

PERILOUS TIMES IN THE LAST DAYS.*

2 TIM. iii. 1,

This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come.

In these words we have three things.

1. The notification of an event as future; "perilous times *shall* come." Not that there are any times in themselves perilous, or unlucky days, as the superstitious imagine; but they are perilous in respect of the evil that is a-going in them among men, ver. 2, &c. The word properly signifies difficult; times wherein it will be hard for people to keep their feet, to know how to carry themselves, to keep out of danger, and keep a good conscience; and these are perilous times.

Of these it is said, they "shall come," [*Gr.* shall be on.] They will be on men, in the course of providence, to try what metal they are of; as darkness comes on after light, and adversity after prosperity, in their turn.

2. The time of that event; "in the last days." These are, in scripture-style, the days of the Messiah, the days of the gospel, even that whole period, according to Acts ii. 17, "And it shall come to pass in the last days, (saith God), I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams." Heb. i. 1, 2, "God who at sundry times, and in divers manners, spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son." It is an Old Testament expression, which sounds "the last of the days;" and days being used absolutely, these days are the days of the world, running from the creation to the end. Now, the days of the gospel are the last part of these days, the concluding period of time. In these last days are several particular periods; the first of which was the last time of the Jewish state, beginning from the time of our Saviour, to the destruction of Jerusalem; and more periods followed, and some are yet to come; but from the time of our Saviour to the end of the world, is "the last days."

3. The notice to be taken of that event; "This know also;" rather, "Now know this;" be informed of this, consider it duly, and lay it to heart, that being forewarned, ye may be armed against the "perilous times."

* A sermon preached at Ettrick, November 14, 1731; a fast day appointed by the Synod of Merse and Teviotdale.

DOCTRINE. As the days of the gospel are the last days, so men should know there are in the course of providence difficult and perilous times that come on in these days.

In discoursing this doctrine, we shall consider,

I. The days of the gospel as the last days.

II. The difficult and perilous times that come on in gospel-days.

III. *Lastly*, Apply.

I. We shall consider "the days of the gospel as the last days." And so we may take them up in a threefold view.

1. As the last days of the world, the latter end of time. With relation to them that oath is made; Rev. x. 6, "That there should be time no longer." The world has lasted long now, it must have an end; and the last part of its time is begun, and far on. The morning and forenoon of the world are over; it is afternoon with it now, and drawing toward the evening.

2. As the days of the last dispensation of grace towards the world, with which God's dealing with sinners for reconciliation shall be closed; according to Rev. x. 7, "In the days of the voice of the seventh angel, the mystery of God shall be finished." There have been three dispensations of grace in the world; the Patriarchal dispensation in the first days; the Mosaical dispensation in the middle days; and now the Christian dispensation in the last days. The first two are now off the stage, and shall never come on again; the third now is; and after it there shall never be another.

3. As the best days of the world in respect of the greatest advantages attending them. The last works of God are always the greatest, as ye may see in the account of the creation; Gen. i; so the circumstances of the world to come, are greater than those of this. The gospel-dispensation far excels the other two, in clearness, extensiveness, and efficacy, through a larger measure of the Spirit. One may say, Have there not been perilous times in all the days? Noah's times in the first; the Egyptian bondage, Babylonish captivity, Antiochus's persecution, &c., in the middle days; what wonder there be so in the last days? So indeed we say now; but consider the Old Testament prophecies of the last days, and the big expectations that behoved to be raised thereupon; and ye will see need for this caution, frequent among the apostles, that even in the "last days," for as great days as they were to be, there were "perilous times to be on."

Use of this point.

1. Take heed how ye improve the gospel. Delay not to comply with the call thereof; for ere long an account will be required of

it. The days of it are the last days of the world, wherein time comes to an end, and the world must make their account for the entertainment they have given it. Behold he cometh "from heaven, with his mighty angels, in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ;" 2 Thess. i. 7, 8.

2. Ye must be saved by falling in with the gospel-call and method of salvation, or else perish; for it is the last dispensation of grace. It is God's last method with a sinful lost world; after which they are not to expect a new one. It is the last ship going off for Immanuel's land; if ye slight it, ye will have no more opportunity for ever; Heb. x. 26, "For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins."

3. The contempt of the gospel is the most dangerous adventure ever the world made, and will have the most terrible issue; gospel-days being the last and best; and the better are the days, the contempt will be the more dangerous. The contempt of the Patriarchal dispensation was punished by the flood; of the Mosaical, by the Babylonish captivity, and other heavy plagues; 2 Chron. xxxvi. 21 How terrible must the punishment be of the contempt of the gospel dispensation? The destruction of Jerusalem was the first swatch of it, the conflagration of the world will be the issue.

