

# A FAST SERMON PREACHED BEFORE THE PARLIAMENT.

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*Therefore thus will I do unto thee, O Israel; and because I will do this unto thee, prepare to meet thy God, O Israel.—Amos iv. 12.*

THE first word in this scripture is illative, and directeth our thoughts to the context. Therefore why? Three things are especially charged upon them in this chapter.

1. The first is oppression in their great ones: 'Hear this, ye kine of Bashan, which are in the mountains of Samaria, which oppress the poor, and crush the needy, which say to their masters, Come let us drink.' This concerneth the governor and rulers, as his former expostulations were directed to the body of the people. And he calleth them 'kine of Bashan.' Amos the herdsman doth not bespeak them in courtly language, with soft and silken words, but in terms proper to his own function and ancient calling. He giveth them not the title of lords, the style of Your Honour and Excellency; he was not skilled in this kind of language, neither would it consist with the freedom and duty of his office. God's messengers may use a liberty and freedom in slighting sinful greatness. 'Ye kine of Bashan;' men of brutish manners deserve no better compellation. They were impudent, wanton, refractory, impatient of the yoke, therefore he calleth them kine, with the addition of Bashan, which was a fertile hill full of rich pastures, and so apt to fatten cattle. Bulls of Bashan we read of elsewhere, *βόες εὐτροφῶι*, so Symmachus, kine full fed. But yet more plainly, lest they should lie hid in the metaphor, 'that are in the mountain of Samaria'—the metropolis and royal city of Israel, as noting the chief of the nation. These are the persons. What is their crime? 'They oppress the poor, and crush the needy;' that is, by burdensome levies and violent extortions to maintain their own greatness and luxury. When men make their lust their law, their will their reason, their belly their god, they are more like cows than men; 'Which say to their masters, Come, and let us drink.' This, I suppose, is spoken to their clients and dependants that encourage them to poll the people to feed their riot and luxury. Now God threateneth that he would make these men like cattle out of their fat pastures, and to leave all their wealth, houses, and stately palaces behind. Well then,

oppression in great persons accompanied with luxury, is a sure forerunner of judgment. When men like ravenous harpies extort from the poor that they may minister to their lusts, and glut themselves and their dependants with the spoils of the poor; and when others languish with want, they are secure, and drunk with worldly wealth and pleasures, God will go an-angling and a-hunting. Take these fishes out of the pond, and drive these beasts out of the pastures: he is the world's guardian, and the great one's judge, higher than the highest; they shall no longer sport in their fish-ponds and fat pastures.

2. The next sin is corruption in worship: ver. 4, 5, 'Come to Bethel and transgress in Gilgal; multiply transgressions, and bring your sacrifices every morning, and your tithes after three years. Offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving with leaven, and proclaim and publish the free offerings: for this liketh you, O ye children of Israel, saith the Lord.' This whole place must be understood as a sarcasm, as appeareth by that clause, 'Go transgress at Gilgal.' The Lord doth not allow sin, much less command it. The meaning is, since you love to fill up the measure of your iniquities, go do so, and see what will come of it. At Bethel there was one of Jeroboam's calves, therefore called Bethaven, the house of iniquity, instead of Bethel, the house of God. The pretence was they thought it was better to worship there than at Jerusalem, because there he appeared to Jacob. Gilgal was another place of idolatry: Hosea ix. 15, 'Their wickedness is in Gilgal; for there I hated them, for the wickedness of their doings,' &c. There Joshua renewed the covenant. It was the chief seat of the idolatry of the ten tribes. They were punctual in observing all the ordinances of the temple, and rites of God's instituted worship; as daily sacrifice, God instituted it: Num. xxviii. 4, 'The one lamb shalt thou offer in the morning, and the other lamb in the evening.' Daily we are to make use of Christ. The tithing, after three years, was instituted: Deut. xiv. 28, 'At the end of three years thou shalt bring forth all the tithe of thine increase,' &c. For the peace-offerings, they were to be offered with leavened bread, Lev. vii. 13. In all these formalities they were very precise. Where was the fault then? they had changed the place instituted from Jerusalem to Bethel and Gilgal; they had changed the priesthood from the sons of Levi to the basest and vilest of the people; and they had set up their calves as relative objects of worship. Well then, from the whole we learn that it is a very provoking sin when men set up new ways of worship out of their own brain without an express rule from the word. As these, though they kept the substance of worship, erected another temple, another altar, and another priesthood. Here was altar against altar, and threshold against threshold; therefore God is angry, and giveth them up to do what they would: Go take your swing and course, and go on, and see what will come of it. A nation is not only to look to oppression, but corruption of worship, if they would provide for their own welfare.

