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Book 12





REV. DR. THOMPSON'S
FAST DAY SERMON,

APRIL 3, 1862.





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MILITARY SUCCESS FROM GOD.

A

S E R M O N,

PREACHED IN THE

ELIOT CHURCH, ROXBURY,

FAST DAY, APRIL 3, 1862,

BY

A. C. THOMPSON, D. D.



BOSTON:

PRESS OF T. R. MARVIN & SON, 42 CONGRESS STREET.

1862.

Roxbury, April 8, 1862.

REV. A. C. THOMPSON, D. D.

Dear Sir,—We listened to your Fast Day Sermon, given at the united service of the Dudley Street Baptist, Vine Street, and Eliot Congregations, with great interest and satisfaction. Desiring to have opportunity, ourselves, for a thorough perusal, and to give it a wider field of usefulness, we respectfully solicit a copy for publication. We regard the Discourse as being replete with sentiments eminently fitted to promote, in our community, a holier patriotism, and a firmer trust in the God of battles.

Very respectfully and affectionately yours,

HENRY HILL,	E. A. HOVEY,
ALVAH KITTREDGE,	J. H. LESTER,
WM. A. BOWDLEAR,	D. B. RISING,
J. S. ROPES,	J. WARREN TUCK,
JOSIAH S. TAPPAN,	H. P. SHED,
C. B. PEVEAR,	H. G. CROWELL.

Roxbury, April 10, 1862.

GENTLEMEN :

The Sermon, of which you speak so kindly, is at your disposal, for the purpose named. No man is at liberty to withhold any contribution, however slight, which he can consistently make, to the cause of Christian patriotism, in a time like this.

Very respectfully, yours,

A. C. THOMPSON.

Messrs. HENRY HILL,
ALVAH KITTREDGE,
W. A. BOWDLEAR,
and others.

S E R M O N .

2 CHRONICLES XIV. 11.

AND ASA CRIED UNTO THE LORD HIS GOD, AND SAID, LORD, IT IS NOTHING WITH THEE TO HELP, WHETHER WITH MANY, OR WITH THEM THAT HAVE NO POWER: HELP US, O LORD OUR GOD; FOR WE REST ON THEE, AND IN THY NAME WE GO AGAINST THIS MULTITUDE. O LORD, THOU ART OUR GOD; LET NOT MAN PREVAIL AGAINST THEE.

NEARLY one thousand years before our Saviour, the third king of Judah, whose name is here mentioned, came to the throne. He was an honest, resolute, sagacious man; after the type and with the spirit of David. He did that which was right in the sight of God.

Great disorders prevailed at his accession. He devoted himself to correcting these, rooting out idolatry and its attendant evils, replenishing an exhausted treasury, consolidating the government, securing internal unity and strength, and bringing the army into a more satisfactory condition than it had ever been before. The efficiency of his forces and of his faith was put to a severe test. From

the South there came up an immense host of Ethiopians, headed by Zerah; whose army numbered nearly twice as many as that of Asa. They met in the vale of Zephathah, on the borders of the Philistines, who of course sympathized with these Southern invaders. What was to be done? "Asa cried unto the Lord his God, and said, Lord, it is nothing with thee to help, whether with many, or with them that have no power: help us, O Lord our God; for we rest on thee, and in thy name we go against this multitude. O Lord, thou art our God; let not man prevail against thee." What was the result? "The Lord smote the Ethiopians before Asa, and before Judah; and the Ethiopians fled. And Asa, and the people that were with them, pursued them unto Gerar: and the Ethiopians were overthrown, that they could not recover themselves; for they were destroyed before the Lord, and before his host; for the fear of the Lord came upon them."

That no possible room might be left for misapprehension as to the source of Judah's success, "The Spirit of God came upon Azariah, the son of Oded; and he went out to meet Asa, and said unto him, Here ye me, Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin: The Lord is with you, while ye be with him; and if ye seek him, he will be found of you;

but if ye forsake him, he will forsake you." That victory was from the Lord, in answer to prayer; and military successes, with civil prosperity, may always be expected according as a people obediently and prayerfully look to God.

