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A

SERMON,

PREACHED IN BOSTON, JULY 23, 1812,

THE DAY OF THE

PUBLICK FAST.

APPOINTED BY THE EXECUTIVE OF THE

COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS,

IN CONSEQUENCE OF

THE DECLARATION OF WAR AGAINST GREAT BRITAIN.

.....

BY WILLIAM ELLERY CHANNING,
MINISTER OF THE CHURCH IN FEDERAL STREET.

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.....

1812



And when Jesus was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it, saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace ! but now, they are hid from thine eyes.

THESE words were pronounced by Jesus Christ, just before his death, when approaching, for the last time, the guilty city of Jerusalem. From the Mount of Olives he surveyed this metropolis of his nation, its lofty towers, its splendid edifices, and above all, its holy and magnificent temple ;—and as he looked, his benevolent heart was pierced with sorrow at the scenes, which opened on his prophetic eye. He saw this city, now so crowded, so opulent, so secure, surrounded by the armies of Rome. Instead of security, he saw terror and consternation. He saw the sword wasting without, and he saw famine within, more fatal than the sword, carrying death in the most horrid forms, into what were once the abodes of plenty and joy. He saw the invading army gradually approaching, and at length scaling the walls of Jerusalem, and weary with slaughter, calling in the aid of fire to complete the work of desolation. He saw the rapid flames lev

elling all the magnificence which was spread before him, and even seizing on the temple of God, ascending its lofty battlements, and leaving not a vestige of its consecrated altars. As he looked forward to the ruins of his country, he wept and exclaimed, Oh that thou hadst known the things which belong to thy peace !

The emotion, which Jesus now expressed, undoubtedly arose from the general benevolence of his character. He would have wept over any city, doomed to this awful destruction : but as Jesus always discovered the sensibilities of human nature, we are authorized in believing, that his grief on this occasion was rendered more poignant by the consideration, that Jerusalem was the metropolis of his country—that its ruin would be followed by the dispersion and misery of the nation to which he belonged. His tears were tears of patriotism, as well as benevolence. We here learn that it is a part of our character and duty, as christians, to be affected by the prospect of national suffering. The miseries of our country, as far as they are unfolded to us, should arrest our attention, should draw tears from our eyes, and lamentation from our lips ; should increase our interest in our native land, and rouse every effort for its security.

On this day, there is a peculiar propriety in directing our minds to this subject. This is a day, set apart for national sorrow and humiliation. It is a day, when forsaking our common pursuits, and especially forsaking our pleasures, we are to penetrate our hearts with our national danger and sins, and to offer, in the temple of the Almighty, penitential acknowledgments and earnest prayers, that he will

spare and protect our country. On this day, the calamities, which we feel or fear, should be brought home to us, that our prayers may be more earnest, our humiliation more deep, our purpose more sincere to renounce our sins, and to perform our duties as citizens and as christians.

I am sensible that on this subject—the calamities of our country—there is danger of indulging excessive apprehension. I know that the mind of man is querulous and discontented—that he is prone to turn from the bright part of his prospects, to forget his blessings in magnifying his dangers, and to say that all before him is darkness and sorrow. In speaking of our calamities as a nation, I desire not to forget that we have been a highly favoured people, and that we have still many benefits, which it becomes us to acknowledge with gratitude, and which distinguish us from other nations. When I speak of our calamities, I do not mean to say, that our state is as wretched as that of Spain and Portugal; nations overrun with armies, drenched with blood, thinned by famine;—we are not as wretched as France, sinking as she is under tyranny as galling as the world ever knew, yet forced to suppress her groans, forced to give up, without a murmur, her treasures, her children, to her merciless lord. A lot worse than ours can easily be conceived. Many fruits of our former prosperity are left us; and, with few exceptions, the inestimable blessings of liberty continue to be the honourable distinction of our country. But, whilst we acknowledge this with thankfulness, is it not true, and ought we not to feel it, that our prosperity is rapidly declining, and that dangers of tremendous aspect are opening

before us ? Why is it, my friends, that on this day you have suspended your common pursuits, and are now assembled in the house of God ? It is because our country, which has been so long the abode, the asylum of peace, is at length given up by God to the calamities of a state of WAR. Have we not cause of lamentation and alarm ?

In all circumstances, at all times, war is to be deprecated as one of the severest judgments of God. The evil passions it excites, its ravages, its bloody conflicts, the distress and terror it carries into domestick life, the tears it draws from the widow and the fatherless, all render war a tremendous scourge.

