prophet. The first part of the book, mostly contains a reproof of the sins prevalent in Israel, and a denunciation of heavy judgments on particular nations, and on the earth generally. Some of these prophecies, have had a minute and very wonderful accomplishment. Others, a partial fulfilment, and remain yet in part to be fulfilled ; and the events to which some of them relate are yet altogether future. The fulfilment of many parts, in a manner so exact, and so contrary to all preceding human expectations, is surprising to the considerate reader ; and we do not need any better proof, that the prophet spoke by an inspiration from the Omniscient and Almighty God, who

governs the world, and that therefore, in due time, the whole will be accomplished.

Several names of places and people, against whom much is denounced in this prophecy, we know to be typical names ; such as Egypt, Babylon, Edom and others. The writings of one prophet often explain another. We know that by these names, the later prophets, especially St. John in the apocalypse, meant the Roman powers, both Pagan, and Antichristian, and the nations now subsisting, who sprung up in a distinct state, on the dissolution of imperial Rome. Many parts of Isaiah's denunciations, were literally fulfilled in the destruction of ancient Edom, Egypt and Babylon. Other parts, delivered under these typical names, are either at this time fulfilling, or remain in future to be accomplished.

Further, the prophet Isaiah in a great number of places, denounces a state of misery, beyond whatever had been, to go thro the whole world. Since his day, to the present, there hath been nothing general enough to answer the prediction. St. John, also in his revelation predicts the same. This general convulsion of mankind, which by the prophetic description is to go thro the earth, and to be attended by distress of nations, and public calamities, exceeding what had been at any time before ; is by the promises of God's word to be followed by a state of universal peace, called the glorious kingdom of Christ, when men shall learn war no more, religion be felt and practised in its purity, with all that civil and religious order, which naturally springs from the heart's being made right, by an effusion of the spirit of God.

This same time of a general distress of nations, is also foretold by Christ himself, and several of his apostles ; and they point out the period to be known when it comes, by a number of moral signs. That there shall be little faith in the earth—men shall be in a state of deep security concerning their own salva-

tion and another world—the truth of the scriptures will be much called in question—and multitudes will say where is the promise of his coming, for since the Fathers fell a sleep all things remain as they were. This distress and convulsion of nations, is doubtless to be effected by men themselves, as instruments in the hand of a holy and avenging God. They will punish one another. The divine threatenings of punishment on mankind, will not be fulfilled by the interference of any miraculous agent; for all the laws of nature, and men themselves with their passions and wrath, are as much under the control of God himself, as a miraculous agent could be if he were raised up. Men may destroy one another, but it is God who gives them up to do it. They are the sword; his is the hand. Actuated by their own motives and passions, they fulfil in the most striking manner, the very revealed word of God, which they deride as the greatest folly and delusion. Their eyes are so shut they do not see their own picture drawn, and the works of their hands punish their own infidel brethren. Our text expressly speaks of this time of general distress, which is predicted by many other of the prophets, in many other places. *For behold, the Lord cometh out of his place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity: The earth also shall disclose her blood, and shall no more cover her slain.*

In farther discoursing, I shall speak to the following points.

I. Whether we do not at this day, in a very remarkable manner, see the fulfilment of this prophecy commencing.

II. Make some remarks upon the question; How far this nation will probably share in the evil?

III. Describe the means of preservation to be used.

In attending to these points, I shall endeavor strictly to hold myself in the place of a minister of

the word of Christ, leaving political questions with those, to whom God and the people have committed them.

We first inquire, Whether we do not at this day, in a very remarkable manner see the fulfilment of this prophecy commencing.

Though it was the design of God, that most of the prophecies in his word, should remain in a great measure sealed, until the time of fulfilment, whereby those who have gone before divine providence, have fallen into many errors in describing the particular events of futurity ; we may still suppose that the beginning fulfilment, will be attended with such evident signs as may teach those considerate persons who faithfully examine the word of God that the prediction is fulfilling. Christ blamed the Jews of his day for not discerning the signs of the times, and attending to the general indications of his providence and word, that they might thereby be prepared to meet him in his dispensations—to discover his displeasure and repent. It has already been observed, we must expect the judgments of God on the people of the earth, will be principally executed by their own hands.

