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*The Guilt and Danger of such a Nation as this!*

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A  
**S E R M O N**

Preached in the Parish Church of

*St. Mary Woolnoth,*

On **WEDNESDAY, FEB. 21, 1781.**

The Day appointed for a

**GENERAL FAST.**

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By **JOHN NEWTON**, Rector.

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*The Lion hath roared, who will not fear? the Lord God hath  
spoken, who can but prophesy, Amos iii. 8.*

Humana sed mens nescia modum ponere

Rebus, secundis intumet successibus.

Quò plura hominibus contulit bonitas Dei,

Occæcat animos altior securitas,

Vanoque fastu turgidos superbia

Stimulat inanis.

BUCHAN. Jephth.

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**L O N D O N.**

Printed for J. BUCKLAND, in Pater-noster-Row, and J.  
JOHNSON, in St Paul's Churchyard. 1781.

T O T H E I N H A B I T A N T S

Of the Parishes of

S T. M A R Y W O O L N O T H ;

A N D

S T. M A R Y W O O L C H U R C H ;

This Sermon is respectfully addressed

By their affectionate Servant

In the Gospel,

J O H N N E W T O N.

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JEREMIAH V. 29.

*Shall I not visit for these things, saith the Lord?  
And shall not my soul be avenged on such  
a Nation as this?*

**T**HREE times\* the Lord God repeats by his Prophet, this alarming question. Their ingratitude and obstinacy were so notorious, their sins so enormous and aggravated, the sentence denounced against them, however severe, was so undeniably just, that partial as they were to themselves, God is pleased to appeal to their own consciences, and to make them judges in their own cause. Inviting or rather challenging them to offer any plea, why his forbearance and patience which they had so long despised, should be still afforded them!

But the form of the question will not permit us to confine the application to Is-

\* Jer v. 9. chap. ix. 9.

rael or Judah. The words are not, *On this nation* particularly, but *On such a nation as this.* The Lord the Governor of the earth has provided in the history of one nation, a lesson of instruction and warning to every nation under the sun. And the nearer the state and spirit of any people resemble the state and character of Judah, when *Jeremiah* prophesied among them, the more reason they have to tremble under the apprehension of the same or similar judgments.

God brought Israel out of Egypt with an outstretched arm, divided the Red-sea before them, led them into the wilderness by a cloud and pillar of fire; fed them with manna, and gave them water from the rock. He planted them in a good land, and though they often sinned and were often punished, they were distinguished by many tokens of his presence, and effects of his goodness, above any other nation. In the time of *Solomon* they possessed the height of human prosperity, but they soon rebelled and involved themselves in increasing troubles. And, though the efforts and examples of *Hezekiah* and *Josiah* produced a temporary reformation, and procured a temporary respite; they went on, upon the whole, from bad to worse, till the measure of their iniquity being filled up, and the season of God's long-suffering at an end, he directed the march of *Nebuchadnezzar* against them, who, because he was the appointed instrument of divine ven-

vengeance, could not fail of success. The temple and city of *Jerusalem* were burnt, the land desolated, the greater part of the inhabitants destroyed, and the survivors led captives into a far distant land.

We likewise are a highly favoured people, and have long enjoyed privileges which excite the admiration and envy of surrounding nations. And we are a sinful, ungrateful people, so that when we compare the blessings and mercies we have received from the Lord, with our conduct towards him, it is to be feared we are no less concerned with the question in my text than Israel was of old. This is the point I purpose to illustrate as suitable to the design for which we are at this time professedly assembled.

Though the occasion will require me to take some notice of our public affairs, I mean not to amuse you with what is usually called a political discourse. The Bible is my system of Politics. There I read that the Lord \* reigns, that he doth what he pleaseth † in the armies of Heaven and among the inhabitants of the Earth. That no ‖ wisdom, understanding, counsel or power, can prevail without his blessing. That as § righteousness exalteth a nation, so sin is the reproach, and will even totally be the ruin of any people. From these and other maxims of a like import, I am learning to be still and to know that he is God. My part as a minister of the gospel  
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\* Psal. xcvi. 1.      † Dan. iv. 35.      ‖ Prov. xxi. 30.  
§ Prov. iv. 84.

of peace, is not to inflame, but, if possible, to soothe and sweeten the spirits of my hearers; to withdraw their attention from the instrumental and apparent causes of the calamities we feel or fear, and to fix it upon sin, as the original and proper cause of every other evil. As a peaceful and a loyal subject, I profess and inculcate obedience to the laws of my country, to which I conceive myself bound by the authority of God's command, and by gratitude for the civil and religious liberty I possess. For the rest, political disquisitions, except immediately connected with scriptural principles, appear to me improper for the pulpit at all times, and more especially unseasonable and indecent on a day of public humiliation. I hope we are now met not to accuse others, but to confess our own sins;—not to justify ourselves, but to plead for mercy.