3. The next sin is incorrigibleness under judgments. Here the Lord taketh up a long plea against them, from the 6th to the end of the 11th verse. Several judgments are mentioned, as famine, pestilence, drought, blasting, mildew, the fury of war, great fires kindled in

their cities; and still this cometh like a chime at the end of every peal, 'yet ye have not returned unto me, saith the Lord.' To take notice of every expression would spend too much time. From the whole let me note a few things.

[1.] That God hath various judgments wherewith to exercise a sinful land and nation. We have divers lusts, and God hath divers judgments. He cannot want instruments of vengeance, for his artillery is never spent, nor our wickedness. If it be our custom to sin, it is his custom to punish.

[2.] Judgments are not removed, but changed, till we return to the Lord. Every kind of physic doth not work on all humours, therefore God changeth his dispensation. Rich men may wear out a famine, but the pestilence maketh no distinction, and in a war they smart most; as an oak laden with boughs is but fit for lopping.

[3.] The Lord keepeth a catalogue of his dispensations. His book of remembrance standeth charged with all the methods of grace used for the reclaiming of a people: Isa. xi. 11, 'I will arise a second time to visit Israel;' the first is not forgotten. 'These ten times have they provoked me,' Num. xiv. 22. A malefactor that is often in prison, his offences are upon record, and will be aggravated to his condemnation. When a judgment cometh, we look upon it as rain that will dry up of its own accord. But in God's book of remembrance there is a mark set upon every providence.

[4.] Observe, God is very earnest after the creature's repentance. He trieth all kinds of methods, key after key, till he hath tried all the keys in the bunch. He threateneth, that he may not punish, and he punisheth, that he may not punish for ever; and if one punishment worketh not, he trieth another, and all to bring us to return to him.

[5.] Moral means work not without special grace. Here was dispensation upon dispensation, and yet ye returned not unto me. Judgments in themselves do but stupefy, till the plague of the heart be cured. The bad thief had one foot in hell, and yet he scoffeth. It is not physic that worketh the expulsion of the disease, but the internal strength and vigour of nature; physic is but an outward help. So here.

[6.] Multiplied signs of anger should be noted, and make men bethink themselves. It is sad when God spendeth rods in vain; when we are often put into the fire and often pulled out, the next burning will be dreadful. Men cannot endure to have two things slighted, their love or their anger; their love, as David to Nabal; their anger, as Nebuchadnezzar heated the furnace seven times hotter. All this view of the context hath been occasioned by that note of inference, 'Therefore.'

I now come to the words, here is a threatening and an exhortation; or, Israel's danger, and Israel's duty; the one inferred out of the other.

1. The threatening—*Thus will I do unto thee.* 'Thus,'—how? It is not specified what God will do; and in the immediate context there is no threatening, but a charge and expostulation. How shall we expound it then? Some expound it generally; 'Thus,' that is, according to the merit of those actions, as thy sins deserve; that which I will do hath a vengeance and wrath in it, a sour dispensation to be sure, for it is a threatening, though the particular kind be not mentioned.

'Thus;' that is, this kind of dispensations will I continue. He had spoken all along of judicial dispensations, of cleanness of teeth, blasting, mildew, pestilence, stink of the camp, burning of cities. And then 'thus,' that is, after this manner, will I continue till you be destroyed.

'Thus;' the judgment was so great, that the prophet was loath to utter it, and therefore draweth a veil over it, and hideth it in a general expression; as Timanthes drew a veil over Agamemnon's sorrow, concealing that grief which he could not sufficiently express. As if the Lord had said, I am loath to tell you what I will do; but 'thus I will do.' There is terror enough in these words.

The next are more comfortable.

*Because I will do thus unto thee.* God threateneth evil, that he may not inflict it. To save sinners, mercy itself will speak in the dialect of justice, in a rough strain and rousing language. When the Lord threateneth most sadly and severely, he would still be understood as inviting to repentance: 'I will do thus unto you,' that if it were told, you would not believe it. And because 'I will do thus to you,' what then?

2. The counsel and duty thence inferred—*Prepare to meet thy God, O Israel.* Some understand these words as spoken in an irony, Now buckle on your harness, and see if you can meet with God, and grapple with him in the day of his wrath. But rather it is an exhortation, 'Prepare to meet him;' that is, to come to God, and to take up the difference, to prevent and pacify him; God is angry, to give him a day of compromise; for the covenant relation is mentioned: Jer. iii. 22, 'Behold we come to thee, for thou art the Lord our God.' The Septuagint renders it *ἑτοιμοζοῦ τοῦ ἐπικαλεῖσθαι τὸν Θεὸν σου*, — 'Be prepared to call upon thy God.'

The point is this,—That the great duty of a nation in danger of judgment is to give the Lord a compromise, or to make up the breach, and take up the difference between him and them.

Here he seemeth to have in store such judgments as would make any tremble to think of; yet inviteth to repentance.