To determine, whether we do at this day see the fulfilment of those prophecies commencing, we will attend, first, to the natural ; and secondly, to the moral signs of the times.—It is the providence of God which unfolds the times that are spoken of in his word.

Do not natural events predict this to be the case ? What is the present state of those nations and countries, which have for many ages been the most influential in the world ; which have had the greatest advantages put into their hands by the providence and grace of God ; and doubtless have most misimproved divine goodness ? Engaged in a war more bloody, more fiercely conducted, more subversive of old institutions, than hath been known in mod-

ern times. A war that seems to cast out the humanity of nature, to chill the blood of natural affection, and confound private right in general hostility.—A war where every blow is pointed by the enthusiasm of passion, and men do strange things, because it is determined by a holy God that strange things shall be done. The world is already embroiled—the passion and obstinacy of men are arisen to a higher pitch than hath been known since the days of civilization—opposing parties have chosen principles which can never coalesce—the cause of contention is in its nature a general one, and must affect all nations. The modern principles of Europe are of such a nature, and they will not be prevented, as must go thro’ all the absolute monarchies of the world. All parties see this which makes them contend with such obstinacy. This is the actual state of things. And can this commotion, and consequently this misery of nations end here? I think it cannot. It cannot without a miracle. There are the same materials to burn thro’ the whole old world, and it will spread from building to building until the whole assumes a new form.

There is a natural preparation for this. The balance of power as it was called, which held Europe together is broken, and can never be formed anew on old principles. The old states loaded with an enormous debt, which will tempt the distressed orders of men to join in revolution, the irresistible dissolver of public faith.—The vast Ottoman empire trembles under the weight of age, luxury, and oppression. Its dissolution will bring a hundred new tribes of men, all seeking their own interests, into the political and martial events of the age. The Russian empire of the north has spread itself thro an extent, which must be the means of its own dissolution. God has permitted this for the civilization of many savage tribes, and when civilized they will resume their own rights.—The southern

monarchies of Asia are already humbled and half conquered by the European establishments on their coasts. These establishments will soon become independent nations after the example of our own country, which must give a new political form and weight to that part of the globe. The interior of Africa continues, as it has been, much unknown; but its shores having been under European influence or authority must deeply feel the shock. When the pile of Europe falls, the southern and middle regions of America, which have been under its authority cannot escape revolution. From the earliest history of mankind to the present, there was never such a natural preparation, as at the present, for change—for revolution—and consequently, for the dreadful calamity of war, with all its train of evils. We know that war and revolution of nations, is in the figurative language of prophecy, signified, by thunders, lightnings and earthquakes. The prophet John, in describing the progress and completion of the present period, saith. *And there were voices, and thunders, and lightnings; and there was a great earthquake, such as was not since men were upon the earth, so mighty an earthquake and so great.* How many miseries must such a period bring forth? How many of the judgments of God upon mankind? A prospect which would be insupportable even in thought, were there not a promise, that all this will introduce by the divine management, a day in which the nations will learn war no more.

It is the lusts of men which bring the destruction, it must be the spirit of God to give the peace. This period of misery, will doubtless be also a period of great sin.—It is common for God to use the worst of men to execute his judgments.—The work is too dreadful to be done by christians—by men who are humane, honest and good. Such could not bring their hearts to execute scenes of misery. Infidels, the most unprincipled of men, who neither fear

God nor regard the rights of humanity and justice, will doubtless be the instruments of executing the Lord's threatenings.—I might have added this also, as one circumstance, in the preparation for a universal desolation. There is a generation of men in the old world, risen and rising up, whose hearts are formed by a want of moral principle, and a disbelief of God's word and providence, to embroil the world, and such a generation will not be idle.

