

THE PRESENT CRISIS.

A SERMON DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE.

MR. GLADSTONE COMMENDED THIS SERMON
AS STRIKING AND POWERFUL.

"I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offence, and seek my face: in their affliction they will seek me early."—Hosea v. 15.

We shall this morning use our text first in reference to our national troubles, for the words were originally spoken with regard to the national troubles of Israel and Judah; secondly we shall use it reference to our personal trials as believers; and then, thirdly, in its relation to the personal trials of the unconverted. Lessons may here be learned instructive in each of the three cases. May the Holy Ghost speak the truth home to the heart.

I. And first with regard to our present national troubles.

I desire to speak of these things as before God in all sincerity and simplicity. I know it is impossible to touch upon such a subject without being suspected of political bias, but I can truly declare that from all such partiality I desire to be freed, that I may not speak as a partisan, but as the servant of the living God. Calmly and solemnly would I speak words of soberness and truth and justice. It is a burden to my heart to speak a hard word of my own beloved country, and if I seem to do so it is not in wantonness, but because of a pressure upon my conscience which will not let me be silent.

Surely no one will deny that our country is passing through a season of great and grievous adversity. We have been perplexed for many months, and even for years with perpetual rumors of war. For a long time no man knew when he went to rest at night, but what the journal of the morning would inform him that our nation had plunged into war with one at least of the great powers of Europe. Our policy has been such, whether wise or unwise, that we have been constantly on the verge of conflict.

In addition to this we have been actually engaged in two wars at the least; was certainly expensive and questionably expedient. In these two conflicts it was impossible for us to gain honor, since they were cases of the mighty assailing the feeble. Laurels gained from nations so far inferior to us would have been unworthy of a place upon the brow of a brave nation. We have invaded one country and then another with no better justification than the law of superior force, or the suspicion of future danger. Disaster has followed upon the heels of disasters, and at the end of it all there are great expenses to be met. Our acts of aggression must be paid for, not only with the blood of the soldiers, but with the sinews and sweat of our workmen. Results of industry, which ought to have gone to support the arts and promote the comfort and advancement of the race, have been thrown away in wasteful feats of arms. The food which should have fed our children has been flung into the mouth of the lion to be devoured by war, that its evil spirit may become yet more ravenous. Willful waste, it is to be feared, will be followed by woeful want, unless God in his mercy shall interpose. We have meddled in many things, and have threatened at least three of the great quarters of the globe either with our fleet or our armies. Nothing could content us till we had drawn the sword against a brave though savage people, whose fighting may well be fierce, since it is for their invaded fatherland. These wars, whatever their issue, are serious calamities.

On the back of all this war has come depression in trade. Everywhere there is complaining and not without cause. Even the most cheerful of men, who have always been rejoicing when others have lamented, begin to look at last very serious, and to own that the times are threatening. Striving tradesmen wonder whether they shall be able to "provide things honest in the sight of all men." Many a man now plans and labors, but his care and toil earn but a scant reward. All trade is dull, and some trade is dead.

As if all this were not enough, the heavens refuse to assist the processes of husbandry. For the most part the crop of hay, so needful for the cattle, may be regarded as lost, and now the great peril is upon the corn. In some places the corn is too backward to have suffered much at present, but in others the prospect is dark indeed. It seems certain that a continuance of this constant rain must deprive us of the most precious fruits of the earth.