There are indeed conditions in which war is justifiable, is necessary. It may be the last and only method of repelling lawless ambition, and of defending invaded liberty and essential rights. It may be the method of preventing or repairing injury, which God's providence points out by furnishing the means of successful warfare, by opening the prospect of a happy termination. In these cases we must not shrink from war ; though even in these we should lament the necessity of shedding human blood. In such wars our country claims and deserves our prayers, our cheerful services, the sacrifice of wealth and even of life. In such wars we are comforted when our friends fall on the field of battle ; for we know that they have fallen in a just and honourable cause. Such conflicts, which our hearts and consciences approve, are suited to exalt the character, to call forth generous sentiments, splendid virtues, to give ardor to the patriot, resolution to the hero, and a calm, unyielding fortitude to all classes of the community. Could I view the war in which

we are engaged in this light, with what different feelings, my friends, should I address you! We might then look up to God and commit to him our country with a holy confidence. We might then ask his blessing on all our efforts, without being rebuked by the fear, that this holy and beneficent being views us with displeasure. It would then be my duty to revive the spirits of the drooping, to reprove the fears of the trembling, to exhort you to gird on the sword, and not count your lives dear to you in asserting the cause of your country and mankind. But, in our present state, what can I say to you? I would, but I cannot address you in the language of encouragement. I can offer you no reflections to sustain you in your calamities—no bright prospects to animate hope and to lighten the pressure of immediate suffering. We are precipitated into a war, which, I think, cannot be justified—and a war, which promises not a benefit, that I can discover, to this country or to the world. We are suffering much, and are to suffer more—and not one compensation for suffering presents itself, whether we consider the influence of the war on ourselves or on foreign countries.

That we have received no injuries from the nation, which we have selected as our enemy, I do not say—I am not prepared to deny that the orders of England are infractions of our rights,* but when I consider the atrocious and unprovoked decrees of France, on which these orders were designed to retaliate; the unprecedented kind of war, which these

* The author has wished to speak with diffidence on the subject of the Orders in Council, knowing that a diversity of sentiment on this point, exists among wise and good men in this country.

orders were designed to repel—when I consider the situation of England, that she is contending for existence, whilst her enemy is avowedly contending for conquest—and when I consider the conduct of our own government in relation to the two belligerents, the partiality and timid submission they have expressed towards the one, the cause of suspicion they have given to the other, and the spirit in which they have sought reparation from England—I am unable to justify the war in which we have engaged. To render a war justifiable it is not enough that we have received injuries—we must ask ourselves, have *we* done our duty to the nation of which we complain?—have we taken and kept a strictly impartial position towards her and her enemy?—have we not submitted to outrages from her enemy by which he has acquired advantages in the war?—have we sought reparation of injuries in a truly pacific spirit?—have we insisted only on undoubted rights?—have we demanded no unreasonable concessions? These questions must be answered before we decide on the character of the war, and I fear the answer must be against us. When I consider the restrictions formerly laid on our commerce for the purpose of pressing with severity on England, and on England alone—when I consider the demand we have made on that nation, that she shall revoke a blockade which at first we approved, and of which we did not for years make a complaint—when I consider another demand we have made on England, that she shall believe in the repeal of the decrees of France, although evidence of repeal has not been given her—when I consider our unwillingness to conclude an arrange-

ment with her on that very difficult and irritating subject of impressment; notwithstanding she professed such an one as our own minister at that court, and our present secretary of state declared "*was both honourable and advantageous to the United States*"—when I consider, what I blush to repeat, the accusation which we have brought against England without a shadow of proof, that she has stirred up the savages to murder our defenceless citizens on the frontiers—and when with all this I contrast the yielding, abject spirit with which we have borne the threats, insults, pillage, confiscations and atrocities of her enemy—I cannot say that we have done our duty, as a neutral nation, to England; that we have sought reparation in a friendly spirit; that we have tried with fairness every milder method before we made our appeal to arms—and if this be true, then the war is unjustifiable. If we have rushed into it, when we might have avoided it by an impartial and pacific course, then we have wantonly and by our own fault drawn on ourselves its privations and calamities. Our enemy may indeed divide the guilt with us,—but on ourselves, as truly as on our enemy, falls the heavy guilt of spreading tumult, slaughter, and misery through the family of God.

If on the ground of right and justice this war cannot be defended, what shall we say when we come to consider its *expediency*, its effects on ourselves and the world. It is a war fraught with ruin to our property, our morals, our religion, our independence, our dearest rights—whilst its influence on other nations, on the common cause of humanity, is most unhappy.