Why 'prepare to meet thy God'? Either to reverse the judgment or to mitigate it. To reverse the judgment. We must distinguish between God's sentence and God's decree; *Mutat sententiam, non decretum.* God's threatenings do not always hold forth his irrevocable purpose. Or else a mitigation: Zeph. iii. 7, 'It may be ye shall be hid in the day of the Lord's fierce anger.' You put your eternal happiness out of doubt, it may be you shall have temporal mercies. I shall show—

[1.] What it is to give God a day of compromise.

[2.] Why this is the most proper duty for a people in danger.

*First,* What is it to give God a day of compromise? Look to the wisdom of men in like cases: what kind of meeting they would give those whom they have offended, and whose power they are not able to resist; even so do you deal with God. I shall only allude to such meetings as are described in scripture. And there we shall first take notice of that interview that was between Jacob and Esau, described in Gen xxxii. 33. Jacob was afraid of Esau, coming with four hundred men against him, and therefore taketh the best course to provide for

his safety: he sendeth presents, and an humble submission to him, to pacify him. And when he was come, he boweth to him seven times. 'And Esau ran to meet him, and embraced and fell on his neck and kissed him, and wept.' So when you hear of God's coming against you, put yourselves into a humble posture, and come bow yourselves before the Lord; and in all probability it will be a gracious meeting and interview. Again, another instance is of the king of Assyria, when he was broken in pieces, and fallen under Ahab's power; his trusty counsellors advised him thus, 1 Kings xx. 31, 'Behold now we have heard that the kings of the house of Israel are merciful kings; let us I pray thee, put sackcloth upon our loins, and ropes about our necks, and go out to the king of Israel,' &c. When we are fallen under the displeasure and power of God, let us put ropes about our necks, and humble ourselves. You have not only heard, but know, that the God of Israel is a merciful God; go lie at his feet, acknowledging that in justice he might destroy you; but you are willing to put yourselves into his hands, to do with you as it shall seem good in his sight. One instance more is the king spoken of, Luke xiv. 31, that had but ten thousand, but there was another coming against him with twenty thousand. 'While he is yet a great way off, he sendeth an embassy, and desireth conditions of peace.' We are no match for God; what can worms do against him that cometh with mighty angels? It is best to take up the matter, in humble way send to him, seek peace in Jesus Christ. Another instance is that of Tyre and Sidon: Acts xii. 20, 'Herod was highly displeased with them of Tyre and Sidon; but they came with one accord to him, and having made Blastus the king's chamberlain their friend, desired peace, because their country was nourished by the king's country.' The case is the same between us and God. He is highly displeased with a sinful people. Alas! What shall we do? our country is nourished by the king's country; we cannot subsist without him, let us with one accord come and beg peace. Have we never a friend in heaven? Yes, one that doth not forget us in all his exaltation, he that remembereth his alliance still, Heb. viii. 2, *λειτουργός ἁγίων*, Jesus Christ; in his name let us come and beg peace. One instance more, because I will not weary you, and that is of Adonijah: 1 Kings i. 50-52, 'And Adonijah feared concerning Solomon, and went and caught hold of the horns of the altar, saying, Let king Solomon swear unto me to-day that he will not slay his servant with the sword. And Solomon said, Let him show himself a worthy man, and there shall not a hair of his head fall to the earth.' So should we capitulate with God, but at the horns of the altar, holding out Christ as a buckler against the strokes of his justice, till he saith, Go to your houses in peace. Thus you may learn wisdom from men. Only there is a vast difference in the case: God is more mighty to destroy, and yet more merciful to save, than any man is, or possibly can be. The one consideration quickeneth us to humiliation, the other to faith.

1. To humiliation: Isa. xlv. 9, 'Let the potsherd strive with the potsherds of the earth. Woe to him that contendeth with his maker!' Poor man, if he will be contending, let him seek out his match; let him cope with a man like himself. There, sometimes the weaker side

may make their party good ; the battle is not always to the strong ; but whenever we enter into the lists with God, he will be sure to have the best of it : Ezek. xxii. 14, ‘ Can thine heart endure, or thine hands be strong, in the days that I shall deal with thee ? ’

2. To faith ; for God, as he is matchless in point of power, so in point of mercy ; none is so able to punish, and yet none so willing to spare : Hosea xi. 9, ‘ I am God and not man, and therefore Ephraim shall not be destroyed.’ It is well for poor Ephraim. Man’s pity and mercy may be exhausted, though never so great. Many will not spare upon all the entreaty and submission that we can use. A pardon may be sought from them carefully and with tears, and not obtained ; but God’s mercy must not be straitened to our size and scantling : Ps. ciii. 11, ‘ As far as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his mercy towards them that fear him.’

