

DISCOURSE,

DELIVERED AT MONTGOMERY,

IN COMMEMORATION OF THE THIRTY-SEVENTH

ANNIVERSARY OF

AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE,

JULY 5th, 1813.



BY THE REV. MOSES FRÆLIGH,

Pastor of the German Reformed Church of Montgomery, Orange County, State of New-York.

MONTGOMERY :

PRINTED BY LUTHER PRATT.

1813.

E 286

.M 76

1813

office

402857
30

ADVERTISEMENT.

The author, never desirous of having his performances issued into the world through the medium of the press, but being warmly solicited by many friends, and being censured by individuals, on account of some of the sentiments expressed in the following discourse, and sincerely believing if said sentiments influenced the mind of every American it would prove a powerful means, for a speedy and honorable termination of the present war, he has been induced to furnish a copy for publication. It is given almost verbatim as delivered in Public.

A DISCOURSE.



ISAIAH ix, 4, 5.

For thou hast broken the yoke of his burden, and the staff of his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, as in the day of Midian.

For every battle of the warrior is with confused noise, and garments rolled in blood, but this shall be with burning, and with fuel of fire.

AS nothing is more valuable in this life, and nothing more conducive to our temporal happiness, than liberty, and nothing more destructive to a people, and more inconsistent with their welfare than slavery, so nothing can alarm a free people more than when their liberties are invaded, and nothing afford them more joy, than when lost liberty is restored to them again, or that which is invaded properly secured. All men are born free, and liberty appears as natural to man, as reason, and unless too far degenerated, a person will equally exert himself to preserve both. With this heavenly jewel, every thing that is near and dear to us is connected, and when this is taken from us, we become truly miserable in every respect. Therefore our fears and joys as a people, will rise and fall according as it stands with our liberty. These observations are confirmed by the words before us, as they stand connected with the preceding.

In a former chapter, the prophet gives a description of Israel's future glory consisting in the illumination, they would receive on the arrival of the Messiah, together with great joy and gladness, on account of that happy event. However, in order to view our context, we need go no farther back than the preceding verse, where God's people are represented as exhibiting the strongest marks of joy and gladness, and surely not without the greatest reason. The blessings conferred on them, afforded powerful motives for such rejoicings, namely, a deliverance from slavery, and servitude. The Lord had *broken the yoke of their burden, the staff of their shoulder, and the rod of their oppressor*. In discoursing from these words, we shall divide them into two general heads.

FIRST, *We shall consider the great deliverance promised; and*

SECONDLY, *A farther illustration by comparing it to a former incident.*

The evangelical prophet, according to his usual custom, here speaks of future blessings in the perfect tense. He is so perfectly assured of the promise, as if it were really accomplished. *Thou hast broken the yoke of his burden, the staff of his shoulder, and the rod of his oppressor*. A most judicious description of slavery indeed. A yoke on his back, a staff or beam on his shoulder, and continually feeling the lash of the oppressor's rod.

1. Some suppose that the prophet must have alluded to a deliverance out of the Babylonian captivity, where they had already groaned for near seventy years; that the Lord would raise up Cyrus, who would grant them permission to return to their native country, and rebuild their temple, and thus break the yoke Nebuchadnezzar laid upon them. This is the opinion of some of the Jewish Rabbies.

2. Others again apply it to Hezekiah's deliverance out of the power of Sennacherib, when an angel of the Lord went forth and slew an hundred and eighty thousand of his army, and thus broke the

yoke which that proud monarch had allotted for Hezekiah and his people. However, we cannot concur with either, as they do not appear to correspond with the prophet's object, for the whole of his prophecy seems to respect the dispensation of the New Testament; and it is evident from this chapter, that he has an eye on the Messiah's kingdom. Still we may view these words in a more extensive point of light, and not confine our attention to any particular period or people. Any nation, delivered from slavery, may with propriety adopt the language of the church in the text—*Thou hast broken the yoke of his burden, the staff of his shoulder, and the rod of his oppressor.* Let us, however, for a moment, confine our attention to the Jewish nation, whom the prophet also principally had in view, and we shall find each of those distinct terms applicable to them.