Further, it is well known and will not be denied by any, that in most of the old nations, there hath been a long continued system of oppression, wonderfully combined by civil power, and ecclesiastical tyranny. A general increase of knowledge among the people hath fully discovered this.—Multitudes have determined to bear no longer.—Their resentments are carried to an extreme. That which they have resolved in the cool deliberation of reason, they execute in passion.—Though a revolution in church and state, and the doing away all old institutions, may be a wise preparation in the providence of God, for good to the generations yet unborn; it must be a day of distress and blood to the immediate actors.—The moment of revolution must be a time more dreadful, than any thing, that can either go before or follow after it.—It is necessarily a time without law, order and government.—A time in which men of daring spirits and little principle will come forward as actors—in which men will do what is right in their own eyes, and the plagues of the human heart be acted out.—To break down the old systems of civil and religious power must be a dreadful struggle, in which opposing interests will thin the human race.—

Hear another of the prophecies of Isaiah concerning the same period in chap. xxiv. It is in the following solemn words. *Behold the Lord maketh the earth empty, and maketh it waste, and turneth*

it upside down, and scattereth abroad the inhabitants thereof. The Lord hath spoken this word. The earth mourneth, and fadeth away; the haughty people of the earth do languish. The earth also is defiled under the inhabitants thereof; because they have transgressed the laws, changed the ordinance, broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore hath the curse devoured the earth, and they that dwell therein are desolate; therefore the inhabitants of the earth are burned, and few men left. Doubtless this prophetic description is in a degree figurative, but allowing the utmost supposeable latitude for figures, it describes a state of awful affliction, and a multitude of similar descriptions might be collected from the former and latter prophets, which do not appear to be yet fulfilled.

We have noticed a number of the natural signs of the times, and do those of a moral nature indicate any thing better? It cannot be pretended that they do. God is governing the world for the glory of his own great name. The events permitted in his providence will shew him to be a holy God, and that he hath a cup of distress for those who forget him. The Lord sleepeth not, nor are his promises or threatenings repealed. When he bears long, and his mercies do not lead to repentance, but fix the children of men in impiety, his eventual coming will be the more dreadful. To draw a true picture of the sentiments and manners of the age in great portions of the world, which hath been called christian, as it respects piety, godliness, and a reverence for the law and gospel of God; it must be in lines so black, as would look like bitterness in the speaker, and must make the hearer tremble for the world, if he believes it. By multitudes the whole word of God is denied—the divinity of Jesus ridiculed—the sabbath thrown away—the ordinances of the gospel considered as folly—its doctrines utterly disbelieved—the very names of piety, faith, and repentance cast out—the spirit in all his operations and the ne-

cessity of them both in convincing of sin, and for renewing the heart blasphemed—an open avowal that the holy Jehovah is much like his creatures, only more powerful and knowing—weak reason put in the place of infinite wisdom, and even by this word reason, little more is meant, than the wicked appetites and passions of human nature—the special providence of the Lord denied with contempt—and a degree of boldness in sin that mocks at judgment and eternity. This impiety is far spread, it sits on thrones—it fills the high seats of state—and what is more horrible still, it wears the ecclesiastical gown and mitre—pronounces the name of Jesus from lips of infidelity—with one breath it blasphemes, and the next calls the people to pray—and goes from the altar to the cell of impurity.

Is it to be wondered that the Lord of all the earth hath come forth? Could there be a more direct or wise method to introduce a new order of things than to destroy the old? If it must be, is it not best to be done by those who fear not God.—As I before observed, the work is too bloody, too full of misery, for the hearts or hands of christians and good men to perform. Let such as fear God, rejoice that Babylon is falling, but let those who are the instruments remember, that they are her limbs, and will fall with her.—The prophet John hath long since told us it should be thus. *And the ten horns which thou sawest upon the beast, these shall hate the whore, and shall make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh and burn her with fire, for God hath put it into their hearts to fulfil his will, until the words of God shall be fulfilled.* Of this beast with its ten horns, it is expressly said, *they shall go into perdition*, that is, be destroyed; but before they are destroyed, the corrupters of the religion of Christ must be punished by their hands. God is now doing this his own great work.—The general appearance of it is convincing enough, but the par-

particular events by which it will be carried through, are hid in the womb of an inscrutable providence, and he is a rash man who attempts to point them out.