Do any ask, what are the evils which this war has inflicted or threatens?—we may first mention the immense loss of property to which it exposes us.—I know that property is often overvalued—and in this country, the love of it is too strong, too exclusive a passion. I do not mean to encourage this passion by deploring the loss of property as the worst of evils—*still it has its value*—and one great object and duty of government is to secure and protect it.

By this war much of our property is placed beyond our reach—shut up in the ports of our enemy—not through the improvidence of our merchants—but in consequence of a severe law of our own government—a law which had no other foundation but the pretext that France had revoked her injurious decrees.

In addition to this, the war has exposed to capture all our wealth floating on the ocean. We have chosen for our enemy a nation which commands the seas, which can block up the mouths of our harbours—and we have invited her numerous cruisers to make a prey of our defenceless ships and unsuspecting seamen, who are now returning from every quarter of the globe.

But this is not all. Still more must be lost to us by the melancholy suspension of active pursuits, which this war must induce in the commercial states. This war is a death-blow to our commerce. The ocean, which nature has spread before us as the field of our enterprise and activity, and from which we have reaped the harvest of our prosperity, is, in effect, forbidden us. We see it laving all our shores—we hear the noise of its waves—but it is our element no longer. Our ships and superfluous produce

are to perish on our hands—our capital to waste away in unproductive inactivity. Our intercourse with all foreign nations is broken off, and the nation, with which we sustained the most profitable intercourse, is our foe. Need I tell you the distress, which this war must spread through the commercial classes of society, and among all whose occupations are connected with commerce. How many are there from whom the hard earnings of years are to be wrested by this war, whose active pursuits and cheering prospects of future comfort are exchanged for discouragement, solicitude, and approaching want.

In addition to this, as our resources are decreasing, the publick burdens are growing heavier; and government, after paralyzing our industry and closing the channels of our wealth, are about to call on us for new contributions to support the war under which we are sinking. And to fill up the measure of injury, we are told, that this war, so fatal to commerce, so dreaded by the friends of commerce, is carried on for its protection. We are required to believe, that restriction and war, the measures which have drained away the life-blood of our prosperity, are designed to secure our rights on the ocean.

But loss of property is a small evil attending this war—its effect on our *character* cannot be calculated. I need not tell you the moral influence of a war, which is bringing to a gloomy pause the activity of the community—which is to fill our streets with labourers destitute of employment—which is to reduce our young men to idleness--which will compel a large portion of the community to esteem their own government their worst enemy.

Regular industry is the parent of sobriety, and gives strength to all the virtues. A community must be corrupted, in proportion as idleness, discontent and want prevail. We have reason to fear, that these temptations will prove too strong for the virtue of common minds—that with the decline of commerce, the sense of honour and uprightness in pecuniary transactions will decline—that fair dealing will be succeeded by fraud—that civil laws will be treated with contempt—that habits of dissoluteness and intemperance, already too common, will be awfully multiplied—that our young men, thrown out of employment and having no field for their restless activity and ardent hopes, will give themselves up to lawless pleasure or immoral pursuits.

Let me here mention one pursuit, which this war will encourage, and which will operate very unhappily on our character. I have said that the ocean will be abandoned—I mistake---The merchant vessel will indeed forsake it ; but the privateer will take her place. The ocean is no longer to be the field of useful and honest enterprise. We are no longer to traverse it, that we may scatter through the world the bounties of Providence. Henceforth plunder—plunder is our only object. We are to issue from our ports, not to meet the armed ship of our enemy—not to break her naval power—not to wage a war for publick purposes, a war which will reflect honour on our country, and give some elevation to our own minds—we shall go forth to meet the defenceless private merchant, and, with our sword at his breast, we are to demand his property, and to enrich ourselves with his spoils. This pursuit is indeed allowed by the law of nations ; but Christ-

ians, and the friends to publick morals, must dread and abhor it as peculiarly calculated to stamp on a people the character of rapacity and hardness of heart. Yet this is the pursuit, this the character, in which Americans are henceforth to be found on the ocean.

