

"PRAYER FOR NATIONAL PEACE."

~~XIX.~~

17.

A S E R M O N,

DELIVERED

IN ST. PETER'S CHURCH, CHARLESTON,

ON THE 4TH DAY OF JANUARY, 1846.

BY WM. H. BARNWELL,

RECTOR OF ST. PETER'S.

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TO THE HONORABLE JOHN C. CALHOUN,
OF WHOM SOUTH-CAROLINA HAS EVER BEEN PROUD;

AND TO WHOM,
IN THOSE EMERGENCIES, WHICH CALL FOR STERLING INTEGRITY,
GREAT TALENTS, LARGE EXPERIENCE,
AND CONSUMMATE STATEMANSHIP,
THE EYE OF THE NATION CONFIDINGLY LOOKS;

THIS DISCOURSE IS DEDICATED

BY HIS FRIEND AND FELLOW CITIZEN,

WM. H. BARNWELL.

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SERMON.

I TIM., ii. 1.

“I exhort therefore, that first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty.”

The blessings of national peace are so many, and so great, that not only Christian, but Pagan governments, have been slow to interrupt it. The sword, has been called the last resort of monarchs, and the best historian* and first orator† of the two most warlike republics of old, have recorded their praises of peace.

“*Peace on earth,*” was a part of the Angels’ song, when they announced the Redeemer’s birth; and the “*Prince of Peace,*” was one of the epithets, which was given to Him in Prophecy long before He was born. Certainly there was nothing in His teaching or in that of His Apostles, which countenanced those principles, or that spirit, which involve either nations, or individuals, in war. “*My kingdom is not of this world,*” said Jesus to Pontius Pilate, “*if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight.*” “*From whence come wars and fightings among you,*” asked St. James, “*come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members? ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not: ye ask and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts.*” Though we do not conceive the Apostle to teach here, or his Master to have taught any where, before him, that it is sinful for a Christian People, under any circumstances, to engage in war; yet, if the secret causes which have led to

* Thueydides.

† Cicero.

most of the national hostilities, that have desolated countries, could be brought to light, there is reason to think that we should be furnished with a sad illustration of another Apostle's words: "*For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.*"

The influence of rulers, whether they be "kings" or "others in authority," in deciding questions of peace and war, is immense, and in many cases exclusive. The consequences of hostilities, fall, it is true; chiefly upon the people, but the government, whose very position, usually exempts its members from personal responsibilities, is invested with the sole power of declaring, when those hostilities are to begin.

Hence, the importance of that counsel which St. Paul gives to Timothy, in the text: "*I exhort therefore, that first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty.*"

There are unquestionably, other ways in which those in authority, are to be influenced by the people, but none can compare, either as to propriety, or efficacy, with this. By "*supplications,*" the Apostle is conceived by some, here to mean, the deprecation of evil; but it is unnecessary to enter at present into any nice shades of meaning in any of the words. Suffice it, that he exhorts to the practice of earnest, grateful, intercessory prayer in behalf of all men, but especially of all in authority, in all nations.

It should increase that reasonable and intelligent attachment, to which our Church is entitled, that her Liturgy embraces all these classes. She has prescribed, prayers, not only for all conditions of men, and for the President of the United States, and all in civil authority; but in the Litany, one of the petitions is, "that

it may please Thee to bless and preserve all christian rulers and magistrates, giving them grace to execute justice and to maintain truth :” and another, “that it may please Thee to give to all nations, unity, peace and concord.”

The importance of such intercessions, at this time; must be admitted by all. War with any nation, is fraught with evil. I speak not of the cost, nor of the loss of life, nor of the suspension of the occupations of peace, nor of the agitation, into which whole communities are thrown. But I refer only to the evil influence, which a state of warfare, exerts upon the religious condition of a people. The public morals become vitiated, and private iniquities, are not only tolerated, but applauded. Stratagems, which if resorted to in peace, would be reprobated, are upheld and praised, even by the pious. The christian Sabbath, is habitually disregarded. The christian graces, are systematically abandoned. The christian ordinances, almost wholly neglected. And the christian’s God, treated with the most profane scorn.

I mean not to say, that the gospel is necessarily powerless, in a state of national warfare. But it is difficult, for those to worship the meek and lowly Jesus, the Saviour of all men, who are making every exertion, to destroy their fellow mortals.

I am fully aware, that there have been, and still are, in the profession of arms, many, whose claims to the crown of glory, which the great Captain of our salvation has promised to his faithful soldiers, can scarcely be questioned; and it is one eminent excellence, of the gospel, that it is adapted to every condition of life; bearing to heaven, the believing soldier from the battle-field, as well as the retiring female, in the walks of private life. Still, it will not be denied, that when men are bent upon destroying others, it is unusual for them, to put on the bowels of mercy; and humbleness of mind, is a rare

and despised quality in a camp. Indeed none of the fruits of the Spirit, can be expected to grow, in the uncongenial atmosphere of battle. Love, joy, peace, long suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance, how soon are they withered by the Sirocco of war.