By this general view you may guess what this meeting with God imports. More distinctly to give it you, I shall, with respect to the former instances, show you the nature of the work, and the manner of performance.

[1.] The nature of the work. It implieth three things—(1.) Humiliation ; (2.) Faith ; (3.) Reformation, or a resolution to walk with God in better obedience.

(1.) An address to God in a way of humiliation ; we must creep to him upon our knees. Jacob meeteth Esau with soft language and submissive behaviour ; and the messengers of the king of Assyria came with ropes about their necks, and sackcloth upon their loins ; ‘ Thy servant Benhadad saith, I pray thee, let me live.’ Thus must we lie at God’s feet, taking part with his justice against ourselves ; though his justice be satisfied by Christ, yet it must be glorified and owned by us. This is the work of the day, to judge ourselves, if we would prevent God’s judgment, 1 Cor. xi. 31. Sinners must be condemned in one court or another. In all our addresses to God, there is a use of both covenants. We must acknowledge the tenor of the first covenant just, if God should proceed according to it, though we hold him to the second : Ps. xxx. 2, 3, ‘ O Lord my God, I cried unto thee, and thou hast healed me ; O Lord, thou hast brought up my soul from the grave, thou hast kept me alive, that I should not go down to the pit.’ Acknowledge that it is just with God to destroy us ; but, Lord, let thy servants live. Every christian must look upon himself under a two-fold notion, as a faulty sinner, and a penitent supplicant. As a faulty sinner, he must receive his doom from the first covenant, as a penitent supplicant, he must lay hold of mercy in the second.

(2.) There is required faith in Jesus Christ. The men of Tyre made Blastus their friend. Look up to Christ’s intercession. Adonijah took hold of the horns of the altar, and would not let go his hold till Solomon sware to him articles of peace. Here we come to get an answer of peace from God ; hold out Christ as the only means of propitiation. When Themistocles came to Admetus, whom he had formerly offended, he took in his arms τὸν παῖδα, he held up the young prince, and so begged acceptance. Lay hold upon Jesus Christ, keep him in the arms of your faith. When the destroying angel saw the blood of the lamb sprinkled upon the lintel, he forbore. We have no

other security against the destroyer: look upon the blood of Christ, as if it were newly shed, that you may have confidence towards God. This man our peace, Micah v. 5.

(3.) A resolution to walk with God in better obedience. The king of Assyria entered into bonds to restore the cities of Samaria. Resolve that God shall have his honour, and the obedience you have kept from him. Solomon puts Adonijah to the question, will he show himself a worthy man? Such conditions are we to make with God; vows of reformation: Jer. iv. 1, 'If thou wilt return to me, saith the Lord, put away thy abominations out of my sight.' If a man's house be on fire, he will put away the flax and straw, and whatsoever is likely to augment the flame. Our sins are the combustible matter. We all declaim against the evil of the times, but every man continueth the practices. We deceive ourselves with general terms. Will you now give the hand to the Lord? 2 Chron. xxx. 8, 'Now yield yourselves unto the Lord.' Give the hand; is it a bargain? Are you resolved to lay down the bucklers and weapons of defiance? to cast sin out of your hearts, and out of your families and township, wherever you have an interest? to lay aside your vanity, your oppression, your deserting of a godly ministry, and the simplicity of the gospel, your hatred of reformation, your slighting of church order, your heats and animosities? This is matter to be done—

[2.] Now for the manner. This must be done—

(1.) Speedily. It is no time to dally. 'Whilst he is yet a great way off, he sendeth an embassy.' We must not tarry till the judgment tread upon our heels, or the storm break out upon us. A man cannot soon enough be in the arms of Christ. They that are in good earnest are in haste: 'who have fled for refuge,' &c. Heb. vi. 18; the avenger of blood being at their heels. Sin and we cannot part soon enough. Many a time a brabble falleth out between a man and his lusts; but he delayeth, and all cometh to nothing. In an heat, we bid the naughty servant be gone; but he lingereth, and before the next morning all is cool and quiet again; we are agreed again as much as ever.

(2.) Seriously; for God will not be mocked. In real danger it is no time to dally with God. The work of humiliation must be serious. God abhorreth mock fasts, hanging the head for a day like a bulrush, Isa. lviii. 5. A little drooping, a few mournful postures for the present, and putting a natural fervency in our prayers, will not serve the turn; it is but howling. Are you indeed sensible of the weight of God's displeasure, so that you make the seeking of his face in Christ to be your great work? 2 Chron. vii. 14, 'If the people that is called by my name shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, &c., then will I pardon their sins, and heal their land.' God's favour and reconciliation by Christ, do you seek this above all things? So your coming to God by Christ must be serious: Heb. x. 22, 'Let us draw near with a true heart.' Not like Judas, kiss to betray him; or as Joab's embracing of Abner. Come with an unfeigned purpose of doing and being what God would have you to do and be. Your reformation must be serious: Jer. iii. 10, 'Judah hath not turned unto me with her whole heart, but feignedly, saith the Lord.' There was an outward turn, for it was in the days of Josiah, ver. 7; and then the law was recovered, the