In the first matter that of a warlike policy, we may by God's goodness make a

change. It may be possible that ere long better principles will come to the front, and we may no longer be made to appear as a nation of snarlers and growlers, breathing defiance, and delighting in war. God grant it speedily! But as to the two other matters, what can we do? We are powerless to quicken trade, we are certainly powerless to stay the bottles of heaven. If God wills it, the clouds will gather from day to day, and drench our fields with their pitiless downpour. Deluge will follow deluge till the corn shall rot in the fields, if God so determines. Prayer is therefore desired, and well it may be. But by some prayer is desired as if it were quite certain that if certain pious words are repeated, rain must necessarily cease and the weather become favorable. I am not quite so sure. Let prayer be offered by all means, but only under certain conditions can it prove effectual. I know of many reasons why it may be possible that such prayers as are likely to be offered will not be heard, but instead thereof, the threatened judgment of God may nevertheless come upon us. I desire, this morning to speak about prayer in the way of warning, lest men should place an unwise confidence in the formality of reading a form of prayer in churches, or uttering extempore formalities in meeting-houses. Few men believe more thoroughly in the power of real prayer than I do, and I have tested and proved it in many remarkable ways so fully, that I can have no doubt as to its efficacy, but heartily magnify the name of our prayer-hearing God. But still we must use our understandings, lest we be deceived, and come to expect what we shall not receive. I would call to your recollection the fact that under certain circumstances, God does not answer prayer. Our text says, "I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offence;" and, if this be the case, there will be no answering prayer till repentance is manifested. Sometimes the heavens are brass, even to good men, and their cries reverberate and come back into their own ears, not without a blessing to themselves, but still without any visible reply as to the people for whom their intercessions were offered. It is not every sort of prayer that God will hear, for he saith by his servant Isaiah, "When ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you; yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear; your hands are full of blood." (Is. i. 15.) Intercession is sometimes useless, for Jeremiah tells us, "Then said the Lord unto me, though Moses and Samuel stood before me, yet my mind could not be toward this people." (Jer. xv. 1.) Ezekiel also warns us that the presence of the godly may not at all times avert judgment, for thus saith the Lord, "Son of man when the land sinneth against me by trespassing grievously, then will I stretch out my hand upon it, and will break the staff of the bread thereof, and will send famine upon it, and will cut off man and beast from it; though these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job were in it, they should deliver but their own souls by their righteousness saith the Lord God." (Ezek. xiv. 13, 14.) David, doubtless, prayed earnestly that he might escape from the chastisement of his sin when he numbered the people, but it could not be removed. He had a choice of three evils, but one of the three was inevitable. When God has come to this pass with a people that he must and will smite them, prayer is their only resource, and even that may fail to avert the threatened stroke. A child may have so transgressed that his father may feel bound to punish him, and then he will not spare the rod because of his crying. I pray God that the rain may cease, but if it should be continued it will not be because the Lord cannot help us, or has ceased to answer prayer. Here is the secret of it all, and with trembling do I quote the words: "Behold the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear; but your iniquities have separated between you and your God and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear. For your hands are defiled with blood." (Is. lix. 1-3.)

Remember, too, that not only may God withdraw himself in anger, but it may be his determination to punish a people out of a far-seeing design for their good. Perhaps, as a nation, we have had too much prosperity. Ease and plenty have begotten pride and luxury, and these may have weakened the spirit of the nation. I would not wish ill to my country, but if our fellow-men will not remember God except in adversity, adversity itself might be desired by the kindest heart. In our text, God declares that he will not give audience to his erring people, but will retire into his secret

place until they acknowledge the offence and seek his face. It may be so with our nation at this time, and if it be we need to be exhorted to something more than public prayer; there is need of a work more thorough and more difficult than the public use of a devotional form.

But saith one, "We hope we shall have national prayer." I hope so, too; but will there be a national confession of sin? If not, how can mere prayer avail? Will there be a general desire to do that which is just and right between man and man? Will that be a declaration that England's policy is never to trample on the weak, or pick a quarrel for her own aggrandizement? Will there be a loathing of the principle that British interests are to be our guiding-star instead of justice and right? Personal interests are no excuse for doing wrong; if they were so we should have to exonerate the worst of thieves, for they will not invade a house until their personal interests invite them. Perhaps the midnight robber may yet learn to plead that he only committed a burglary for fear another thief should take the spoil, and make worse use of it than he. Does the footpad stop a passenger on the road for any other than his own interests? When our own interests are our policy, nobility is dead and true honor is departed; but I fear that only a minority are of this mind. Will the nation repent of any one of its sins? Will it settle itself down like the people of Jerusalem during the great reign of Ezra's time, and do that which is right in the sight of God? Remember what they said in that day: "The people are many, and it is a time of much rain, and we are not able to stand without, neither is this a work of one day or two: for we are many that have transgressed in this thing." If stern reformation went with supplication, I am persuaded that prayer would prevail; but while sin is gloried in, my hopes find little ground to rest upon.