Nor are the injurious tendencies of a state of national warfare, unexperienced by the Christian Ministry. Insensibly, they become roused to a spirit of enmity, against the enemies of their country; and learn to view with indifference, the transition of souls into eternity. The zeal for God's glory, is exchanged for an admiration of man's glory, and patriotism develops itself, no longer as a benevolent spirit, which seeks to make its country, the abode of pure religion, but as a malignant fury, which rejoices in the ruin of whole regions, the massacre of men, women, and children, and the confusion of all things, secular and sacred. The themes too, of the pulpit, during national hostilities, especially in countries, where the popular mind, readily diffuses itself through all classes of society, are apt to savor but little of that charity which "*suffereth long and is kind,*" which "*rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth.*" The spirit of Missions, which is indeed, the spirit of the gospel, ceases to influence those, who are looking upon men, not as brethren in Adam, heirs of a once pure, though now corrupt nature, and therefore to be pitied, and blessed with the means of grace; but as brute beasts, who are to be slaughtered in the speediest, and best manner, that the public convenience may require. Souls, to redeem which Christ died, are overlooked in the hurry of a national conflict, and though the enemy of man, triumphs with peculiar delight over the thousands who are, with mutual wounds, hastening each other into his regions of despair, the elect angels, strike but few anthems of joy, over penitent and converted sinners.

But if such, are some of the spiritual evils of war in general, how greatly must they be aggravated, should two such nations as Great Britain and these United States become the contending parties. I pass by their ancestral unity; I say nothing of their speaking one mother tongue; of their having, in the main, one Common Law; of their inheriting, one common literature. I confine myself wholly, to the religious view of the subject; and surely, this is vast enough, to overtask the strongest powers. As nations, we profess to worship the same God, to rejoice in the same Saviour, to look for holiness, to the same Holy Ghost, the Comforter, to adore the same Trinity. We read the same Bible, agree in general in the same grand fundamentals of the Protestant faith, live in obedience to the same divine precepts, observe the same ordinances, and look forward to the same heaven.

What two nations of the earth, ever have been more assimilated in a pure religion, than England and America? Where, on earth, shall we find a greater number of God's elect, than among the inhabitants of these two countries? Where, are there more, who enjoy an abiding evidence, that they are the children of God, and entitled to all the rich, and vast inheritance, which is stored up in glory, for the heirs of God through Christ? And are these Christians to be brought into violent collision with each other? Are these brethren in Christ Jesus, to be arming themselves, not with the panoply of God, against a common foe, but against each other, with carnal weapons of war? Are these followers of the Lamb to be glorying, not in His dove-like spirit, but in the savageness of the Lion, and the Eagle? And though they belong, to one communion of saints, and expect to enter, that general assembly, and church of the first-born, whose names are written in heaven, and to be numbered among the spirits of just men made perfect; yet, are they to enter Paradise, despatched

by each others weapons, and while their bodies, are grasped together, in the death-grapple of foes, are their souls, to begin to embrace one another, in that perfect love, which pervades the state of glory? And bound together, as the true christians of these two countries, are, by the ties of brotherly love, and striving as they are, in the noble effort to evangelize the world, must it all cease, or worse, be turned against each other? Is the time at hand, when a British, or American christian, shall be restrained, by the existence of international war, from blessing one another? Is it to be, that the ministers of the Prince of Peace, who at present, on both sides of the Atlantic, in imitation of the Apostle, exhort their brethren, to make prayers and supplications and giving of thanks, for all men, for kings, and all in authority, that they may lead quiet and peaceable lives, in all godliness and honesty, shall before long, be afraid to urge motives of peace, and press the duties of brotherly kindness, lest they be suspected of treason against their own country? And are our Missionaries in foreign parts, who in one spirit, are contending against the errors of heathendom, to be infected by this malignant fever, which under the name of patriotism, is to infuse itself, throughout these great nations; and either return home, driven away, not by Pagans, but by Christians, or be mingled in the affray which is to take place in every quarter of the globe, where their respective national flags may meet? Are the principalities and powers of darkness, who reign in almost undisputed sovereignty over the idolatrous regions of the earth, to enjoy the fiendish satisfaction of beholding, their chief opponents, retiring from the spiritual conflict, because the christians, who have sent them, are engaged in carnal warfare? Almighty God forbid it!