1. By *the yoke of their burden*, we may with propriety understand the ceremonies of the Jewish church. This was a burdensome yoke indeed, both in regard to the immense cost it was attended with, and the vast pains it required. They were mere nothings in themselves. All their virtue derived from God's will and institution. This yoke would be broken immediately after the Messiah came, for they were nothing but shadows, that must inevitably vanish when the body appears; and they were with propriety styled a yoke. A yoke is an instrument ordained for various purposes. (a) To steer and direct our beasts, according to our proposed end; thus was the yoke of the ceremonies a rule to walk by, to steer and direct them. (b) A yoke is also intended to couple together. In this sense the apostle speaks, 2 Cor. 6. "Be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers." The ceremonies also answered this purpose: they served as a means to join them together, as a peculiar people, and to distinguish them from other nations. (c) A yoke is also a fit instrument to bridle the unruly. Israel, indeed, possessed too much of such a disposition, as appears evident from their

transactions in the wilderness, and in the land of Canaan; and therefore such a yoke might be some benefit to them. (*d*) A yoke is also made to bring the yoked under subjection, so that we may govern them as we think proper. (*e*) A yoke is commonly heavy and burdensome; and so were these ceremonies a burden, says the apostle, that our fathers could not bear. This is, as we apprehend, *the yoke of his burden*. To this is added,

2. *And, the staff of his shoulder*. This, perhaps, refers to the power of the priests and Levites over them, which in its original form was highly commendable, being only a ministering one, but afterwards grossly abused by usurpation and infringing on the liberties of the people. These sit on the seat of Moses, but are shamefully degenerated from the doctrine of Moses, for they teach a doctrine that consists in institutions of men, and by thus imposing on the people, they became to them *a staff in the shoulder*. A similitude, taken from the custom of schoolmasters, who generally keep a rod or staff to lay over the backs or shoulders of their pupils, in case of disobedience. Thus did these cruel taskmasters impose burdens on the necks of the people, which they themselves would not touch with their fingers, as our Saviour himself charged them. But this staff of priestcraft was broken by the arrival of the great high priest, of whom these priests were types.

3. This is succeeded by *the rod of oppression*. This may refer to the Jewish Sanhedren, and the judges who governed the city. This body, considered in its original and primitive form, was far from being a rod of oppression. It was a government God himself had instituted. But now they were of ancient standing, and, like all governments of long duration, they had already aspired after an absolute prerogative, and began to infringe on the liberties of the nation, as plainly appears from the case of Rehoboam, the son of Solomon, who consulted them on the

subject of a petition from the people for a milder government; they advised him to oppress them tenfold more than his father had done, and numerous other instances of their cruelty might be cited.

This rod was to be broken to pieces by the great Messiah, and this we find verified shortly after his death. Nay, it had already before his incarnation received a fatal stab by Herod, who caused the whole counsel to be put to death, and supplied their places by his own immediate dependents, and thus subjected the whole nation to his despotic will. But afterwards, the rod of oppression was entirely destroyed by *Titus*, who demolished their city, burned their temple, and did level it with the ground. However, though this explanation may agree with the genuine sense of these words, and the prophet's object when he uttered them; yet, to take this passage in a general point of view, I suppose would not be repugnant to the spiritual sense of it; for the things then recorded, were written for our instruction. It is a most lively and striking emblem of slavery; for any people whatever, reduced to a state of servitude, may be considered as beasts of burden, with a galling yoke on their necks, a heavy beam on their shoulders, and the driver's rod on their backs. O, unhappy people who are reduced to such a situation! No wonder that men will venture their lives and fortunes in defence of liberty. Who would not imitate an ancient example, and exclaim, I would not be a king unless I could be free? And, on the contrary, happy the people who enjoy this blessing, and happy they who are emancipated from slavery; with justice they tune up the song in the text, *Thou hast broken the yoke of our burden, the staff of our shoulder, and the rod of our oppressor.* God makes use of various means to break and destroy those implements of slavery.

1. By causing every measure, that is concerted to enslave a people, to prove abortive, infatuating their counsels, and converting their wisdom into

foolishness. This was manifest in the counsel of Achitaphel when Absalom aspired to absolute monarchy.

2. By forcing their oppressors, by hard and wonderful judgments, to set them at liberty, as we may see in the deliverance of Israel out of Egyptian bondage. God brought upon the tyrant a series of miseries before he could be prevailed on to let Israel go, till he gave commission to one of his angelic servants, who in one night, slew all the first born in Egypt, not even sparing his successor to the throne; till finally he was compelled to set them free.

3. By moving the tyrant's heart, and disposing him to set them at liberty. By this means were the Jews delivered from the Babylonian captivity. The Lord gave Cyrus a disposition to set them free, and consequently that monarch granted them permission to return and rebuild their temple, though vigorously opposed by several of the governors.