4. *Lastly*, There may be great and good things in days which yet are dangerous days; "in the last days shall be perilous times." The best days that ever Judea saw, were in the days that went before the destruction of Jerusalem; the Spirit was poured out in such a measure as never took place before nor since; Acts ii. 17, forecited; but there came after a pouring out of "wrath to the uttermost;" 1 Thess. ii. 16. In these days of ours there are great things not to be overlooked. Learning, and the art of civil management in improving of ground and manufactures, are carried to a pitch they were not at before; which sometimes brings in mind the case of the Cainites, among whom arts flourished while piety went to wreck, as ye may read, Gen. iv. 20—22. Nay there are good things done in these our days, great good things, the like to which were never done before in our nation; particularly the erecting of schools for propagating Christian knowledge in the highlands and islands, the erecting of the Infirmary in Edinburgh. Nay, some glorious gospel-truths have been in our days set in an uncommon light. And yet for all they are certainly most perilous days. Which brings me to consider,

II. The difficult and perilous times that come on in gospel-days.

Even in the days of the gospel, in which sometimes there are sweet and glorious times, yet at other times there come difficult and perilous times.

We must inquire what makes these perilous times.

1st, An old controversy lying over untaken up. They that are in debt, are always in danger. The Jews were a bloody generation, from generation to generation they were murderers of their prophets; that was an old debt on the head of the generation in our Saviour's time; Matth. xxiii. 31, and made their time a perilous time, for it was like a train lying within their bowels, which at last came to blow them up, ver. 35. So good Josiah's days were perilous times, by reason of an old controversy laid in the days of Manasseh his grandfather; 2 Kings xxiii. 26.

Our times are so, by reason of the iniquity of the late times, which is like that of Baal-peor, that brought "a plague on the congregation of the Lord: Josh. xxii. 17. The avowed breach of covenants made with God for reformation; the blood of the Lord's people shed in fields and scaffolds, for adhering to the oath of God; the sinning, confining, imprisoning, banishing of them, and other barbarous usage of them, whereby for many years these nations carried on a war with heaven; these, I say, are an old debt lying on the head of Scotland, England, and Ireland, for which God will pursue them, and pursue so as it will appear to be both for principle and interest during the time it has lain over. These things are forgotten, or laughed at now as what we have no concern in; a stone is rolled to the mouth of that sepulchre. But God will readily arise, if the stone were sealed, and they forgot quite and clean; 1 Thess. v. 3, "For when they shall say, Peace and safety: then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; they shall not escape."

2dly, Error or corruption of principles spreading. This was foretold to happen in the latter days; 1 Tim. iv. 1, "Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils." Then the fountains men drink at, are poisoned; the faith once delivered to the saints, is exchanged for strong delusions, to believe lies; and many are in hazard of following their pernicious ways.

There are three dangerous engines of this kind that the gates of hell are directing this day against the foundation of the church built on the rock.

1. **LEGALISM**; An attempt against the grace of Christ, bringing in a scheme of religion that has no relation to Jesus Christ and his Spirit, putting virtue or a virtuous life in the room of Christ's

righteousness for acceptance with God, and the exerting of our natural powers in room of the influences of his Spirit. By which means the corruption of nature, and the necessity of regeneration, are buried in deep silence; and living by faith, attending the Spirit's influences, and communion with God, are branded as enthusiasm; and desertion is accounted the product of a crazy imagination. Thus a refined Heathenism is palmed on us for Christianity.

2. **ARIANISM**; An attempt against the person of Christ, bringing in a Christ that is not of the Father's equal, not the most high God, independent, and self-existent; but an inferior god, an arbitrary, dependent being; thus striking at the foundation of our salvation, taking away the infinite dignity of his person, which gives the sufficient value to his sacrifice. And it is to be feared, that when Christ ariseth to vindicate his own glory, it will be found, that the Church of Scotland has not given sufficient testimony of their indignation against this blasphemy.

3. **DEISM**; An attempt against all revealed religion, casting off the whole gospel and Bible by the lump, with the whole way of salvation by Jesus Christ; leaving us nothing, but that there is a God, and that this God is to be served as our reason directs. Such a stroke was not given against Christianity in the time of Prelacy, no, not in the times of Popery. Scotland may, and shall say, Alas! for the union with England; we were going to ruin before, but we have run to ruin since that fatal time, as to our most valuable concerns.