This is a day for prayer on our part. Although usage has made it an anniversary, there is a present demand for supplication quite beyond any period through which the generation now living has passed. Recent achievements of the Federal arms do not remove occasion for fasting, humiliation and prayer. The end is not yet of those offenses which brought the judgment of civil war upon us, nor of the contest itself; still less of the grave questions and responsibilities which must attend and ensue upon final adjustment. The local affairs of our City and Commonwealth give place in every one's thoughts to the great National issues which are pending. That we must look to the Lord our God for success, is the very evident subject thus brought before us, which will be discussed in a manner as simple as the theme is obvious, and with a view to promote the great object of the day, humble, earnest, united petitions.

Now that our force on land and water has attained such proportions, equipment and disci-

pline; now that our line of military operations exceeds that which any Government ever had occasion before to contemplate, equaling one-fifth of the circumference of the globe; now that throughout that whole circuit of five thousand miles—a coronal of roaring artillery, gleaming bayonets, and eyes flashing with the fires of loyalty—success attends almost every movement of the girdle of terror while contracting and consolidating around rebellion; it is natural that all eyes should fasten upon this seemingly irresistible agency; that we should look for triumph as a certainty, and in some measure lose sight of our dependence upon Almighty God. Such a tendency is favored by theoretical as well as practical skepticism, in regard to special providence and the efficacy of prayer. This unbelief cuts the very sinews of supplication, and exposes to all the calamities suggested by Azariah when he said to Asa and Judah, “If ye forsake Him, he will forsake you.”

No teaching of God’s word is plainer than that he maintains a universal, minute and constant superintendence over the affairs of earth; a superintendence embracing the operations of nature, together with the conduct and all the affairs of men. While his is a government of laws, we believe there is among those fixed laws no statute more legible

than that they are all so related, are adjusted to such nice interacting, as that every particular occurrence shall come to pass without interference, yet often to appear as if by special interposition. We believe that among the firmly established ordinances of heaven is this, that prayer, individual and social, shall have power; that events shall occur or not occur according as voluntary, appropriate supplication is or is not offered. We never think of asking God to change or suspend his laws; they are so wonderfully arranged—and here is a broad, characteristic law of laws—that no appropriate petition shall fail of its influence, and that none of his gracious intentions come short of fulfillment. The great wonder of all providence, and solution of all prayer is, that God so governs the world as, without change or miracle to bring about such marvelous results. What unreflecting men term chance, is only the unknown Ruler; an accident, so called, is his ordinary still small voice raised louder.

In the practical affairs of life and of religion, are two extremes to be avoided. One is an indolent enthusiasm which, ignoring outward means, is sheer presumption. To pray without putting forth suitable effort, is renouncing one set of God's established laws; is to ask a miracle in behal.

of impertinence, and is a low insult to the Supreme Ruler. We must do what is required, if we venture to ask what we hope. Mohammed, over-hearing one of his followers, with whom he was encamping, say, "I will loose my camel, and commit it to God," suggested, "Friend, tie thy camel, and commit it to God."

The opposite extreme—one much more frequent—is that prudence so common, which, ignoring Providence, refuses to pray at all. This atheistical sagacity is apt to be quite self-complacent, and to make merry in a kind of sly wit at the expense of those who reverently recognize God's government as extending to all his creatures and all their actions. It bandies the military maxim, that God always helps the heavy battalions. King Asa and some other divinely taught generals hold, "Lord, it is nothing with thee to help, whether with many, or with them that have no power." At the engagement in the vale of Zephathah there were a million of men, with three hundred chariots of war,—an army double in number, and no doubt better disciplined and equipped than that of Judah; yet was it completely overthrown. God did not help the heavy battalions then, nor those of Sennacherib or of Shishak; nor of Pharaoh at the

Red Sea. It was neither the heavy battalions of Midianites nor Israelites that God helped. "And the Lord said unto Gideon, The people that are with thee are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel vaunt themselves against me, saying, Mine own hand hath saved me." Gideon's army of two and thirty thousand had to be reduced to three hundred before it was small enough to make it appear beyond all question that their victory came from God. Important as is the question of numbers, armor, discipline and position, there is a weightier question: With whom does God side? The grand strategic movement which won victory for Asa was his cry, "Help us, O Lord our God, for we rest on thee; and in thy name we go against this multitude."