But though God did not design to reveal particular events in the execution of his plan, so as to be exactly foreknown by men, nor the precise year or day of fulfilment ; still the general issue of things, through a progress made dreadful by the wickedness of men, and terminating in a state of universal peace and holiness, by the overruling of God's providence and spirit, is most plainly revealed. The period is arrived, expected by those who have been the most laborious, judicious and prayerful in searching out the times spoken of in holy scripture, for God by the out-pouring of his judgments, to make a notable preparation for the glorious kingdom of Christ on earth.

Slowly as events have unfolded in the opinion of men, still it is doubtless true, that the wheels of his providence have been swiftly rolling, from the time the prophecies were spoken, to carry them into execution. God's plan is a great one. There were a thousand preparations to be made by infinite wisdom, which now seem complete ; and we may expect a rapidity of changes, in this eventful period, beyond what hath been before.

Some who think sanguinely, when they observed revolution commencing, were ready to suppose, an increase of knowledge and civilized habits would bring the world to a state of great refinement and peace, without dreadful scenes of bloodshed. Such have ascribed a power to knowledge and to human reason that is not in them, and have overlooked the selfish heart of man, out of which every evil work proceeds. The heart of man is a fountain which naturally produces poisonous streams. Depraved creatures will torment each other, unless purified by the efficacious grace of God, or restrained by the authorities of civil government.

Some others who have a pious disposition, and firmly believe the scriptures of God, have kept their eyes so fixedly on the promises of a day when the nations shall learn war no more, that they have been ready to hail revolutionary war, as the beginning of millennial peace and good will. They have overlooked the judgments, which we may both naturally and prophetically expect to antecede Christ's universal reign on earth. But whatever men may think best, God will fulfil his own word. Those who are wise will see the signs of the times, and hear the admonition. *Behold I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame—when the kings of the earth and the whole world are gathered to the battle of that great day of God Almighty.*

II. I am to make some remarks upon the question, how far this nation will probably share in the evil? Here curiosity and a regard to our own interest is at once excited. A vain presumption might say many things, but I shall not presume myself a prophet, or pretend to an eye that can look into futurity, to tell how events will particularly happen. Every thing that can be useful to us may be understood without this. There is a way in which we may be assured of escaping in a good degree the bitterness of these plagues; tho we must not expect that the earth will quake, without our feeling something of the shock. There is also a way, which will certainly bring us to participate in the very dregs of the cup. God doth not punish without reason, and he will distinguish, even in the day of his greatest anger, between those who fear him, and those who fear not. There will be a proportion between national sin, and national punishment. Where his name and his laws, have been most and longest forgotten the weight of his judgment will fall. He saith concerning Babylon, so much as she hath exalted herself and lived deliciously, so much he will bring her down,

and that being wonderfully sinful she shall have fearful plagues. In another place the Lord saith, *at what instant I shall speak concerning a nation to pluck up, and to pull down and destroy it, if that nation against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them. And at what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, to plant and to build it, if it do evil in my sight that it obey not my voice, then I will repent of the good wherewith I said, that I would benefit it.* Falling into sin, will endanger those whose prospects have been the fairest; and repentance and reformation will scatter a gathering cloud.

John in his Revelation describing the vials of God's wrath as they were poured on men one after another, in the conclusion of each description adds, *Yet they repented not to give God the glory.* So that by suffering one judgment they were prepared for another.—God permits this to be the case with nations, when their final subversion is intended.—It was thus with Pharaoh and his Egyptians. They did not take warning, but became more hardened, until the finishing judgment of God came upon them. We therefore have a rule given us, both by scripture examples and a scripture promise, to determine how God will deal with us.—We may avoid the overflowing scourge, or we may plunge into its roughest billows.

There are some favourable circumstances, and many unfavorable, which I will suggest. We are a new nation.—The habits of luxury have not gained the deepest footing.—Our public institutions both civil and religious are not wrought into a system of oppression.—Our land was peopled on the principles of civil and religious liberty.—The public order and institutions of religious instruction are in a good degree preserved.—And we have a civil constitution giving the greatest freedom men can enjoy.