May it please God therefore by the influence of his holy Spirit to impress the consciences of all present, and to make us attentive to our own immediate concerns; while I endeavour,

I. Briefly to delineate the state of the Nation; or to shew you, what a Nation this is!

II. To consider in what manner the righteous Judge and Governor of the Earth might justly avenge himself of such a Nation as this.

III. To

III. To enquire, whether there be any hope that such a Nation as this can yet escape the impending ruin with which it is threatened? and if there be, in what way this Mercy is to be sought and expected?

I. In order to estimate the state of the nation, we must attend to two views, which, when contrasted, illustrate each other, and in their combination constitute our national character, and discriminate it not only from that of every nation around us, but from all the kingdoms recorded in the history of past ages. I mean our national privileges, and our national sins.

With regard to the first head, the peculiar privileges which by the favor of Divine Providence we have enjoyed as a people, I must be brief. A full detail of them would require a volume. Though the island of *Great Britain* exhibits but a small spot upon a map of the globe, it makes a splendid appearance in the history of mankind, and has for a long space of time been signally under the protection of God, and the seat of peace, liberty and truth. When Christendom had groaned for ages under the night of Papal superstition, the first light of Reformation dawned amongst us by the preaching and writings of *Wickliff*. From that time we have possessed the knowledge of the gospel, and God has had a succession of witnesses in our land; they have been at different periods exposed to suffering, and many of them were called to

seal their testimony with their blood, but they could neither be intimidated nor extirpated. In *Luther's* time, when the pillars of Popery were more publicly and generally shaken, we were among the first who were animated and enabled to shake off the yoke of Rome; and God has often since remarkably interposed to preserve us from being brought into that bondage a second time. The spirit of persecution under various forms has again and again attempted to resume its power, but has been as often restrained and defeated. Civil commotions likewise stand upon record in our annals, and our forefathers have felt miseries of which we can form but a very imperfect idea. But they suffered and struggled for us. The event of every contest and revolution contributed gradually to establish that happy basis of government which we call *The British Constitution*; and together with these advances in favor of Liberty, an increase of commerce, wealth, and dominion, has been afforded us. From that distinguished *Æra* the *Revolution*, and more especially since the accession of the present Royal Family, we have enjoyed such an uninterrupted series of peace and prosperity, as cannot be paralleled in the history of any nation we have heard of, not excepting even that of Israel. I call our peace *Uninterrupted*; for the efforts of rebellion in the reigns of our two last kings, were so speedily crushed, and were productive of so few calamities, except to the unhappy aggressors, that they are chiefly to be

noticed



noticed as instances of the goodness of the Lord, who, notwithstanding we were then a sinful people, was pleased to fight our battles and put our enemies to shame. I call it *Uninterrupted*, for though we have been engaged as Principals in several foreign wars, and the storm fell with dreadful weight upon other countries, we at home knew little of the war but from the public prints, which usually after the first or second year were filled with accounts of the successes and victories which the Lord of hosts (alas! by how few was he acknowledged) gave to our fleets and armies. When the last war terminated we were at the height of national honour and power. Our arms were victorious, and our flags triumphant wherever our operations had been directed in the most distant and opposite parts of the globe. What an accession of empire and riches did we then acquire, while we were sitting (if I may so speak) under our vines and fig-trees undisturbed; and while a considerable part of *Germany* rather involved, than properly interested in our disputes was almost desolated by fire and sword! And notwithstanding our increasing provocations, every succeeding year has afforded signal proofs, that, though the Lord is displeased with us, he has not yet forsaken us. If in some instances he has justly disappointed our expectations, he has in others, appeared no less remarkably in our favour, defeating the designs of our enemies, protecting our commerce, and afford-

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ing us in general more plentiful harvests at home, since the war has rendered supplies from abroad more precarious and difficult. Add to our internal peace, wealth and plenty, the inviolable immunity both of persons and property in which we are preserved by the spirit and administration of our laws: and that unrestrained liberty which people of all sentiments and denominations possess and exercise of worshiping God in the way they think most agreeable to his will. Must not a due consideration of these things constrain us to say, He hath not dealt so with any nation?