The greatest results often depend upon apparently trivial causes—upon circumstances against which no human foresight or resources could provide. It is so on the field of battle, so in political affairs. A smooth stone from the brook, or a bow drawn at venture, may decide the result of an action. A war that continued many years, and in which nearly all the chief men engaged on both sides were cut off, arose from the shoot-

ing of a camel that had drunk at a forbidden well. It was staying to drink one draught of water that lost Lysimachus his kingdom. How trivial was the incident which precipitated one of the later French revolutions, the consequence of which is a changed aspect in the political affairs of Europe. Certain concessions were demanded from Louis Philippe. An obnoxious ministry resigned. That seemed to give universal satisfaction, and quiet the capital. There was no purpose of dethroning the monarch. In the evening of the same day, a procession of peaceable citizens was passing the quarters of the ministers, where a body of troops were stationed. At the moment of their passing, a gun in the hands of a soldier was accidentally discharged, wounding the horse of the commandant. Supposing the shot to have come from the citizens, he ordered his men to fire upon the people, when twenty of them fell dead, and forty more were wounded. Soon was the cry raised, "Down with the King." That accidental shot dethroned the monarch, introduced the republic, and cleared the way for the reigning emperor. The case of the Mortara boy at Bologna has had not a little to do in hastening subsequent revolutions and as we hope the regeneration of Italy.

More potent than the single bullet is the single

ballot sometimes. One vote sent Oliver Cromwell to the Long Parliament, and Charles Stuart to the scaffold. The Hanoverian succession was carried by one vote, as was the Reform Bill of 1831. It is within the memory of us all, that one vote in the legislature of Indiana elected a certain man to the United States Senate. In the last named body—to which that individual belonged—one vote determined the annexation of Texas, provoked the Mexican war, and had its influence in bringing on the contest which rages at this time in our land.

Now the falling sparrow, the hairs of our heads, and each projectile in war are under the eye and fulfill the appointment of Heaven. Well did King William of glorious memory use to say, “Every bullet has its billet.” We see that results of the greatest magnitude stand connected with events in themselves most trivial. Indeed it would seem that in all great movements of society and actions in the field, as in the career of every individual’s life, there is some one moment and some one circumstance on which the whole turns.

We are thus helped to understand, and are impressed by the fact that, as God makes so much to depend upon slight causes, in the natural, the

political, and the military world ; as he can, with such perfect ease, change the whole current of affairs, so may he in the moral, the spiritual world. Yes, the silent petition of some poor widow, or some praying child in this congregation to-day, may decide an issue on Chesapeake Bay, on the Rappahannock, or the Mississippi, more important than any that has yet occurred since the war commenced. It is perhaps hardly probable, yet for aught that appears to the contrary, Asa was the only one who “ cried unto the Lord his God, and said, Lord, it is nothing with thee to help, whether with many, or with them that have no power : help us, O Lord our God ; for we rest on thee.” That prayer routed a million of men. What achievements would there not be in wielding this mighty engine of supplication, were there only faith in its efficacy, and each one prized aright the privilege, and felt the responsibility pertaining to him !

Two extremes have been spoken of—indolent presumption, and undevout activity. There is a golden mean ; it is to pray as if all depended upon prayer ; and then exert ourselves as if all depended upon effort. In the course of one chapter of his proverbs, Solomon says : “ The hand of the dili-

gent maketh rich ;” and “The blessing of the Lord maketh rich.” So far from being contradictory, these mutually confirm each other. If God do not bless, diligence is of no avail ; and on the other hand, his favor may not be expected or sought, if diligence be not employed.