If christians pray as they should, I cannot believe that God will send upon these countries, so severe a scourge as war. And see, how great may be the efficacy of our pray-

ers, for those who are entrusted with the adjustment of this grave question. National pride may be awakened; national honour may be wounded; national rights may be conceived to be invaded; national treaties may be alleged to be broken; and the sword may be almost drawn. But the prayer of christians has gone up like incense to God. Their petitions are granted at the throne of grace; and the Holy Ghost is sent; not it may be, to convert from sin to holiness, the hearts of those who hold the authority in the case, but so to influence them with thoughts of peace, that they may incline to God's revealed will, and walk in His way. Every thing is changed. National pride, now consists in doing the strictest justice. National honour, will not be soothed, until it has generously acknowledged its own errors. National rights, are sacrificed at the altar of truth. National treaties are adhered to, with renewed fidelity, and the sword leaps back into its scabbard, refusing to avenge imaginary insults, while peace on earth and good will to men, are causing all holy spirits, whether on earth, or in heaven, to give glory to God in the highest.

But it is not necessary, for God in answer to our prayer, to produce peaceful intentions in the minds of those referred to, by such righteous motives as we have just described. Human policy, may be made use of in His Providence, to bring about the same results. Those who would be influenced, by no considerations of godliness, or honesty, may yet be restrained, by worldly wisdom, from pursuing a course, which would affect injuriously, their carnal projects.

But, even if our intercessions should not prove efficacious, but God, in His awful majesty, should make bare His arm, in vengeance against the wickedness of these two nations, which though blessed with the light of truth, abound in those, who prefer darkness to light, and delight in deeds, which would disgrace Paganism. What, if after all our prayers and supplications, the decree should go

forth from the Divine Council, that these nations are to engage in deadly conflict? Surely, it will be some alleviation of the great calamity, that we have done our utmost to avert it; and when the dreadful crisis shall have come, the consciousness, that we have faithfully, in our prayers, implored Almighty God, that those in authority might determine upon peace, and not war; the godly and honest conviction of our own minds, that we have earnestly sought, to live quiet and peaceable lives, will prepare us the better to do, or suffer, all that the occasion may demand.

The sword, if then drawn, will be clothed, with the olive branch of peace, and descending, as the reluctant executioner of God's judgment, which He himself declares is His slow work, a work he is loth to perform; it will blaze with the terrible brightness of truth, and cleave with the fearful keenness of justice. Or, if it be shivered in our grasp, we shall meet our doom, with the quiet and enduring confidence, of those, who, as they would scorn to triumph vaingloriously, over a fallen foe, derive more true dignity, from the manner in which they bear their reverses, than their adversaries can, from their boasted victories. Or if, after being righteously drawn, the instrument of death be again buried, not in the bosoms of opposing enemies, but in its peaceful sheath, then, like the christian father of our country, we shall return to the occupations of peace, with a reputation that has suffered no stain, and a person that has given, or received, no cruel, disfiguring wound, during the period of warfare.

But it pains me, dear friends, to speak in such terms; I cannot bear to think of the possibility of war, between these christian countries, under any circumstances. I shudder, to meditate upon the shock, which the kingdom of Christ, must feel to its very centre, should such an event occur.

I look to the pages, which record the results of former wars, between these high contending parties; and while as

an ardent lover of my country, I pretend not to hold an equal balance, in weighing the merits of either side, yet as a christian man, and minister, I should be blind not to see, and uncandid not to admit, that the influence upon religion, was certainly, in our own country, disastrous. How few of the patriots of our Revolution, died sincere and consistent christians! How many of the officers and soldiers of that, and of the succeeding war with Great Britain, fell victims to the plague of intemperance, which seemed sometimes to take delight in bringing to a dishonored grave, those who had won for themselves bright chaplets of earthly renown on the field of carnage.

How many, brought with them into the ranks of private life, that false sense of honor, which vindicates itself in personal combat, even in opposition to the laws of that very country, for which it professes, to hold itself ready, to lavish life, and treasure.

How fearfully, were blasphemy and profane swearing, which seem to be looked upon, as the necessary vocabulary of martial men, increased throughout the land. How many who had been trained up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, as the baptized soldiers and servants of Christ, became apostates from the faith, or disgraced the religion which they continued to profess. And surely it is not to the times of either war, that we are to look for divines, who were workmen, that needed not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

I say these things in sorrow, and doubt not that the same, may be said of England. Does it not become us then, to besiege the throne of grace, for all in authority there, and here, that they may deliberate, and speak, and act, in the fear of God; not listening to the clamor of a maddened populace, nor to the sophisms of ambitious debaters, nor to the haughtiness of military chieftains, but to the still, small voice, of an experienced, and enlightened conscience, to the dictates, of an enlarged, and philanthro-

phic wisdom, to the monitions, of a true regard for the best welfare, of their respective countries, to the counsels of the pious, and to the precepts of God.