—These are distinguishing advantages, but God can blast them if we make ourselves unworthy.

There is also, my hearers, the dark side in our case. There are dark and ominous appearances.—I do not mean the wrath and threatening of any foreign nations whatever, for if we please God and procure him to be on our side, we may bless his providence, and hear human threatenings without emotion.—But the dark omens are to be found at home. In our hearts, in our houses, in our practice, and in a licentious spirit disposed to break down civil and religious order.—In affecting to depend on reason in the things of religion, more than the word of God ; so as to reject all evangelical holiness, faith in Jesus Christ the Son of God, and the ministration of the spirit in the heart.—In substituting anarchy and licentiousness, in the room of rational and just liberty.—In supposing that freedom consists in men's doing what is right in their own eyes ; even though their eyes look through the mist of a wicked ambition and lust.—Here is our real danger, and these are the omens that augur ill to us, and make it appear as though we are preparing for a drought in the cup of the Lord's vengeance.

There is an excellent passage in the proclamation which calls us together this day, which I will repeat.

“ At the same time, to consider and lament the many heinous vices, which are prevalent in our land at this day, particularly, the increase of infidelity and profaneness—the neglect of the gospel of our great Redeemer—the growing indifference to the institution of the Sabbath and public divine worship—with the increasing neglect of gospel ordinances and benefits, and our aggravated ingratitude to God, and unfruitfulness towards him, under the receipt of all the rich mercies of providence and grace, with which he has been pleased to indulge us.”——This is a picture of the times, and it is a true picture ; not drawn by

clergymen, who the irreligious say, are prejudiced by their profession to prophecy evil and fault men needlessly.—Those who can look back but a few years, know there is a great declension in all the respects that are mentioned.

What an alarming catalogue of growing sins we have mentioned! Let us look them over. “Infidelity!”—This is of various degrees, from such as begin to doubt or deny a part of God’s word, to those who deny the whole, and throw human nature back for instruction, to its own weak reason and wicked lusts. An infidel is to be both pitied and feared—pitied as a person lost to his own good, and given up by his judge to the blindness of sin.—He is to be feared as an instrument of vengeance in the hand of the Lord on the land in which he dwelleth.—Those who deny God’s word, his religion, his Son, his laws and ordinances, are fit instruments to do his strange work of judgment. When we see the instruments forming and rising up among us, we should begin to tremble for ourselves and our children. God doth not generally prepare a rod in vain; and if we as a people are so void of wisdom as to nourish the rod, we certainly invite the judgment which it is prepared to execute.

“The neglect of the gospel of our great redeemer” is another sin, and how are this gospel and redeemer neglected? By every sin in our hearts and our houses; by living in unbelief, without God in the world; by restraining prayer before him; by denying the corruption of our own hearts; the sovereignty of his grace; and the work of his holy spirit in convincing sinners and graciously sanctifying the penitent unto eternal life.

“The growing indifference to the institution of the Sabbath, and public divine worship, with the increasing neglect of gospel ordinances and benefits.—The people who neglect God’s Sabbath, break his covenant with them.—God told his an-

cient church “ *Wherefore the children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, to observe the Sabbath throughout their generations, for a perpetual covenant, it is a sign between me and the children of Israel forever.*” Neglecting the Sabbath of God, is the most direct way for families, particular places, and nations, to cut themselves off from the right of calling the Lord their covenant God; and if we can no longer call Jehovah our covenant God, what right have we to expect his preservation, in the day when he cometh forth from his place to punish the inhabitants of the earth.—In places, where the Sabbath of the Lord with its institutions fall into disuse, the spirit of piety must fail; knowledge of sacred subjects will cease; and a sense of eternal things become small in the mind, which is a preparation for vice and divine chastisement.