4. By crowning a people's just resistances against tyranny and oppression with success, never is the sword more justly drawn, than in defence of liberty, and unless national sins justify God in delivering over to slavery, never fails of success. History, either sacred or profane, will not afford many instances in which God has suffered a people to fall in a struggle for liberty, unless for some notorious sins, for which he publicly declared that he permitted them to be enslaved. But generally they have succeeded: witness Britain, Holland, Switzerland, America, and others. In this manner hath God often times broken the *yoke, the staff, and the rod of oppression*.

This is further explained by comparing it to a former incident; namely, the defeat of the Midianites. *As in the days of Midian*. It must be admitted by every person, who has any knowledge of the Hebrew language, that the English translation of the fifth verse, differs widely from the original, and that the Dutch version is justly entitled to the pre-

ference, which runs thus, *For every battle of the warrior was with confused noise, and garments rolled in blood, burned and made fuel for fire*, containing a short description of that glorious defeat of the Midianites by Gideon, with the hundred men that licked like dogs. The preceding night, he and his armour bearer, or aid de camp, had been to reconnoitre, and to take a view of the enemy's encampment, and approached so near it unobserved, that they heard a man relate a dream to his fellow, he dreamed that he saw a barley loaf tumble into the host of Midian, and overturn one of their tents, the other immediately, as it were by inspiration, exclaimed, *That is the sword of Gideon, a man of Israel, for the Lord hath delivered Midian with all his host into his hands.* This animated the hero, who immediately went back, paraded his little army, and marched in order to attack the Midianites, who lay in the valley like grasshoppers, in multitudes, each with a trumpet, an empty pitcher, and a burning lamp. The Midianites, hearing the jarring noise, and seeing the bright appearance of their lamps, were struck with a most dreadful panic, and ran; afterwards they were pursued and numbers slain, among whom were two of their principal commanders. And thus was an army of one hundred and twenty thousand, destroyed to a man, so that the latter part of the text contains a true narrative of this rout, the battle is very justly said to have been with confused noise. It was such on both sides.

1. On the side of Israel, for the sound of the trumpets, the breaking of the pitchers and the cry of the whole army, the sword of God and of Gideon must have created a confused noise indeed.

2. But the noise was not less confused on the part of the Midianites, for they cried and fled.

(A) This defeat was not only with confused noise, but also with garments rolled in blood. In regard to those who were slain, as well as those who slew them, for where such a numerous army was defeat-

ed, there must have been streams of blood in which their garments were stained.

(B) And made fuel for fire. Perhaps a large quantity of those polluted garments were thrown on heaps and burnt; though scripture gives us no positive account of this, yet we know that whatever was stained with blood, was deemed unclean by the Jewish Ceremonies, and hence it is highly probable that the greatest part of their spoil, being rolled in human blood was committed to the flames. In such a manner doth God destroy those who oppress his people, and break to pieces the instruments of slavery, that are framed against them.

APPLICATION.

And may we not, my hearers, together with the people of these United States, express our joy at a similar blessing? Have not instruments of slavery been framed for us, in the tyrannical court of Britain? What was their claim, to bind us in all cases whatsoever, but a galling yoke? What else was the right they claimed, to tax our property at their own discretion, but a heavy, and an insupportable burden upon our shoulders, that would have made us go a scurrying all our days, and made beasts of burden of our posterity, till the latest generation? and what can more properly be styled the rod of oppression, than the banditti they did send to enforce those abominable chains? For nearly eight years have we felt the rod, a rod as it came from God, was a just one, because we had richly deserved it through sin, but, as it came from Britain, was to all intents and purposes a rod of oppression. Every species of cruelty attended their arms in America, and all their transactions much more resembled the rod of oppression, than the sword of the warrior. Burning defenceless

towns, insulting innocent women and children, robbing and pilfering houses, distressing defenceless inhabitants; exciting savages to commit indiscriminate murder; are lasting proofs that in the whole course of the contest, they have exhibited much more of the oppressor, than the soldier. But thanks be to God for his interposition, who hath broken the yoke of our burden, the staff of our shoulder, and the rod of our oppressor; by blessing our efforts, and often indeed by the battle of the warrior, with confused noise, not with trumpets and pitchers, but with the thunder of cannon and musketry, and cries of our flying foe, witness our several important victories. To enumerate would be needless, especially to those who still recollect, who have assisted in them, and now wear the laurel. Here was a jarring noise, here were garments rolled in blood. Whole armies with their brave commanders at their head, have surrendered to our conquering sword. In the midst of all the horrors of war, we flourished, our trade and commerce was carried on with a considerable degree of vigor, notwithstanding every opposition from our enemies, our fields were cultivated, and yielded in abundance; our intestine enemies disappointed in their hellish designs to enslave their native country, have flocked back to us in numbers, and received mercy and pardon. And what greatly exceeded all this, we were richly favored with gospel blessings, the offers of a redeemer were continually made, and we were invited in the most endearing language, to come and receive the waters of life for nought. It is to make public acknowledgments of those favors by decent celebrations of joy and merriment, that we are met together at this time, and what song of praise can be better adapted to our case than the one contained in the text. *Thou hast broken the yoke of our burden. Thou hast frustrated the infernal design of a British ministry to enslave us, Thou hast broken the staff of our shoulder. Thou hast disappointed a licentious king,*