But will there be general prayer? No, there will not. I speak sadly, but I speak no more than the truth. There are numbers among us who say that prayer is of no use with regard to the winds and the clouds, for certain laws govern the weather, and prayer cannot affect those laws. These men, therefore, will not pray, and there are multitudes of others of like spirit whose atheism is practical though it is unavowed. How, then, can prayer be general, when such vast numbers utterly disregard it? But what of those who are supposed to pray; are all these men of the Elias stamp, whose fervent prayer could open or shut the windows of heaven? We dare not put much confidence in the prayers which will be offered. Will they be offered in faith by a tenth of those who will repeat them? I wish I could hope so. By many, the public prayer will be regarded as absolutely ridiculous, and by many more as a mere matter of form, which it is proper to use, but in which no confidence whatever can be placed.

What, then is to be done? This much is to be done. All hope for a country lies in the true believers who dwell therein. Remember Sodom, and how it would have been spared had there been ten righteous men found therein, and know that ye also are the salt of the earth, by whom it is to be conserved. Loathe the spirit of those who say that because we are citizens of heaven, we are to have nothing to do with the concerns of men below. A more un-Christian like sentiment, a more selfish sentiment, never degraded spiritual minds. You are part and parcel of the nation, for you share in its protection and privileges, and it is yours as Christian men to feel that you are bound in return to do all you can in the midst of it to promote truth and righteousness. What then? What course should we now pursue? Let us make confession of sin on behalf of the people, as Moses and Jeremiah and Daniel did aforetime. You may not consider that to be sin which I judge to be so; but, my brother, you see sin enough all around you of one sort or another. Take it to yourself, and as the high priest went into the holy place to plead for the people, so act you as a priest before God, in your quiet personal devotions. Confess the sin of this nation before God. If it will not repent, repent for it. I believe that a country can never have a larger blessing, a truer safeguard for the present, or a firmer security for its future greatness, than a band of praying men and women who make mention of it before the throne of God. English history from the first day till now is as full of instruction as the history of Israel from Egypt even to Babylon. Did you ever read Cowper's wonderful description of the care which God has taken of this little island, how he has favored and protected it?

When all the nations were in arms against it they could not touch its shore, for God was there; and on the other hand the Lord has laid us low, and made us suffer, when we have boasted of our fleets and armies. Our nation has been as much under the peculiar and especial providence of God as were the descendants of Jacob themselves, and therefore God deals with us as he does not deal with other nations. The smothering of black men with smoke in the caves to which they had fled, the burning down of human habitations, and the hunting of men as if they were wild beasts, is a greater iniquity with us than it would have been in savages, or even in Papists or Mahomedans. Our religion is higher, nobler, purer than theirs; and we ought to be ashamed to act as they do. Bloodshed by some nations God winketh at, for they know but little better, but a country which has in it the very sun of the gospel shining in the fulness of its strength should set to the world an example which it can follow, and, if it does not, it may expect to have trouble after trouble and blow after blow from the hand of God.

Thus have I spoken what was burdening my heart; make what you will of it, it is the warning of an honest lover of his country, who fears the Lord and fears none besides. Judge me to have spoken with political bias or not, and censure me as you choose, I could say no less, or I would gladly have held my peace. Before God I am clear in this thing of any attempt but an upright one. May God grant that my feeble protest may touch the hearts of those who ought to feel its truth. I am not very sanguine that it will be so, for we have fallen upon evil times, and the heart of the people has waxen gross.

II. And now, secondly, let us view the text in reference to OUR PERSONAL TRIALS AS BELIEVERS.

Brethren and sisters, let us now commune with one another concerning the ways of God with our own souls. The Lord will not cast off his people; notwithstanding their faults they are his own children, and they shall be his children for ever. But when his children sin, God is sure to chasten them for it. "You only have I known of all the people, therefore will I punish you for your iniquities."

When chastisements are of no avail, withdrawal follows. The Lord has promised that he will not forsake his people, nor will he utterly do so, but there are withdrawals which are not included in that promise. God may so hide himself from his servants that they may have no conscious fellowship with him, no enjoyment of his Word, no power in prayer; in fact, they may pray and he may shut out their prayer.