What a privilege is it in times like these, to have an interest at the throne of grace; to be able to pray, with well founded confidence, that our prayers are heard; to present these "*Shields of the earth,*" as rulers are called in scripture, in our supplications before God, and beseech Him to make them, shields indeed, to protect the people from the horrors of war. How imperative is it upon us, at such times, to live in such a way, that our prayers be not hindered; to delight ourselves in God, that he may give us our hearts desire; to enjoy that assurance of which St. John speaks. "*And this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask any thing according to His will, He heareth us; and if we know that He hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of Him.*"

There is a perfect harmony in all the dealings of God; and though, we are for the present, prevented from enjoying it perfectly, yet in eternity it will burst upon our souls, with transporting exstasy. We see not, it may be, how God, whose counsels are in His own mind determined, and who has declared Himself to be unchangeable, can answer our prayers, and avert impending evils, or bestow desired good. But we can see, if we please, how God has appointed prayer, as one of the links in his chain of consequences; and it would be improper for us to inquire, what would be the result, if that link, which we are called upon to supply, should be left out. The least reflection must shew us, that while an All-wise mind, might have foreseen our omission, and provided against it, in some other way, this does not in the slightest degree, diminish our responsibility, or lessen our guilt, if we fail to do, what God has directed to be done, and promised to bless, if properly done. A battle may be lost, notwithstanding the devoted valour of a single soldier, or it may

be won in spite of his treachery, but does this at all affect his fame, if he has been faithful, or his ignominy if he has deserted? We may pray earnestly, as we are here directed to do, for all in authority; and yet, God, may have predestinated war, as his scourge upon the wicked, and war may come; or we may fail to pray, and war may not come; but will either event affect the question of our present duty? Events are not ours, and well for us they are not, for experience, must have told us, so much of our own want of wisdom, in the selection of means, and of the painful perplexity, which attends the use of them, that if it belonged to us, also to decide upon the end, to determine the event, we should be driven almost to despair, and our interest at the throne of grace, instead of being such a privilege, as even a child, might delight to possess, would be a weight of responsibility, which none but a God, could sustain.

What are we, that God, should inform us precisely, what consequences, will assuredly follow if we pray, and what, if we do not pray? Is it not enough, that He has given us the direction, that He has accompanied it with exceeding broad and precious promises? Is it not more than enough, that on former occasions, we have prayed and been blessed? Our eyes, are not sufficiently cleared of the film of earthliness, to see, in all the glory of its unrolled completeness. the awful scroll, of the divine decrees. Our ears, are not sufficiently attuned to heavenly music, to comprehend the full, and overpowering harmony, of Divine Providence. Our hearts, are not enough united to the Divine will, to have revealed to us at once, all that God means to do. We would shrink from our crosses, if we saw them all before us; and the crown of glory would be shorn of its splendour in our eyes, if the prelude, of trial, and doubt, and despondency, and agony, had all, not only to be endured in reality, but to be seen in all their distinctness, as the necessary introduction to a state

of triumph. It is wise then, it is good, it is gracious in God, that He has not disclosed to us, what is to be the immediate result of our conduct.

And so, with regard to these rumors of war, let us do our duty as christians; let us do at once, what the Apostle exhorts, and what I have endeavoured to enforce, intercede for those in whose hands, rests the tremendous issue of peace or war, between this country and Great Britain.

Nor, should our prayers be restrained by the conviction, that both nations, need the chastisement of the Divine hand. This may be true; but does not God forgive sin, when it is repented of? Does He not even speak of Himself as repenting, when the wicked repent? Have we forgotten the case of Jonah, and the repenting Ninevites? Is not true repentance God's gift? And what more likely to produce repentance, in those, who we believe are obnoxious to the Divine wrath, than for us, to repent for them, mourning over their sins, sighing over their rebellion, lamenting their hard-heartedness, and beseeching our compassionate and royal High Priest, to grant them, mercy, and grace, in this their time of need?

And then, should our prayers be heard; should they be answered; should the evils we dread, be averted; should the blessings we seek, be secured; should the relations between these countries become more friendly than ever; better understood; better cemented; better preserved; because, instead of a jealous distrust, there shall have sprung up between them, a cordial esteem, a kind forbearance, a manly generosity, a godly and honest confidence. Then, with what fresh joy shall we hail the Divine Prince of Peace, who was manifested to destroy the works of the devil. With what saint-like rapture we shall re-echo, on both sides of the Atlantic, the Angels' song, "*Glory to God in the Highest, on earth Peace, good will towards men.*"