3dly, Immoralities abounding. That this is the case in the last days, we may consult the text and context, "This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, truce-breakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, high-minded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof." The opening of the sluice of impiety and wickedness, and the spreading and prevailing of scandalous practices, make perilous times.

If these make perilous times, ours are very perilous. I doubt if ever contempt of God, his Gospel, and all that is sacred, was ever at a greater height. The first table and second table are trampled on with a witness, so that we may say, Hos. iv. 1—3, "Hear the word of the Lord, ye children of Israel, for the Lord hath a controversy with the inhabitants of the land, because there is no truth, nor mercy, nor knowledge of God in the land. By swearing, and

lying, and killing, and stealing, and committing adultery, they break out, and blood toucheth blood. Therefore shall the land mourn, and every one that dwelleth therein shall languish, with the beasts of the field, and with the fowls of heaven, yea, the fishes of the sea also shall be taken away." God's worship is contemned and slighted, his name abused and blasphemed, and his Sabbaths profaned. Unfaithfulness prevails in all relations; murders, uncleanness, marriage-vows never more lightly treated, injustice and fraud in dealing, lying, covetousness, &c. What can be found among a people professing the name of Christ, to bring on wrath, that is not to be found in our land at this day?

Here let us view the scandalous outbreakings among us. Many such we see, opening the mouths of enemies to blaspheme the way of God. But how few do we see truly humbled, but almost always more concerned for their own blasted honour and reputation, than for the honour of God! And unless it be in those things which by use require public satisfaction, people cannot endure to be touched or checked with their faults told them.

Many other things there are that make perilous times, and which make ours so; such as the hiding of the Lord's face, threatenings and symptoms of wrath; among which may be reckoned the terrible thunders by which so many were killed on the last day of July this year; the shock which the fruits of the earth endured in the harvest, though Providence seasonably interposed, yet in a way that gives occasion to sing of mercy and judgment; and the murrain that in some places has appeared among the cattle.

But one thing deserves particular notice, as rendering our time perilous, viz., the church joining with the state in robbing the people of the Lord of their just right to choose their own ministers, and thrusting in ministers on congregations violently, and over their bellies. This is a most ready way to fill the church with naughty men, to ruin religion, and quite mar the interest and success of the Gospel, which are already very low.

I might here shew in what respects such times are perilous, that they are perilous to the present and succeeding generations, to their souls, and to their bodies.

And how they come in the course of providence to fall out by its permission, viz., for proving and trying men; 1 Cor. xi. 19, "For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you,"

But I will conclude, exhorting you therefore to know and lay to heart, that our times are perilous times, and therefore to bestir yourselves for your own safety, and be on your guard. Let the

peril of the times cause you to join yourself to God in Christ, and keep near him; beware of worldly-mindedness, instability and wavering; pride and self-conceit, Rev. vii. 3. Strive against the stream, if ye would not be carried away with it.

THE END OF TIME, AND THE MYSTERY OF GOD FINISHED WITH IT.*

REV. x. 6, 7,

And swear that there shall be time no longer; but the mystery of God should be finished.

THE going out of an old year, and the coming in of a new, doth so natively lead to consider the passing nature of time, that they must be very carnal, light, and inconsiderate, to whom such an event occasions not serious thoughts. For while one sees time on such a run, how can one miss the thought of its running out, or that there "shall be time no longer," as saith the text?

In which we have a deposition, or a matter declared upon oath, made by a mighty angel, Christ, the angel of the covenant, whose glory and majesty is inconceivable, as clothed with a cloud; darkening all created glory, as the sun doth the stars; and whose dispensations of providence are steady and pure, as pillars of fire, verse 1. The gesture used by him in swearing, is not laying his hand upon the book, though he had one in his hand; that is Antichrist's way of swearing; but it is lifting up the hand to heaven, verse 5, the natural and approved gesture of an oath, as being a solemn invocating of God, who dwelleth there. The scope of the deposition is, to comfort the church against the heaviness of the reign of Antichrist brought in by the fifth trumpet, as the Turks were by the sixth. The parts of the deposition are two.

1. The negative part, "that time should be no longer;" (Gr.) "that time shall not be any more." Most interpreters understand this restrictedly, of the time of the Roman empire, or the Antichristian tyranny; others, absolutely, of the world's ending, time's removal for good and all, and eternity succeeding in its room; no more days, months, or years. This I take to be the true sense; for (1.) It is agreeable to the scope, being a general including the particular

* Several Sermons preached at Ettrick in the year 1732. The first sermon was preached January 2.