What could the Lord have done more \* for his vineyard? How could he have laid a people under stronger obligations to his service? What returns might he not expect from such a nation as this? But, alas! we have requited him evil for good! such a nation as this is very imperfectly described by an enumeration of privileges. I have a more painful task now to attend to, I should enumerate (were it possible) our National Sins. It is but a sketch I can offer upon this immense and awful subject. But enough is obvious and at hand to make us tremble, if we regard the scripture, and do in our hearts believe there is a God that governs † the earth. I wish you to keep in mind as I proceed, the slight view I have given of the favours God has bestowed upon us. The recollection of *his* mercies is necessary to give a proper sense of the coloring and aggravation of

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\* Isa. v. 4.

† Psal. lxxiii. 11.

*our* sins. It is often pleaded that sinful as we are, we are not more depraved in morals and practice than the inhabitants of *France* or *Italy*, or the other nations of Europe. I much question the truth of this plea. I am afraid that, in some instances at least, we are more corrupt and profligate than any nation now existing. But admitting that *France* or *Italy* equal, or even exceed us in open and positive wickedness, if they fall short of us in advantages for knowing the will of God, if they are not equally enriched by the bounties of his providence, if he has not so signally appeared on their behalf as he has on ours, their sins, however enormous or numerous, are not attended with equal aggravations; we must fix upon a nation (if such could be found) that is upon a par with us in the blessings of gospel light, of civil and religious liberty, before we can properly form a comparison, or have any just reason for supposing that our sins are not greater than theirs.

The magnitude of our national debt is a frequent topic of conversation. We have indeed but an indistinct idea of a number not very far short of two hundred millions, yet we can form some conception of it. But our national debt of sin, is beyond all the rules and powers of arithmetical computation. The holiness, authority and goodness of God, (which are infinite) afford the only proper measures by which to judge of the horrid evil of the sins committed against him.

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The sin of a nation is properly the aggregate or sum total of all the sins committed by every individual residing in that nation. But those may be emphatically called *National Sins* which, by their notoriety, frequency or circumstances, contribute to mark the character or spirit of one nation, as distinct from another. It is to be hoped that some species of sins amongst us are not yet become national. They are rather exotics not perfectly familiarised to the soil, or prevalent in every part of the land. I shall confine myself to a few of the particulars which are more directly characteristic of this nation, and at this time.

1. The maxims and usage generally prevalent among a people, if contrary to the rule of God's word, are national sins. If customary, they are national; if inconsistent with the precepts of scripture, they must be sinful. A woe is denounced \* against those who call evil good, and good evil; but this dreadful abuse of language, sentiment, and conduct, can only be avoided by making the inspired writings the standard of our judgment. In a land that bears the name of Christian, adultery is deemed gallantry, murder, in some cases, is a point of honor, avarice is prudence, profuseness wears the mask of generosity, and dissipation is considered as innocent amusement. On the other hand, meekness is accounted meanness of spirit, and grace is branded with the approbrious names of melancholly and enthusiasm. Habituated from our  
infancy

\* Isa. v. 20.

infancy to the effects of these prepossessions, and more or less under their influence, very few of us are duly sensible how utterly repugnant the spirit and temper of the world around us is to the genius and spirit of the Christianity we profess. It would, I think, appear in a much more striking light to an intelligent and unbiaf-ed observer, who, upon hearing that *Great Britain* was favored with the knowledge of the true religion, should visit us from some very remote country with a view of sharing in our advantage. If I could make the ~~tour~~ <sup>tour</sup> of the kingdom with such a stranger, and shew him what is transacting in the busy, and in the gay world, in city, court, and country; if I could describe to him the persons he would see at our theatres and public places, at Newmarket, at contested elections, and explain the motives and aims which bring them together. If I could introduce him into the families of the great, the reputed wise, and the wealthy; from these data, together with the ignorance and licentiousness of the populace, which must unavoidably engage his notice wherever he went, I apprehend he would not be long at a loss to form a tolerable judgment of our national character. And if after this survey, he was attentively to read the New Testament, I think he must allow that, admitting it was a revelation from God, our national character was neither more or less, than the union and combination of our national sins. He could not but perceive that infidelity, pride, sensuality, greediness of gain, strangely cou-  
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pled with thoughtless profession, contempt of God, and a daring opposition to his will, constitute the leading features of our portrait as a nation.

2. If there be sins, which though not expressly enjoined, are authorised, and to people who regard man more than God, rendered in a manner necessary by the sanction of legislature, these, and especially in a free country, may be deemed national sins. Here I feel myself embarrassed. As a private member of society, full of respect and reverence for the authority to which by the providence and will of God, I owe a willing and thankful subjection, I could wish to be entirely silent. But I likewise bear another character. As a minister of the gospel I stand here before a higher Master. In his service I am commanded to be bold and faithful, and I dare not in conscience, especially at such a time and on such an occasion as this, wholly suppress my sentiments. But I wish to speak with all the tenderness and delicacy the subject will admit.