But all the ruinous effects of this war are not yet unfolded. To see it in its true character, we must consider *against what nation it is waged*, and *with what nation it is connecting us*. We have selected for our enemy the nation from which we sprang, and which has long afforded and still offers us a friendly and profitable intercourse—a nation, which has been, for ages, the strong hold of Protestant Christianity—which every where exhibits temples of religion, institutions of benevolence, nurseries of science, the aids and means of human improvement—a nation, which, with all the corruptions of her government, still enjoys many of the best blessings of civil liberty, and which is now contending for her own independence, and for the independence of other nations, against the oppressor of mankind. When I view my country taking part with the Oppressor against this nation, which has alone arrested his proud career of victory, which is now spreading her shield over desolated Portugal and Spain, which is the chief hope of the civilized world—I blush—I mourn. On this point, no language can be exaggerated. We are linking ourselves with the acknowledged enemy of mankind—with a government, which can be bound by no promise, no oath, no plighted faith—which prepares the way for its armies by perfidy, bribery, corruption—which pillages with equal rapacity its enemies and allies—

which has left not a vestige of liberty where it has extended its blasting sway—which is, at this moment, ravaging nations that are chargeable with no crime but hatred of a foreign yoke. Into contact and communion with this bloody nation, we are brought by this war—and what can we gain by building up its power? what, but chains which we shall deserve to wear?

Will it be said, that France, while unjust to the world, has yet, by her special kindness and good offices and fidelity to this country, brought us under obligations to become her associate.—Have we then forgotten her insulting language to our government—have we forgotten our property, which she seized in her own ports without a colour of justice—have we forgotten our ships burnt on the ocean? This is the nation with whom we are called to interweave our destinies—whose conquests we are ready to aid!

On this subject too much plainness cannot be used. Let our government know, we deem alliance with France the worst of evils, threatening at once our morals, our liberty and our religion. The character of that nation authorizes us to demand, that we be kept from the pollution of her embrace—her proffered friendship we should spurn—from her arms, stained, drenched with the blood of the injured and betrayed, we should scorn and should fear to receive aid or protection.

I have thus pointed out some evils of the war, and the question now offers, what are we to gain by it? What compensation is offered us for losses and calamities so immense? What brilliant successes are placed within our reach? Is it on the ocean or on

the land that we are to meet and spoil our foe? The *ocean* we resign to England; and, unless her policy or clemency prevent, we must resign to her our cities also. She can subject them to tribute, or reduce them to ashes. With what language shall I speak of a government, which plunges a country so defenceless into such a war? In better times, indeed, we had a growing navy, which, if fostered, might now have afforded us important aid. But, since we have made the mournful discovery, that commerce is to be protected by restriction, our navy has been suffered to dwindle into insignificance, and its poor remains, I fear, will only serve to expose our brave and hardy seamen to destruction. Is it said we can invade the enemy's provinces. But what can we gain by invasion? Of territory we have too much already. We are sinking under our unwieldy bulk. Plunder, I trust, is not to be our object; and if it be, will even the most oppressive exactions extort from these provinces as much as we must spend in conquering and retaining them? Let it be remembered too, that this conquest will cost us something more than wealth. It will cost us blood, and not the blood of men whose lives are of little worth—of men burdensome to society, such as often compose the armies of Europe. In this part of our country, at least, we have no mobs, no overflowing population, from which we wish to be relieved by war. We must send our sons, our brothers to the field—men who have property, homes, affectionate friends, and the prospect of useful and happy lives. That government will contract no ordinary guilt, which sheds such blood for provinces, which are our neighbours, which have never injured us, which

are a charge to the parent country, and can give to us no aid in the present conflict. What then have we to gain? Was ever war waged so completely without object—without end—without means—with less prospect of a happy termination?

It only remains to consider the duties which belong to us in this unhappy state of our Country—what sentiments become us in relation to God, to our rulers, and to our country. Our duties in relation to God are obvious. It becomes us to approach this righteous Governour of nations and holy disposer of events with deep humility—to acknowledge his justice in our sufferings—to confess before him our sins, and sincerely to renounce them. Whilst our indignation is called forth towards the men who have exposed us to the calamities of war, let us look beyond them to God, who on this, as on other occasions, employe human agents to punish guilty people. Who of us, my friends, has a right to send up murmurs to God? Whose heart does not accuse him of many offences? Who can look round on his country, and not see many marks of ingratitude to God, and of contempt of his laws? Do I speak to any who, having received success and innumerable blessings from God, have yet forgotten the giver?—to any who have converted abundance into the instrument of excess and licentiousness—to any who, having been instructed by the gospel, have yet refused to employ in works of benevolence the bounty of heaven—to any who are living in habits of intemperance, impurity, impiety, fraud, or any known sin? To such I would say, it does not become *you* to complain of your rulers, or of the war. *You* have helped to bring on us this scourge, to call down the dis-

pleasure of God. *You* are among the enemies of your country, and the authors of her ruin. My friends, if God be a moral governour, no individual and no nation can continue to prosper in the violation of his holy commandments. Let then this day be something more than a day of empty forms. We owe to ourselves and our country deep sorrow for our sins, and a sincere purpose that we will labour by our reformation, by our prayers and exemplary lives, to bring down a blessing on our land.