worship of God restored, a covenant made with him, 2 Kings xxii. 23; but for all this pretended change the mischiefs continued, all was in pretence, as appeareth by their speedy revolt. Usually, in the changes of the world, the persons are changed, but not things. The men are cast out, but the corruptions live. Or else all is but pretence. In Josiah's time, many nasty corners were unswept: Zeph. i. 1, 'The word of the Lord that came to Zephaniah, in the days of Josiah'—(A man would wonder, that he should come with such a thundering prophecy in the days of a reforming magistrate)—'I will utterly consume all things from the land; I will consume man and beast.' A sad desolation threatened. Why all this in Josiah's time? See in ver. 4, 'I will cut off the remnant of Baal from this place, and the name of the Chemarims with the priests.' Some relics of the old superstition, which Josiah could not discover, and the people would not reform. The Chemarims were kept officers of the idols; idolatrous Chemarims, wicked priests. So ver. 6, 'And them that are turned back from the Lord, and those that have not sought the Lord,' &c.

God's anger is increased by mock turns. Hypocrites, if there be any hotter place in hell, it is their portion: Mat. xxiv. 51, 'And shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with hypocrites.' The land of darkness is their heritage and fee-simple. So an hypocritical nation: Isa. x. 6, 'I will send him against an hypocritical nation, to take the spoil and take the prey;' the Assyrian, a profane nation, and Judah, an hypocritical nation. They professed reformation, and dallied with God. God doth not stand upon the choice of a rod when his people mock him, as an angry father taketh what cometh next to hand. The basest people may be employed against them that mock God with vain pretences, feigned words, and empty shows. If, in a church, forms of worship be only changed, and not the manners of men; in a state, the instruments, but not the corruptions, the Lord will not be put off so.

(3.) It must be done earnestly, and with affection. Humiliation implieth an afflictive sorrow, and that the heart be melted and broken before the Lord; 'a rending of the heart:' Joel ii. 13, 'Rend your hearts and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord.' Stout hearts must be broken, and affected with the sense of God's displeasure. This is not a work to be lightly passed over. Our looking for mercy in Christ, it must be earnest. The messengers of the king of Assyria waited for the word, *brother*. With such earnestness should you look for the answers of grace. And your resolutions for God must be earnest, loathing our sins, and returning to the Lord with all the heart, seeking his face with diligence and seriousness. It may cost you much wrestling to get and keep his favour and communion with him.

*Secondly*, Why is this the most seasonable duty?

1. Because the main party with whom we have to do is God. He is at the upper end of causes, and his hand and counsel is in all things; and all the evil that befalleth us is the fruit of God's anger. Then, get his favour, and you stop danger at the fountain-head. If God be reconciled, and made a friend to us in Christ, you need not fear man's enmity. Either it shall be assuaged—(Prov. xvi. 7, 'When a man's ways please the Lord, he maketh his enemies to be at peace with him.'

God hath the hearts of men in his own hand. When two states are at war, the business is not to seek the favour of common soldiers, but those that do employ them. The next way to get in with men is to get in with God—or else, if it continue, it can do you no harm: you need not fear the sword when you do not fear him that weareth the sword.

2. It will either prevent the danger, or mitigate it, or get it sanctified. It may prevent the danger. When he is about to strike, he would fain be prevented. He often reverseth his sentence: Jer. xviii. 8, '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.' Or mitigate the danger, especially to your own persons; you may be hid. In temporal things, God leaveth us at an uncertainty, and keepeth us in suspense, that we may use the means more earnestly, referring the event to him. Mourners in Sion have a mark of preservation. Or else get it sanctified, which is a great comfort, either to better our hearts, or hasten our glory. He is at peace with God: Isa. iii. 10, 'Say to the righteous, It shall be well with them,' whatever falleth out in the world: Cant. iv. 16, 'Awake, O north-wind, and come, thou south, and blow upon my garden,' &c. Out of what corner soever the wind bloweth, the cold north or sultry south. If we could make a good company of mourners, the judgment may be prevented: Zeph. ii. 1, 2, 'Gather yourselves together, yea, gather together, O nation not desired, before the decree bring forth,' &c. God's decree is not taken for his secret counsel, but his public sentence: if the nation could be got to gather themselves together. Sincere humiliation in secret is not enough in God's account, but there must be a public profession of repentance, that all may concur to quench that fire which their sins have kindled, every one bringing their bucket. If only a few set about it, it will do no good. But if that cannot be, yet the judgment may be mitigated; you may escape common judgment: Ezek. ix. 4, 'Set a mark on them that sigh.' God can make a distinction; it is an art that he is versed in: 2 Peter ii. 9, 'The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished.' If not so, yet the judgment may be sanctified to you, however things go, Isa. iii. 10, 'Say you to the righteous, It shall be well with him.' It is possible a green stick may burn for company when the dry are kindled; but it is sanctified to better your hearts, and hasten glory. It is possible they may perish in the common burning, but their eternal happiness is out of danger: Rom. viii. 28, 'All things work together for good to them that love God.'