In this land of liberty the measures of government and of parliament are canvassed with great freedom. Often indeed with a very offensive intemperance and indecency. It is however, one important privilege of our happy constitution, that British subjects have a right of presenting respectful petitions either to the throne or to the senate, when such measures are in contemplation, as are apprehended may prove detrimental to the interests of the nation or of individuals. A right which  
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upon the ground of real or pretended grievances has been abundantly exercised of late years. But it is long since the honor of God and the interests of true religion have been the objects of an address or petition from any corporate body in the kingdom. This indifference of all parties to the cause of God, when all are so attentive and feeling in cases where they think their own temporal concerns affected, warrants one to consider the acts of the legislature while no alteration is desired by those on whom they are binding, as the acts of the whole nation. Even the edicts of an arbitrary prince whose will supplies the place of law, might involve a nation in guilt, if he enjoined what was contrary to the commands of God, and they through fear obeyed him. Much more then may laws, made by the representatives of a free people, be considered as acts of the community, if they excite no constitutional endeavour for relief.

I am far from supposing that any of our laws now in force were formed with an intention of promoting sin. But some of them, through the prevailing depravation of morals amongst us do it eventually. For instance, the *Test and Corporation Acts*, which require every person who has a post under government, or a commission in the navy or army, to qualify himself for his office by receiving the sacrament of the Lord's supper, would occasion no sin, if men were generally influenced by the fear of God, or even by a

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principle of integrity. They would then rather decline places of honor or profit, than accept them upon such terms, if they were conscious that their sentiments or conduct were repugnant to the design of that institution. But as the case stands at present, while gain is preferred to godliness, and the love of distinction or lucre is stronger than the dictates of conscience, we frequently see professed infidels and notorious libertines approach the Lord's table as a matter of course, and prostituting the most solemn ordinance of christianity to their ambition or interest. The great number and variety of appointments civil and military, which cannot be legally possessed without this qualification, render the enormity almost as common as it is heinous. If the Lord be a God of knowledge he cannot be deceived. If he be a God of truth and holiness he will not be mocked. I am afraid we have been long guilty of a contemptuous profanation of the body and blood of Christ.

The multiplicity of Oaths which are interwoven into almost every branch of public business involves thousands in the habitual guilt of Perjury, which perhaps may eminently be styled *Our* national sin. Many of them, it is true, do not necessarily lead to sin, because honest and conscientious men may and do strictly observe them; but it is to be feared, the greater number deliberately and customarily violate these solemn obligations, and take them as often as imposed without hesitation, and without



without any design of complying with them. Not a few of these oaths are either so worded or so circumstanced, that it is morally impossible to fulfil them; and if a person was even to attempt it he would be thought a busy-body or a fool. Yet they must be tendered, and must be taken as a matter of form, when nothing more is expected or purposed on either side. The number of church-wardens and constables, who are yearly sworn, is very great; and as these offices are chiefly held by rotation, in the course of a few years, they take in a considerable part of the middling-people in the kingdom. How many or how few of them act up to the letter and the spirit of the oaths they have taken, will be known in the day when the secrets of all hearts shall be revealed. But it is *now* evident, that, while some like sheep tread without thought in the path of custom, content to forswear themselves because others have done so before them; and while some are hardy enough to trifle with God and man for profit, the laws which enjoin and multiply oaths do thereby furnish and multiply temptations to the sin of perjury. To this source we may ascribe much of that profligacy and contempt of religion, which we now are called to mourn over. The frequency of oaths, the irreverent manner in which they are administered, and the impunity with which they are broken, have greatly contributed to weaken the sense of every moral obligation

gation, and to spread a dissolute and daring spirit through the land.

Where the laws have expressly interposed to enforce the commands of God, if they are suffered by general consent to lie dormant, and are not carried into execution, the enormities which flow from such connivance, come under the denomination of natural sins. The prophanation of the Lord's day, drunkenness, prophane swearing, are contrary, not only to the precepts of scripture, but to the laws of the land; and yet could hardly be more prevalent if there were no statutes in force against them. As these evils are not apparently detrimental to the revenue or to commerce, they are seldom taken notice of, except when connected with some act of trespass or injury to individuals. Very few magistrates are concerned to enforce the observation of these laws, and if private persons sometimes attempt it by information, they meet but little success, they obtain but little thanks. The arts of pleading, the minutiae and niceties of forms are employed to entangle and discourage *them*, and to skreen offenders. Their endeavours are usually treated as officious and impertinent, and they are stigmatized with the invidious name of *informers*. In their own cause they are allowed to be active; but a man must have a good share of resolution, or rather of divine grace, who can withstand the reproach and scorn he will bring upon

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upon himself, if he dare to be active in the cause of God.