When these withdrawals of God are painfully felt, then we should be in most eagerly to search out the sin which has caused them; for sin is at the bottom of it all. Hast thou restrained prayer? Confess it. Hast thou neglected the reading of the Word? Confess it. Hast thou been neglectful of thy children and thy family as to training them in the nurture of the Lord? Confess it. Has there been laxity in thy contact with the world? Hast thou given way to flippancy and levity? Hast thou been proud? Hast thou been slothful? Hast thou indulged too much in the pleasures of the table? Has thy heart set itself upon thy wealth? Then bring the idols out and let thy heart see the wounds which they have given thee, and what it is that thou hast doted on, and what these things are which have come in between thee and thy God. Surely thou wilt be ashamed of them when thou dost consider that their love is the price for which thou hast parted with thy Saviour's presence. Is this a goodly price that thy Lord was prized at by thee? Judas' pieces of silver were not more contemptible than these poor paltry bribes. Lament the treachery of thy heart and hear him ask thee, "Lovest thou me?" nor hesitate to answer, "Lord, thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee."

But, beloved, when you have obtained a sense of the sin or sins which separate you from God, and have made a full confession, then take care that you seek the Lord with hopefulness and confidence, for, notwithstanding all this, you are his child still, and must not give way to a paralyzing despair. You are married unto Christ, and there is no divorce with him, "for the Lord the God of Israel saith he hateth putting away." He will not cast off for ever nor put away his erring spouse. Come, therefore, unto him with humble confidence. He hath torn and he will heal, he hath smitten and he will bind us up. Seek his face, for his face is towards you.

The very face of God is Jesus Christ. Son of God is he in whom we see Father. Even as you see a man in countenance, so God is seen in Christ. Seek you God in Christ Jesus, for the good shall come unto you.

To be out of fellowship with God is the heart to be in a state of spiritual disease. Things must be wrong with when we are wrong with God. When we do not walk in the light, as God is in light, there is some evil in the eye of soul. Dread the evil, and cry for healing. To be away from God is to be in a state of spiritual weakness. Samson may shew himself as at other times, but he can do no deeds of strength when the Lord is departed from him. God is our strength and God's hiding makes us weak as water. If the Lord should leave us we cannot plead with him and prevail, nor can we plead with men and win them for Christ. Our strength has departed, both towards God and towards man, when our fellowship with God is suspended.

III. And now my time is almost spent indeed I have but a few minutes to use the third head, and I would therefore speak few words, but speak them very earnestly indeed. We shall now think of THE PERSONAL TRIALS OF THE SINNER. O you that are unconverted, if God means to save you, he will before long begin chastening you in body or in mind. You will have trouble. You are a wandering sheep, and God will send his black dog after you to fetch you to the fold. If your trouble does not do it, you will have another, and another, and another. Perhaps I speak to some who, as the result of providential chastenings, and the work of conscience on their spirit have already been aroused; let them take heed of trifling with their awakenings. After that earnest sermon, or after reading that stirring book you did begin to pray, but your desire and feelings have now subsided. I would have you greatly grieve over this. Let me warn you that God may withdraw himself from you altogether. Some have been sitting in this Tabernacle now for years from whom I fear God has withdrawn himself; for you used to feel much moved by the gospel, but it is not so now. You would not come when you were called and admonished, but you revolted more and more, and now mercy is growing weary of you. You were smitten again and again, but you still rebelled, and now God says, "Let him alone." This is a more terrible calamity than you suspect; unless it be averted it will be your ruin.

God himself must heal you, or you will never be healed. He who has broken your heart must give you comfort or you will never have any. Hasten to your chamber at once, and then upon your knees cry out unto God with the prayer of faith. Be not content with your own sense of sin. Do not say, "I am getting on, for I have felt my guilt." No, your sense of sin may be but the first drop of a shower of eternal remorse. Get away to God in Christ, and rest not till you are there. Oh, if I had the power to put this into fitting and forcible words, I would implore every man and woman that I look upon not to live without God. He made you, and you cannot be happy without him. While he is angry with you, you cannot be at peace. He bids you come to him. The smitings of his providence are meant to separate you from the love of sin, and drive you to your God. In Jesus Christ the great Father stretches out his arms to you and says, "Come now, and let us reason together: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." Believe in Jesus and live. "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near; let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." God bless you, my beloved friends, for his name's sake. Amen.

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