3. If our mercies be continued to us, they are continued with a curse while God is angry. We may have government in God's anger, and governors and establishment in God's anger, *ἔνδον τὸ κακόν*. Though we should build walls up to heaven, sin in the bottom, that would undermine all; sin within, as the voice told Phocas, in Cedrenus. Therefore, if we would not have our mercies cursed, let us first make peace with God: Job xxii. 21, 'Acquaint thyself with God, and be at peace, and good shall come unto thee;' then good cometh to thee. God's wrath is sometimes compared to a moth, and sometimes to a lion. The moth noteth the eating of an insensible curse; the lion, open and

destroying judgments. If you would not have your mercies blasted and eaten out by a secret moth, begin with God. Until we flee to God by Christ for the pardon of sin, we cannot expect that the good and peace we have should be continued as a blessing. To have mercies in anger is one of the worst kind of judgments: Micah v. 5, 'Then this man shall be the peace, and when the Assyrian shall come into our land, then shall we raise against him seven shepherds and eight principal men.'

4. Hasting and preparing to make peace with God, and take up the differences between us and him, prevents many sins which are the bane of a nation; as security and creature confidence.

[1.] Security, not fearing of deserved wrath; when we see a judgment in its causes, and a storm while the cloud is but a-gathering. The welfare of a nation is not to be measured by outward probabilities, but the sentence of the word. The face of providence speaketh not the intentions of God so much as the course of his justice according to the covenant: Heb. xi. 7, 'Noah being warned of God of things not seen,' &c. To appearance there was no such thing as a flood coming; all things continued according to the stated course of nature; but of a sudden the mouth of the great deep opened, and the windows of heaven; and the merry world was overtaken and overwhelmed with a flood. And so it is usually in God's judicial proceedings. Men are secure, and feast themselves with hopes of temporal felicity, till God's wrath breaketh in of a sudden. We are not to look to the present face of things, but the word. Now, while God is a great way off, we should labour to make peace with him. As Josiah trembled when the law was read; we do not read of any danger and actual disturbance to the nation.

[2.] Carnal confidence. When our first and chief business is with God, it is a sign we little mind carnal props. Arms, ships, treasures, wise counsels, how soon can God blow upon them! Trusting in the arm of flesh is much talked of in the world, and little understood by many. They have a gross notion of it, and only confine it to praise and idolising of instruments. The true notion of it is, when a people hope, by their own wisdom, power, and strength, to carry on their matters against God or without God. Against God, when they think their power shall bear them out in unjust actions; without God, when they think to establish a nation by their own carnal shifts, and without taking up the controversy between God and them. The case is expressly spoken to in Jer. iv. 14. 'O Jerusalem, wash thy heart from wickedness, that thou mayest be saved; how long shall thy vain thoughts lodge within thee?' Vain thoughts are not taken in their full latitude, as implying all the corruption of the thoughts; but hopes of succour and safety from their force of arms, or the wisdom of their counsels and mutual agreement, without humiliation, repentance, and reformation. So that, if we do not prepare and set ourselves to make all sure with God, we do but deceive ourselves.

Use 1. To press you to consider England's danger, that you may more effectually mind England's duty.

1. England's danger. Possibly you may think that the nation is upon the mending hand, and that we have wrestled out of many difficulties. Now it is comfortable, if any have these hopes, to say as the

prophet in a like case, Jer. xxviii. 5, 'Amen; the Lord do so, the Lord perform thy words which thou hast prophesied.' However if the threatening be unseasonable, the duty is not. But alas! the times do not look upon all with a like face. Surely there is a cause for God to be angry. We have had our judgments and our deliverances; we are but as a brand plucked out of the burning; but is not the Lord's hand stretched out still? Are we not now under the rebukes of his providence, by the Lord's blasting our designs abroad, by our distractions at home, enemies arming against us, and the friends of Sion full of jealousies and fears? Are the foundations so well settled that we have no cause to think of preparing to meet the Lord? Other preparations do well, but this should be regarded in the first place. Have we not many spiritual judgments upon us; which of all are most dreadful? The storm is not broken in upon us indeed, we do not hear the alarm of war, nor see garments rolled in blood; but is not the moth of intestine confusions and dissensions eating out the staff and the stay? Do not these shoals of libertines, that are every day increasing in numbers, power and malice, call upon us to inquire after the reasons of the Lord's wrath? Lord, why art thou angry with thine heritage? Surely to any discerning eye there is enough of danger. God seemeth to say, Thus will I do unto you; though he doth not tell us from what corner the storm shall blow, nor what kind of vengeance he hath in store for us, nor whence it shall arise. We do not know what is in the womb of providence, or how far the prerogative of free grace may interpose in our behalf, whether England shall be made a theatre of mercy, or a field of blood, but though we do not know what God hath decreed, we may soon know what England hath deserved; and that is enough to quicken us to humiliation. Shall I trouble you, I will not say with a few melancholy thoughts, but serious observations, to awaken us out of our security?