My subject, alas, is almost boundless! But our time prescribes limits to my discourse. I must, however, hint my apprehension, that acts of oppression and violence, in some parts, (at least) of our widely extended settlements, have contributed to enhance and aggravate our national sin. If the welfare and the lives of thousands have been sacrificed to the interest of a few; if the ravages of cruelty and avarice, tho' notorious and undeniable, have met with no public censure or punishment, may we not expect that God himself will avenge the oppressed and plead their cause, not only against their actual oppressors, but against the community that refused to hear their cries and redress their wrongs.

I am pained likewise to observe how little the calamities of war, and the shedding of blood are laid to heart. War, when most necessary and unavoidable, is a dreadful evil; one of the most severe scourges with which the Great God visits a sinful world. But, because we, thro' his mercy, know no more of it at home than by what we hear of the sufferings of others; to their sufferings, if we account them enemies, the hearts of many are unfeeling as a stone. They contemplate with composure and apparent satisfaction, not only the horrors of a field of battle, but the devastations, flames, rapes and murders, which too often mark the progress of conquest, or the retreat  
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of disappointed rage. May the Lord God keep such miseries far from us! May we never have to say, As we have heard, so we have seen. But there is a temper and spirit too prevalent amongst us, which calls for humiliation: A thirst of revenge, an eagerness for war, as affording opportunity for pillage and plunder, and an indifference to the distresses of our fellow creatures, more answerable to the idea we form of the savages in *America*, than to that of a civilized and christian people.

If we consider the nation with a more particular respect to the profession of religion amongst us, the prospect is equally dark. Though the articles and liturgy, which are still retained as a public standard, express the doctrines and spirit of the reformation, the truths upon which they are founded are sunk into disrepute. They are heard from few pulpits, they are to be met with in few books of modern divinity. The ministers who have courage to preach agreeably to their required subscriptions are discountenanced and slighted, if not openly opposed. In a word, the gospel of Christ, the truth as it is in Jesus, is little known amongst us, and where it is published, is rejected by a great majority of every rank. Yet, by the mercy of God, it has been considerably revived and spread amongst us of late years, and (I hope) is still spreading. There is a remnant amongst us who sigh and mourn for the abominations of the times, and have a humble and awful sense of the

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the judgments of God declared against sin. They see black clouds gathering apace around us, and their hearts tremble at the apprehension of what he may justly inflict upon such a nation as this. But even among the people of different denominations who profess the truth there is much to be lamented, Alas! What sinful conformity to the world! What coldness and indifference where we ought to be warm, and what unchristian heat and fierceness in enforcing or exploding lesser differences in sentiment or in modes of worship. May we not fear lest for the abatement of christian love, the violence of party-spirit, and the abuse of religious liberty, the Lord should visit his professing people with a rod, even tho' he were still to exercise patience towards the nation at large?

Let us then, having premised this brief but awful delineation of our present state, proceed to consider,

II. What we have just reason to expect, if the Lord should speak to us in his displeasure, and avenge himself of such a nation as this? Two obvious topics offer themselves to assist our enquiries.

I. What we learn from scripture, and from general history, of God's usual methods in the government of the world. He avenged himself on the old world dy a deluge; on *Sodom* and *Gomorrab*, by fire from heaven. Where are now the mighty empires which once extended over a great part of the earth? The

*Assyrian,*

*Assyrian, Persian, Macedonian, and Roman governments, arose and perished in succession. What were Cyrus, Alexander, and other conquerors, whose victories decided the fate of nations, but instruments of divine vengeance? The sins of the people against whom they went, and a secret commission from the Lord of hosts, directed their march, and ensured their success. He has appointed a day when he will judge the world in righteousness, but the award of that final tribunal will be personal, to each one according to his works. Communities, as such, in their collective capacity, are visited and judged in the present life. And in this respect, the scripture considers nations as individuals: Each having an infancy, growth, maturity and declension. Every succeeding generation accumulates the stock of national sin, and there is a measure of iniquity which determines the period of kingdoms. Till this measure is filled up, the patience of God waits for them, but then patience gives way to vengeance.*