Now with respect to the affairs of our country, the first thing desired by all loyal hearts—and from such only can acceptable prayer arise, for “If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me ;” and is there a greater iniquity than treason !—the first thing desired, is a satisfactory close to this civil war. No termination can be deemed such, without a complete removal of armed rebellion from every inch of United States’ domain, be it land or water, be it cotton or corn-growing soil. But in enabling our Government to effect that, how broad is the margin of circumstances which Providence may order more or less auspiciously, according as prayer shall be offered or withheld ! Whether the contest is to be brought to a speedy close, or protracted for many months, if not years ; whether every remaining strong post shall be fiercely contested, or be yielded in a panic-stricken evacuation ; whether thousands of loyal soldiers shall yet fall in conflict, and other thousands by sickness, or not ; are points concerning

which we may well send up petitions to the Great Arbiter of events.

Assuming a successful conclusion to the struggle, there arise many questions, in thoughtful minds, with respect to the character, the subsequent course and influence of our own returned soldiers; and the dominant state of feeling in that wide region which has been scathed by insurgent falsehood, false alarm and barbarizing hatred. New and vexing questions relative to readjustment, to alterations in the fundamental law of the land, and pre-eminently to the stupendous, all-related evil of slavery, will demand perhaps more wisdom and self-sacrifice than any juncture of our history hitherto. But into all these affairs the elements of unlooked-for difficulty or facility are now gathering, and will doubtless be apportioned somewhat in accordance with present prayer.

Specially important is also the question, What will be the influence of this struggle upon our national character? When more immediate and obvious results have been attained, what will be the permanent, resulting impress, as seen in the future life of the nation? This is of unspeakably greater importance to us and to other countries than any problems of finance, or of a purely

social and political nature. The early reign of king Asa was marked by the waking up of the people to a new consciousness of their mission, by a reform in morals and manners, and by a revived religious sentiment. Shall such happy results be witnessed among us? Providence never makes disproportionate preparation, nor uses excessive means; and it is not to be supposed that God is subjecting us to such an ordeal as the present one, without a sufficient reason in the past, and an adequate object in the future. It is idle to deny that greed of gain, luxuriousness, an ostentatious, vain-glorious spirit have characterized us; that genuine public spirit and integrity had declined; that men of principle and ability were more and more withdrawing from active political life; that patriotism had nearly died out; that corruption and decay had come in fearfully upon the general Government, and that the national conscience had become torpid. Shall these evils only be aggravated, and others perhaps added to the unlovely catalogue? Are we to become a military people; grow more reckless and insolent than ever; put on finery, and airs, and impudence in the great drawing-room of nations; bluster among our neighbors, and wink at fillibustering generally? or shall we acquire somewhat of self-

knowledge, and modesty, some new appreciation of right, some higher and nobler aspirations? Shall uprightnes, loyalty, magnanimity henceforth characterize people and government?

“ What constitutes a State ;
 Not high-raised battlement, or labored mound,
 Thick wall or moated gate ;
 Not cities proud, with spires and turrets crowned ;
 Not bays and broad-armed ports,
 Where, laughing at the storm, rich navies ride ;
 Not starred and spangled courts,
 Where low-browed baseness wafts perfume to pride.
 No : Mex, high-minded men,
 With powers as far above dull brutes endued
 In forest, brake, or den,
 As beasts excel cold rocks and brambles rude ;
 Men, who their duties know,
 But know their rights, and knowing dare maintain,
 Prevent the long-aimed blow,
 And crush the tyrant while they rend the chain ;
 These constitute a State ;
 And sovereign Law, that State’s collected will,
 O’er thrones and globes elate
 Sits empress, crowning good, repressing ill.”

God has placed us in the severe seminary of war. It remains for us to improve the discipline by humiliation, fasting and prayer—prayer that we may learn profounder lessons of subordination to law, firmer maintenance of right, and a more unselfish devotion to the public good.