[1.] I observe, that after God hath laid in any spiritual comforts, there is a time to lay them out again; and after great receipts we are put to great expenses. The disciples first enjoyed Christ's presence and ministry, and then were exposed to a dreadful persecution. John xi. he biddeth them make use of the light, because the darkness was coming upon them. There never was the gospel powerfully preached but trials came: 1 Thes. i. 5, 6, 'Ye received the word with much assurance and much affliction.' God will try how we can live upon the comforts of the gospel. Castles are first victualled, and then besieged: Heb. x. 32, 'Ye had compassion of me in my bonds, and took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing that in heaven ye have a better, and an enduring substance.' The churches of Asia underwent horrible desolation after a powerful ministry. Germany, after a sufficient promulgation of the gospel, hath suffered many sad years.

[2.] After trials and reformations, there come trials and probations, that, after we have submitted to the ways of God, we may honour them with suffering. The ten persecutions were after Christ had set up the ordinances of the gospel; the Marian and bloody days after king Edward's reformation. God will have every truth honoured in its season. When the witnesses had finished the testimony of their prophecy, after a short time they were slain, Rev. xi. 7.

[3.] When reformation stick in the birth, God will promote them by troubles. He taketh his own fan into his hand, Mat. iii. 12. When men cannot or will not effect it, God will purge his floor, and cleanse the church from profane mixtures. Christ came with his whip to cleanse the temple, John ii. 15. Grosthead prophesied that the church should not be reformed, but *ore gladii cruentandi*. God usually tendeth a reformation to the world with a judgment in his hand; and if the reformation be obstructed, the judgment will proceed, Ezek. xxiv. 13. When the pot is put over the fire, if the scum remaineth still, he overturneth all.

[4.] When there are great differences among his own people, the end is bitter. We warp in the sunshine. The dog is let loose that the sheep may run together. A piece of wax when it is broken, put it together never so often, it will not close, but put it into the candle, and the two ends stick close together. Ridley and Hooper could agree in a prison. A little before Dioclesian's persecution, *φιλονεικίαί ἀναφλεγόντο*, the church was rent and torn with intestine broils, pastor against pastor, and people against people. Ease begets pride and wantonness, and that maketh way for contention. God may solder you in your own blood, and effect union by making you objects of the same hatred and persecution. Nazianzen was wont to call the enemies of the church, *κοίνους διαλλάκτας*, the common reconcilers; the turbulent enemies many times prove the best reconcilers, and the wolves bring the sheep together.

[5.] Libertine and fanatical persons, when they increase into power and numbers, become cruel: Jude 11, 'These walked in the way of Cain.' The Donatists are of detestable and accursed memory, because of their insolent cruelties: Hos. v. 5, 'The pride of Israel doth testify to his face,' &c. Revolters are found to make slaughters, viz., men that have cast off the holy faith after some profession; the Lord keep us from their tender mercies! Arians grew bloody. Naz. Orat. xxv., *πὼς δε ἀνθρώπων ἔμελλον φείδῃσθαι οἱ τῆς θειοτήτος μὴ φειδόμενοι*. Want of truth is usually made up by a supply of rage; lees and dregs are usually very tart and sour.

[6.] When religion hath received wounds in the house of her friends, and occasion is given to the world by scandals, to think evil of the ways of God, God taketh his scourge in his hand; and when the devil hath an advantage, he stirreth up the malignant world against the children of God as a sort of monsters. The Gnostics, by their impure and libidinous courses, made christianity odious, and then the heathens rose up against them as pests of mankind. *Luminum extinctores*. The devil is first a liar and then a murderer, John viii. 44. He lieth that his murders may carry some pretence. Now, that his lies may carry some pretence, he taketh up the scandals of false christians.