Such has been his uniform procedure from the earliest times, of which either sacred or profane history afford us any information; and undoubtedly a day will come when the prosperity of this nation will cease. May it be at a yet very distant period! But there are alarming symptoms of decay already visible upon us. When God is exceedingly displeas- ed with a people, it is not necessary in order to their punishment that he should bury them  
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alive by an earthquake, or destroy them by lightning. If he only leave them to themselves, withdraw his blessing from their counsels, and his restraint from their passions, their ruin follows of course; according to the necessary order and connection of causes and effects. The destruction of *Jerusalem* affords a striking proof and illustration of this remark. Our Saviour foretold that the calamities of that siege would be greater and more aggravated than had ever been known from the creation; and infidels must confess, that the relation of *Josephus*, who was an eye-witness of that catastrophe, exhibits such scenes of distress, as cannot be paralleled in any other history. Yet the *Roman* armies, which were led on by an invisible hand to accomplish the prediction, were not headed by a *Nero*, or a *Caligula*, whose savage disposition and thirst of blood might have prompted them to unrelenting slaughter; but by *Titus*, who for his singular moderation and clemency, obtained the title of, *Deliciae humani generis*, the friend and delight of mankind. He desired not their destruction, he entreated them to have pity on themselves; but in vain, they were judicially infatuated, and devoted to ruin. If God gives up a people to the way of their own hearts, they will, they must perish. When a general corruption of morals takes place, when private interest extinguishes all sense of public virtue, when a profligate and venal spirit has infected every rank and order of the state, when presumptuous

ous security and dissipation encrease, in proportion as danger approaches; when, after repeated disappointments, contempt of God and vain confidence in imagined resources of their own, grow bolder and stronger; then there is reason to fear, that the sentence is already gone forth, and that the execution of it is at hand.

2. The progress of our public affairs for some years past, too evidently confirms these general principles, brings the application home to ourselves, and loudly warns us what we are yet to expect, if we persist in hardening ourselves against the Lord. How rapid the change we have seen! From what small beginnings to what extensive consequences! The cloud which now overspreads the heavens with blackness, was not long since no larger than a man's hand. I suppose none who were actively concerned in our public commotions during their early stage, had the least apprehension that things would have proceeded to such calamitous and diffusive extremities. But sin abounded, and the Lord was displeased. Thus we may easily account for every mistake and miscarriage; for the first rise, and the long continuance of the war. The connection between us and the *Americans* was too nearly founded in relation, too closely cemented by mutual interest, to be so suddenly broken, if their sins and ours had not concurred in operation to bring distress both upon them and us. After a great expence of treasure and blood, instead  
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of the re-union we hoped for, we have been successively involved in war with *France, Spain, and Holland*. And it is possible, that every power in *Europe*, either is, or soon will be, openly or secretly against us. Nor can I omit, upon this occasion, the unprecedented violence of the late dreadful hurricanes in the *West Indies*. Tho' infidels and petty-reasoners will doubtless labour to persuade themselves that they proceeded merely from natural causes, christians, I trust, will acknowledge the voice of God speaking, and speaking to us out of the whirlwind. It is true, he spoke by them to our enemies likewise, for they likewise are sinners. May both they and we be humbled before him, and learn, that as sin instigates and arms us to destroy each other, so when he is pleased to take the work into his own hands, he can strike such a blow, as shall for the time suspend our feeble hostilities, and by involving us in a common calamity, make us, notwithstanding our enmity, the objects of mutual commiseration. *The Lord's hand is lifted up* \*: this part of an ancient prophecy is fulfilled in our view; the next clause, *They will not see*, is, alas! fulfilled likewise, by the amazing insensibility and infatuation which still prevails among us: It follows, *But they shall see*. . . . What still greater evils may overtake us, before this clause also is accomplished to the glory of God and our due humiliation, who can say? Alas! who that loves his country,

\* Isa. xxvi. 11.

but must tremble at the prospects of the judgments yet impending over us, if he should still proceed to plead his own cause, till he is fully avenged on such a nation as this! To relieve my thoughts, I gladly hasten to enquire,

III. Whether there be any hope that such a Nation as this may yet escape deserved ruin; and if there be, in what way this mercy is to be sought and expected? I confess I have little hopes of it but upon one or the other of the following suppositions.

1. If the Lord be graciously pleased to succeed the professed design of this day's service, and to put forth that power which accompanied his message by *Jonah* to *Nineveh*, so that a general spirit of repentance and humiliation may spread throughout the land—If he bow the hearts of both rulers and people, to confess and forsake those sins which have awakened his displeasure—If the laws which concern his honour, will, and worship, be speedily and impartially enforced; and profaneness and immorality discountenanced and suppressed—If, instead of trusting in fleets and armies, we acknowledge the Lord of hosts, and look up to him for a blessing—If men \* fearing God and hating covetousness are raised up to assist in our councils, and to stand forth in their country's cause; men, who will rely on his guidance and protection and disdain the little arts and intrigues, on which alone short-sighted poli-

\* Exodus xviii. 21.

politicians depend for the success of their measures. Should I live to see such a happy internal change, I should hope that notwithstanding our great provocations, the Lord whose mercies are infinite, would be yet intreated for us. That he would turn from the fierceness of his anger, maintain our tranquility at home, and, by his wisdom and his influence over the hearts of men, put an honourable and satisfactory end to the unhappy war in which we are engaged.