There is a question yet higher and more distinctively Christian: What are to be the religious results? An eminent writer has said, "Civil wars leave nothing but tombs." Shall the struggle in which we are now engaged be attended and followed only by devastation? Shall demoralization become general? Shall a tendency toward irreligion and barbarism be strongly developed? It would seem that, on the part of rebels, loyal citizens of the United States and prisoners are often treated as only felons should be; that with the spirit of the savage and the jackall, even graves are rifled, and that too for purposes at which the aborigines of our land might blush. The war of the revolution left our country in a deplorable condition, religiously. Infidelity and intemperance were rampant. The war of 1812, and that with Mexico, had a deteriorating effect. The fact that our existing conflict is so different in its origin, and in the issues at stake, does not of itself simply insure us a blessing. Is there no danger that we shall rest upon the clear and mere justness of our cause, deeming success a certainty, proudly regarding ourselves as special favorites of Heaven, and scornfully looking upon all rebels as the only sinners in the land? If so, God will scourge us with something worse than

civil war. A good cause may be injured, indeed may be ruined, by the delinquencies of its supporters ; and that is the most disheartening of calamities. Prosperity is often more disastrous than previous peril.

Some years after their victory over Zerah, good king Asa and the people of Judah appear to have lost ground in patriotic and religious character : “ At that time Hanani the seer came to Asa king of Judah, and said unto him, Because thou hast relied on the king of Syria, and not relied on the Lord thy God, therefore is the host of the king of Syria escaped out of thine hand. Were not the Ethiopians and the Lubims a huge host, with very many chariots and horsemen ? yet, because thou didst rely on the Lord he delivered them into thine hand. For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him. Herein thou hast done foolishly : therefore from henceforth thou shalt have wars. Then Asa was wroth with the seer, and put him in a prison-house ; for he was in a rage with him because of this thing. And Asa oppressed some of the people the same time. And Asa in the thirty and ninth year of his reign, was diseased in his feet, until his disease was exceeding great ; yet

in his disease he sought not to the Lord, but to the physicians." Of Uzziah, one of his successors, we read: "He was marvellously helped till he was strong; but when he was strong, his heart was lifted up to his destruction; for he transgressed against the Lord his God."

Physiologists tell us there is a period in youth when the character of the constitution is determined, and on which its future sanity revolves. In our youthful life, as a people, we have probably reached that point. It can hardly be otherwise, than that from this epoch, onward, our national character will assume a more distinctive and permanent type. What shall it be? What peculiar signature shall this contest leave upon the present generation, and transmit to generations yet unborn? Shall our remaining life be a sickly, waning existence, yielding little comfort to ourselves, and less to other nations? Or shall we, God helping us, apprehend our mission for this continent and the world; lay out ourselves for the great work of fortifying free institutions; publishing the blessed gospel; and thus, beyond any other nation, become a glory and blessing to mankind? That is to be determined, mainly, by the sincerity and earnestness of our cry, "Lord, it is nothing with thee to

help, whether with many, or with them that have no power: help us, O Lord our God; for we rest on thee, and in thy name we go against this multitude.”

It is possible for Him—we devoutly desiring it—to make this outbreak the greatest blessing to us, and to the world, since our Lord and Saviour came to send a sword and kindle a fire. During the siege of Sebastopol, a Russian shell, burying itself in a hillside, opened a spring. A stream of pure cold water bubbled forth, and continued to supply the allied troops of that neighborhood. God caused the first shot thrown at Fort Sumter to unseal a fountain which has flowed strong and refreshing to the present hour. He can make every deadly missile yet to be thrown, on either side, too, a messenger of mercy. In order to that, prayer must give it range.

My friends—friends of three neighboring churches—from our united devotions here, let us go to our private abodes still to pray. At the appointed hours, let us assemble in our respective places of associated supplication, in humble reliance upon the mercy of God through the Great mediating High Priest.

And where a beloved Pastor retires — who now shares with us in his last public official service in this city, and who carries with him the hearts and devout good wishes of us all — may the Great Shepherd and Bishop of souls be especially present.*

By all the momentous national issues of the hour ; by all the anxieties of maternal and other yearning hearts in our land ; by the sighing and hoping of oppressed thousands in other lands ; by all that is commanding in true nobility of character, a vigorous, sanctified philanthropy and whole-hearted loyalty to Jesus Christ, pour out your hearts to God,—“Lord, it is nothing with thee to help, whether with many, or with them that have no power : help us, O Lord our God, for we rest on thee.”

* The Rev. Thomas D. Anderson, D. D., of the Dudley Street Baptist Church, Pastor elect of the First Baptist Church, Broome Street, New York.



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