who expected to fill his coffers with our property, exacted from us by an unjust taxation. Thou hast baffled the expectations of greedy pensioners, and placemen, who sought to aggrandise themselves by this new acquisition. Thou hast disappointed the hungry Bishops and Prelates, who waited eagerly for their share of the booty, and who always were a burden on the shoulders of their own people. *Thou hast broken the rod of our oppression.* Thou hast destroyed the numerous host that came to reduce us, to unconditional submission. Thou hast caused the flower of it to fall into our hands. Thou hast broken their power and diminished their strength, and finally, compelled the very tyrant, who endeavored to enslave us, to declare us free and Independent States. Thou hast delivered us from the horrors of war, no more confused noise, no more garments rolled in blood. O that this might have led us to national repentance, and reformation. The contrary has, however, been our unhappy situation, sin has abounded, and the Lord has from time to time threatened to plead a controversy with us. These circumstances have given that same nation (who never were sincerely at peace with us) a better opportunity to infringe our rights. For years successively we have experienced the unhappy effects. Time would not permit to enumerate them all. Our most friendly overtures, all our solicitations for an honorable and just settlement of differences have been treated with neglect, contempt, and a perpetual repetition of insult. After much forbearance we have been under the very disagreeable necessity of again appealing to arms. And according to the specimen given, Britain is pursuing the same species of horrid warfare, as in the late revolution. Algerine barbarians, and American savages, are the allies of this "Bulwark of Religion." The former to cast our citizens in dungeons, and reduce them to a state of most abject slavery; the latter are furnished with the tomahawk and scalping knife, to butcher our defence-

less frontiers, and to massacre in cold blood, those of our friends and countrymen who surrender themselves prisoners of war, notwithstanding the most solemn promises of protection. O, what American is there to be found, who does not feel highly indignant at such a foe. Do you think the Lord will bless such means, for the subjugation of our happy country, and the destruction of its liberties? we never ought so far to loose confidence in the justice of God, as for a moment to entertain the thought. It would detain you too long should I undertake to enumerate every thing that might be thought proper and useful as to this point. All clamor against our own government should cease, however much, peace may be desirable to us all. If we must remain for a while in a state of warfare, it ought to be prosecuted by our united exertions; whatever may be the political sentiments of our citizens, however much they may differ in opinion, as to matters of minor consideration, in defence of their country there ought to be only one sentiment; all should act as it becometh freemen, and none should be "ashamed to acknowledge themselves Americans." As for the other belligerent, we feel her insults; we leave her case to the consideration of those at the head of our government, not doubting but she will finally meet her just reward. Although some of the particulars enumerated, afford melancholy considerations, let not this altogether disappoint us in our present purpose, namely, to rejoice in the liberties we do possess, but let it be attended with sincere prayer to God that he may preserve those liberties to us immaculate. Let us conduct, in every respect according to the real design of our meeting together, it is not only to express our joy, but also to return gratitude to God for his blessings. Remember that; every degree of excess or impropriety of conduct on this occasion, would be a disgrace to a free people, an insult to the God of liberty, and a just cause to reduce us again to a state of slavery. Let every thing be trans-

acted with decency and a becoming merriment, and let us prove by our deportment, that we are worthy to wear the laurels of freedom. And while we rejoice in our liberty, let us not forget, by the use of every lawful means, to watch over it, and endeavour to secure that which has been bought with the price of much blood and treasure, against all who may undertake to assail it. It is as unpardonable in a people, not to preserve the liberty they have obtained, as it would be to submit to the yoke of oppression. And that the Lord may continue to disappoint all enemies to equal liberty, whether in our own land or abroad, in their infernal designs to rivet on us the shackles of slavery; that he may continue to *break the yoke of our burden, the staff of our shoulder, and the rod of our oppressor*, is our sincere prayer, for Jesus' sake.

AMEN,