[7.] The decay of the power of godliness, and formality and contempt of the word, which are the usual effects of prosperity. As soon as we come out of miseries, we run into disorders. Therefore God is wont to return us into our old chains again, that we may wanton it no more: Hos. v. 'In their afflictions they will seek me right early.' I will try them by adversity; I will try what my rod will do: to better his people, as also to discover hypocrites. When the ways of God are

a little owned, and the church hath ease, many come and take up a form, and so religion is turned into a fashion and empty pretence. Salvian observeth, that the church, like a river, loseth in depth what it gaineth in breadth—*Multiplicatis quidem populis, fides diminuta est*; and *Frequentibus filiis mater ægrotat*—a woman that hath borne many children is with every birth the weaker. *Tantum copie accessit, quantum disciplina recessit*; as a large body is less active. Carnal men coming under a profession of religion weaken the power of it.

[8.] When professors grow worldly, this awakeneth worldly rage and God's rods. The men of the world take mammon for God, and the conveniences of this life for their portion. Now, when the children of God put in for a share, and are all for worldly hopes and interests, it stirreth up their enmity. They cannot endure to be discountenanced; it is their generation and sphere: Luke xvi. 8, 'The children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light;' full of watchful malice; so God's rod. When the world gets into the church, God whippeth it out again by the world. God will show us the vanity of our aspiring projects. The spirit of the world is breathing in most christians, prowling for greatness, as if they served the god of the world. Many dream now of a carnal pomp and dominion, fit for a worldly hope. The disciples had such a dream, and Christ cureth it by those threatenings: Mat. xxiv. 6, 'Ye shall hear of wars, and rumours of wars; nation shall rise against nation,' &c.

But enough of England's danger; and to prove that it is in a great measure God's language to us, 'Thus will I do unto you.'

2. England's duty: 'Prepare to meet thy God.' Which let us all set upon.

[1.] We are all concerned. God taketh it ill when we do not meet him in his wrath, and prevent him in his judgments: Ezek. xiii. 5, 'Ye have not gone into the gaps, neither made up the hedge for the house of Israel to stand in the battle in the day of the Lord.' God besiegeth the church with judgments, to try the watchfulness and valour of his people. Our standing in the gap is by humiliation, invocation, and repentance. If you oppose the Lord, it must be with spiritual weapons of his own choosing and appointing. So Ezek. xxii., 30, 'I sought for a man to stand in the gap, and found none.' He threateneth, to prevent the execution.

[2.] You are involved in the common guilt till you take this course: 2 Cor. vii. 11, 'You have approved yourselves clear in this matter.' The whole church was not guilty of incest. We contract a share and fellowship in the common guilt, unless we mourn for it and wrestle with God; you enter your protest and dissent before the Lord. But especially this concerneth you, the representative body of this nation; you that should be the repairers of the breaches. Zech. iii. 3. Joshua, the high priest, the public officer and ruler of the nation, stood before the Lord in filthy garments, as representing the people's iniquity. Magistrates and ministers are most concerned. The measures of the sanctuary were double to other measures: 'Prepare to meet your God.'

(1.) Get the sin stated, and the great cause of the breach between us and God. You had need advise about it. See where the business

sticks; otherwise we shall chop logic with God, as the carnal Jews did: Mal. iii. 7, 'Even from the days of your fathers ye are gone away from mine ordinances, and have not kept them: Return unto me, and I will return unto you, saith the Lord of hosts: but ye said, Wherein shall we return?' Knowledge of a disease is a good step to the cure. It was Cæsar's complaint of the Britons, It is harder to find them out than to vanquish them. There must be a searching and trying before returning: Lam. iii. 40, 'Let us search and try our ways, and turn unto the Lord.' It is a very critical business to us that are blinded with lusts and interests. I observe, in our humiliation either we fling dirt in one another's faces, and one party accuseth another; what one is for, another condemns; or else we take up customary terms and superficial acknowledgments, or pitch upon sins by the by: Amos ii. 4, 'For three transgressions of Judah, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof, because they have despised the law of the Lord.' There be many sins, and yet one main one. The Corinthians were guilty of foul disorders, yet, 'For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep,' 1 Cor. xi. 30. If the right cause of God's displeasure were truly and impartially stated, we should soon see where our business lieth. I doubt it is not the work of a private person; he hath not skill, and his testimony would be more liable to suspicion; if he should alone bear the burden of such a discovery, he would be made a reproach. If many of the most judicious and godly-wise were called together for such a work, it would be very acceptable to the Lord, and comfortable to the nation: Hos. v. 15, 'I will return to my place till they do acknowledge their offence.' Trouble will pursue till this be done, till we plead guilty, and humble ourselves as a people that have such a burden upon them.

(2.) Make your own peace with God; for till then you are never fit to pray or act for the public good of the nation with any hopes of success.

(3.) Promote a sound well-tempered reformation in the land. Promote God's interest, protect his truth and servants against those that malign and hate them, and all endeavours to a thorough reformation.

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