“ Our ingratitude to God for past favors” is also a dark omen. The Almighty has appeared for this land in the most dark and dangerous days.—By the hands of our fathers, who were a people that feared him more than we do, he has transmitted us rich favors—has prospered in peace, and been with us in the day of alarm.—We may all worship as our consciences dictate. Our civil privileges are unexampled in the history of the world. We annually choose our own rulers. We have had rulers of eminent wisdom and disinterestedness. Being a new people, in a new country, we had no old institutions of oppression to endanger and torment us. The people have had permission and licence to make their own laws, and say which of their own number should execute them. All this has been given by God. If ever a people had motives of an earthly nature to bind them to the true Jehovah, it is this.

Have we made returns of obedience to God? Let conscience answer. Have we not left the God of our fathers? Have we not begun to say, there

was too much spirituality in their notions of religion? They speak too much about our lusts which we love to gratify, and make the sabbath a weariness to us, thro a holy observance? Have we not begun to say, we will have a kind of religion that is more easy, and has less self-denial for corrupt human nature? I shall only propose the questions, and let conscience answer; but before conscience answers, let us see the signs of the times which the providence of God is setting before us. And what do those signs answer? Do they not tell us, if ye will by irreligion make yourselves like to those nations, whom God must punish, ye shall have a part in the punishment? And is not God raising up the instruments of infidelity to do the work? The rod to punish sin, always grows out of sin. Let the tree grow, and we shall find poisonous branches enough to spread death far and near.

Now let us take up the original question. How far are we to share in the plagues of the age? Just so far as we depart from God, his law, his word and gospel, his sabbaths, the spirituality of religion, and vital experimental piety. So far as we undervalue our present blessings and wish for licentiousness, instead of a rational and well restrained liberty, God will give us the licentiousness; and tell us to drink the cup; and when he gives it, his wisdom will name it, one of the vials of his wrath.

But if when tokens of anger appear, we repent before God for our past ingratitude, and pray to him and obey him, we have his promise that he will repent of the evil that he thought to do unto us.— Thus life and death are set before us, and which it shall be depends on ourselves. If, either through capriciousness or a love of sin, we choose the ways of death, that must be our portion; but if we walk in the ways of wisdom and life, there is a gracious God to preserve us. Those who exercise their curiosity further than this, had better spend their time

in repentance, than in inquiry on any other principles. Which leads me,

III. To describe the means of preservation.

And this branch of the subject is in great part anticipated by what has been already said. If this be the day of the Lord's displeasure with men, the means of preservation, are to turn from all our sins and serve him in newness of heart and life. In this we all have a part to act. A general reformation must be effected by the reformation of individuals.

We must take care of our own persons, and repent before God. Let us all submit ourselves to a strict personal examination of our hearts, of our lives, our treatment of God's word, sabbaths and ordinances. Let us inquire of our own consciences, whether we live those lives of piety and prayer, which they dictate to be right?—Whether our conduct be such that we publicly appear to be on the side of God, more than against him? If we wish him to be for us, we must be for him.—If we expect the blessings of the christian covenant, we must on our own part keep it.—But if we fall into that loose way of thinking and acting which is common among the enemies of God, he will number us among them and give us a part of their cup.

We must take care of our families. These little communities form the great public body.—As the religion of the closet gives a favor to the conduct of a christian, through the whole day; so the religion and good government of families gives a favor to the national character for piety.—The parents, who do not indoctrinate their children in christianity, teach them the gospel, and inculcate on them its good life; are certainly bringing them up to be the instruments of God's anger in punishing men.

Let us all reverence the word of God, and our old institutions of piety, which made our fathers blessed in life, and invited down on them the pro-

tection of the Almighty. Whatever new things we find in the present day, we shall never find a better religion, law or gospel than the law and gospel of Jesus Christ. This turning to the Lord must be with sincerity, with the heart as well as with the tongue; for God who judges doth search the heart, and nothing but sincerity can please him.—If we do observe these means of preservation they will be effectual, and the wisdom of God will guide and keep us, so that we need not fear either the devices of the evil, or what men can do unto us. May the Lord keep us that we may serve him in sincerity all the days of our lives. AMEN.