Our duties to our rulers are not so easily prescribed. It is our duty towards them to avoid all language and conduct which will produce a spirit of insubordination—a contempt of laws and just authority. At the same time we must not see, without sensibility, without remonstrance, our rights violated, and our best blessings thrown away. Our elective form of government makes it our duty to expose bad rulers, to strip them of unmerited confidence, and of abused power.—This is never more clearly our duty than when our rulers have plunged us into an unjustifiable and ruinous war,—a war which is leading down to poverty, vice and slavery. To reduce such men to a private station, no fair and upright means should be spared; and, let me add, no other means should be employed. Nothing can justify falsehood, malignity, or wild, uncontrolled passion. Be firm, but deliberate—in earnest, yet honest and just.

To those, who view the war in the light in which it has been now exhibited, one part of duty is very plain. They must give no encouragement, no unnecessary voluntary support to the war. They should leave the awful responsibility of this destructive

measure entirely with our rulers, and yield no aid (except for defensive purposes) but what the laws require. Do any of you think, my friends, that even this degree of support is not due to a government which has wantonly sacrificed our interests, and denied to some members of the national confederacy almost all the benefits which induced them to accede to the Union? I answer, that a government may forfeit its right to obedience, and yet it may be the duty of citizens to submit. Resistance of established power is so great an evil,—civil commotion excites such destructive passions,—the result is so tremendously uncertain,—that every milder method of relief should first be tried, and fairly tried. The last dreadful resort is never justifiable, until the injured members of the community are brought to despair of other relief, and are so far united in views and purposes as to be authorized in the hope of success.—Civil commotion should be viewed as the worst of national evils, with the single exception of slavery. I know that this country has passed through one civil war without experiencing the calamitous consequences of which I have spoken. But let us not forget, that this was a civil war of a very peculiar character. The government which we shook off was not seated in the midst of us. Our struggle was that of nation with nation, rather than of fellow citizens with one another. Our manners and habits tended to give a considerateness and a stability to the publick mind, which can hardly be expected in a future struggle. And, in addition to these favourable circumstances, we were favoured by heaven with a leader of incorruptible integrity, of unstained purity—a patriot who asked no glory but that of delivering his country—

who desired to reign only in the hearts of a free and happy people—whose disinterestedness awed and repressed the selfish and ambitious—who inspired universal confidence—and thus was a centre and bond of union to the minds of men in the most divided and distracted periods of our country. The name of WASHINGTON I may pronounce with reverence even in the temple of the Almighty; and it is a name which revives the sinking spirits in this day of our declining glory. From a revolution, conducted by such a man, under such circumstances, let no conclusions be hastily drawn on the subject of civil commotion.

I must now close with offering a few remarks on our duty to our country. Let us cling to it, my friends, with filial love. Though dishonoured, though endangered, it is still our country—it gave us birth—it holds our dearest friends—and such are its resources and improvements, it may still be the first of nations. Let us not forsake it in this evil day. Let us hold fast the inheritance of our civil and religious liberties, which we have received from our fathers, sealed and hallowed by their blood. That these blessings may not be lost—that our country may yet be honoured and blest—let us labour to improve publick sentiment—to enlighten publick understanding—to exalt men of wisdom and virtue to power. Let it be our labour to improve the moral and religious character of our citizens. Let us remember that there is no foundation of publick liberty but public virtue—that there is no method of obtaining God's protection but adherence to his laws.

Finally, let us not despair of our country. I have in this discourse suggested many painful views—but the design is not to depress, but to rouse you to exertion. Despondence is unmanly, unchristian. If all that we wish cannot be done for our country, still something may be done. In the good principles, in the love of order and liberty, by which so many of our citizens are distinguished—in the tried virtue, the deliberate prudence, the unshaken firmness of the chief magistrate, whom God in his great goodness has given to this Commonwealth—in the uprightness of our cause—in the value of the blessings which are at stake—in the peculiar kindness which God has manifested towards our fathers and ourselves—we have motives, encouragements, and solemn obligations, to resolute, persevering exertion in our different spheres, and according to our different capacities, for the publick good. The times in which we are called to act are trying, but our duty is clear. Let us use with vigour every righteous method for promoting the peace, liberty and happiness of our nation—and having done this, let us leave the issue to the wise and holy providence of HIM who cannot err—and who, we are assured, will accept and reward every conscientious effort for his own glory and the good of mankind.



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