2. However the bulk of the nation may determine, if the remnant who know his name and have tasted of his love, should be deeply impressed with a concern for his glory, and forsaking their little animosities and party-interests, should unite in application to the throne of grace, and be found in those duties and practices which their profession of the gospel, and the state of things around them require, there is yet hope. For the prayers of God's people have a powerful efficacy. The holy and benevolent importunity of *Abraham* would have prevailed in favour even of *Sodom*, if ten righteous persons had been found in it †. When *Sennacherib* invaded *Judea*, had overrun the greatest part of the country, and thought *Jerusalem* would be an easy conquest: *Hezekiah*, though he took such precautions as prudence suggested, did not defeat him by arms, \* but by prayer. In the prayers of true believers is our best visible resource. These are the  
the

† Gen. xviii.

\* Isa. xxxvii.

the chariots and horsemen of Israel. United prayer, humiliation of heart, a mourning for sin in secret, and a faithful testimony against it in public, will more essentially contribute to the safety and welfare of the nation, than all our military preparations without them. We boast of our navy, and it has often proved by the blessing of God our bulwark. But how easily can he who walketh upon the wings of the wind, dash the best appointed fleet to pieces against the rocks, or sink it like lead in the mighty waters! We boast of our troops, but he can easily cut them off with sickness; give them up to a spirit of discord, or impress them with a sudden terror, so that the stoutest hearts shall tremble, and the mighty warriors turn pale and drop their weapons! A thousand unforeseen events and contingencies are always at his disposal, to blast and disappoint the best concerted enterprizes; for that the race is not necessarily sure to \* the swift, nor the battle to the strong, is not only asserted in the scripture, but confirmed by the experience and observation of all ages. But his people are precious in his sight, and their prayers he will hear. Unknown and unnoticed as they are in the world, he highly values them. He has redeemed them by his blood. He inhabits them by his Spirit. He has prepared heaven for them, and the earth itself is continued for their sakes, and shall be destroyed when they are all removed from it. They are the  
light,

\* Psalm xxxiii. 16, 17. Eccles. ix. 11.

light, the \* salt, the strength, and the safety of the nations among which they are dispersed. Except the Lord of hosts had left a small remnant † of thee among us, we should long ago have been as *Sodom*, and made like unto *Gomorrab*. To his attention to *their* prayers and concerns, I doubt not the preservation of this city at the time of the late horrible riots may be ascribed. I wish I could now recal to your minds, the emotions which some of you then felt, when your countenances bore a strong impression of your inward anxiety. Those terrors came upon you unexpectedly, and though they are forgotten by too many, scenes equally distressing may present themselves before you are aware. O may he in mercy animate this remnant, now to stand in the breach as one man, and to wrestle for a sinful land. Then we may at least arise to the hope of the *Ninevites*, Who can tell but the Lord may turn from his fierce anger, that we perish not § ?

Let me now close with an address,

1. To such of you in this assembly as fear the Lord. A part of you are a poor and afflicted people, and by your obscure situation in life, are precluded from a very distinct knowledge of the causes, the present effects, and possible consequences of the war. You live in a happy ignorance of what passes in the world, and take no part in the disputes, which, in many places, ensnare and embitter the spirits even of pro-

\* Matt. v. 13, 14.

† Isa. i. 9.

§ Jonah iii. 9.

professors of the gospel. Your principles inspire you with sentiments of duty to government, with the love of peace, and with a just sense of the value of your privileges, civil and religious. But tho' you are poor, and can serve your country in no other way, you may serve it effectually by your prayers. You have access to the throne of grace. Intercede therefore for a land that lieth in wickedness, be concerned for the honor of his name, for the blindness and misery around you. It may be the Lord will be entreated of you. and for your sakes, and the sake of such as you, command the destroying angel to stay his hand.

Those of you who have better opportunity of knowing the state of our public affairs, have likewise a more extensive sphere of service. You will, I hope, improve your influence in your families and connections, and, by your advice and example, endeavour to awaken all with whom you converse to join in promoting the design of this day's service. I call upon all who have ears to hear, and eyes to see the voice and the hand of the Lord, the rich and the poor, the young and the aged, to be faithful, circumspect, and zealous in your several stations.

Should wrath be decreed, and there be no remedy, at least you shall prevail for yourselves. You shall know that the Lord whom you serve is a strong-hold in the day of trouble, and is mindful of them who put their trust in him.

You

You can hardly be too much alarmed for the nation, but for yourselves you have no just cause of fear. We are commissioned to say to the \* righteous, It shall be well with him. The Saviour to whom you have fled for refuge has all power in heaven and earth. He will keep you as the apple of his eye, and hide you under the shadow of his wings. He can screen you from evil, tho' thousands and ten thousands should suffer and fall around you. Or if he appoints you a share in suffering, he will be with you to support and comfort you, and to sanctify all your troubles. His word to you is, When you hear of wars and rumors of wars see that † ye be not troubled. Fear not them who, at the most, can but kill the body. The light of his countenance is sufficient to cheer you in the darkest hour, and your best interest, your everlasting inheritance is safe beyond the reach of enemies, in a kingdom ‡ (how unlike the kingdoms of the earth!) which cannot be shaken. Your life is hid with Christ in God; and || when Christ, who is your life, shall appear, then shall you also appear with him in glory. Thither neither sin nor sorrow shall be able to follow you. Then your sun shall go down no more, and the days of your mourning shall be ended. In patience therefore possess your souls. Be not moved by appearances, but remember all your concerns are in the hands of him who loved you,

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\* Isa. iii, 10.

† Matt. xxiv. 6.

‡ Heb. xii. 28.

|| Col. iii. 3, 4.

and gave himself for you. Let those who know him not tremble when he ariseth to judgment and to shake terribly the earth ; but do you sanctify the Lord God \* in your hearts, make him your fear and your dread, and he shall be to you for a sanctuary ; and in a little time he will come to receive you to himself, and to wipe all tears from your eyes.

2. But what can I say to the rest of the congregation. Tho' we are all met in the same place, and outwardly engaged in the same service, so that, to the eye of man, we may appear as one people, animated with one and the same desires, the eye of the searcher of hearts sees and notices a real and important distinction amongst us. He draws with infallible certainty the line of separation. He knows who are truly on his side, whose hearts † are tender, who are afraid of his judgments, and are mourning for their own sins, and the sins of the nation. And he knows and sees that too many here, have neither his fear nor his love abiding in them. You may comply with an outward form, and abstain from a meal, but you neither abstain from sin, nor desire to do so. To-day you look serious, and by your presence seem to assent to the confessions which have been made, and the prayers which have been offered in your hearing. To-morrow, I fear, will shew that all your semblance of seriousness was but hypocrisy ; and that,

\* Isa. viii. 13, 14.

† 2 Chron. xxxiv. 27.



that, tho' you drew nigh to God with your \* lips, your hearts were far from him. But be not deceived, God will not be mocked. You have contributed largely to swell the measure of our national sin; herein you have been hearty and persevering. Do not think that the lip-service of a single day will make any alteration either in your state or in your guilt. Rather that pretended humiliation, by which you act towards God as if you thought † he was altogether such a one as yourselves, is an aggravation of your wickedness, and no better than affronting him to his face. Yet I am glad of an opportunity of speaking to you. Oh! that I could prevail on you to seek him in earnest, while he is to be found. You cannot serve, or love, or trust him, unless you be born again. But Jesus is exalted to produce this change in the heart of a sinner, by the power of his holy Spirit, and to give faith, repentance and remission of sins. Could I convince you of this, the rest would be easy. Then, feeling your wants and misery, you would ask mercy of him, and asking you would surely receive; for he has said, Him that cometh unto me, I will ‡ in no wise cast out. O Lord, do thou convince them by thine own power! Open the blind eyes, unstop the deaf ears, and turn the stony heart into flesh.

Till this be done, you are neither fit to live, nor fit to die. What will you do in a day of  
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\* Mark viii. 6.

† Ps. l. 21.

‡ John vi. 37.

public calamity should you live to see it, if you should be despoiled of your earthly comforts, and have no share in the consolation of the gospel? But should the Lord answer prayer and prolong our national prosperity; still you must be ruined unless you are saved by grace. For what will you do in the hour of death? This is inevitable, and may, for ought you know, be very near. If I could assure you of peace and wealth for the term of a long life, still without the peace of God, and an interest in the unsearchable riches of Christ, you must be miserable at the last; and lie down in sorrow.

But O that we may rather with one consent, search and try our ways, and turn to the Lord from whom we have so greatly revolted. To us indeed belongeth shame and confusion of face, but to the Lord our God belong mercies and forgivenesses though we have rebelled against him.

F I N I S.

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