

The Crisis, or the Uncertain Doom of Kingdoms at Particular Times

by Samuel Davies

The sermon emphasizes the uncertainty of a nation's doom and the importance of repentance and reformation to avoid divine displeasure.

Scripture: Isaiah 1:6, Isaiah 32:13, Jeremiah 25:7, Jonah 3:9, Micah 7:4, Luke 11:9

Topics: "National Repentance", "Divine Judgment"

Description

Samuel Davies preaches about the uncertainty and anxiety faced by nations in times of crisis, using the example of Nineveh's impending doom due to sin. He emphasizes the importance of repentance, reformation, and earnest prayer as the only hopeful way for a nation to escape divine judgment. Drawing parallels to the present war with France, he warns of the consequences of national sin and the need for a collective turning to God. Davies urges for a deep humility before God, a thorough reformation, and a reliance on the Holy Spirit for true repentance and national restoration.

Transcript

The Crisis, or the Uncertain Doom

of Kingdoms at Particular Times

A sermon by Samuel Davies, preached at Hanover, Virginia, October 28th, 1756, being the day appointed by the Synod of New York, to be observed as a general fast on account of the present war with France.

"Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger--that we do not perish?"
Jonah 3:9

A state of uncertainty, a suspense between hope and fear, about a matter of great importance, is a very painful and anxious state. And by how much the more important and interesting the matter--by so much the more distressing is the uncertainty. Now what can be more important, what more interesting, than our country?

Our country is a word of the highest and most endearing import: it includes our friends and relatives, our liberty, our property, our religion; in short, it includes our earthly all. And when the fate of our country, and all that it includes, is dreadfully doubtful; when we are tossed and agitated between the alternate waves of

hope and fear; when, upon taking a view of the present posture of our affairs, we can only ask with painful solicitude, what will be the end of these things? and when even the consideration of the divine mercy upon our repentance cannot give us any assurance of deliverance in a political capacity--but only a perhaps, who can tell but God will turn and repent! When this, I say, is our situation, every mind that has the least thought, must be agitated with many eager, dubious expectations. This is the present situation of our country; and this was the state of that populous and magnificent city of Nineveh, when the words of my text were first spoken.

Nineveh was the metropolis of the Assyrian empire: and how prodigiously populous it was, you may calculate from hence, that it contained more 120,000 children, that were so young that they could not distinguish the right hand from the left; and the number of adults, in proportion to these, must be vast indeed. Its extent was more than three days journey. Secular authors tell us, it was forty-seven miles in circumference; and that, notwithstanding its vast extent, it was surrounded with lofty walls and towers. The walls were two hundred feet high, and so very wide, that three chariots might drive on them abreast; and the towers two hundred feet in height, and fifteen hundred in number. But what became of this mighty Nineveh at last? Alas! it was turned into a heap of rubbish! Divine patience was at length wearied out; and though the vengeance denounced by Jonah was suspended--yet that vengeance foretold by Nahum was dreadfully executed!

And what was the cause of this execution, and that denunciation? The cause of both was SIN! National, epidemic sin, against an unknown God, the God of Israel. I say, against an unknown God; for Nineveh was a heathen city, not favored with the knowledge of the true God by supernatural revelation; much less with the gospel, that most perfect dispensation of divine grace towards men. The Ninevites could not sin with such horrid aggravations as we can sin. And yet even they could sin to such a degree, as to become utterly intolerable to God. They sinned against the light of nature, and that sufficed to bring down remediless destruction upon them.

This is mentioned as the cause of the divine displeasure in Jonah's commission. "Get up and go to the great city of Nineveh! Announce my judgment against it because I have seen how wicked its people are!" Jonah 1:2. Their wickedness has reached to heaven; and can no longer be endured by God. But before the fatal blow falls--let them have one warning more--Oh! how astonishing are the grace and patience of God towards a guilty people! Even when their wickedness has scaled the heavens, and come up before him--he condescends to give them another warning, and suspends the blow for at least forty days longer, to see if they will at length repent.

Jonah, having tried in vain to flee from his divine commission, is at length constrained to undertake it; and with the solemn gait of a prophet, he walks from street to street, making this alarming proclamation: "Forty days from now Nineveh will be destroyed!" Jonah 3:4. This was the substance of his sermon: but no doubt he spoke much more than is here recorded. No doubt, he produced his credentials from the God of Israel, and gave them the history of his reluctance to accept the commission; of the storm that pursued him, while attempting to make his escape; of his miraculous preservation in the belly of a fish, and his deliverance thence. No doubt, he also let them know what was the cause of the divine displeasure against them, namely, their national vices and impiety; and he perhaps intimated, that repentance was the only possible method of escaping the threatened destruction. It is plain, however, they understood him in this sense; for they actually did repent.

It appears that God thought it most proper to be upon the reserve upon this point; and that he did not reveal to Jonah his gracious design to pardon them upon their repentance; nor Jonah to the Ninevites. That God did not reveal it to Jonah, seems probable from hence, that he had some expectation the city would be destroyed, though he saw their repentance; and hence he waited for the event, and was greatly chagrined when disappointed. He seemed indeed to have presumed what the event would be, from the known mercy and patience of God, (4:2,) but this implies that he had no express revelation for it. That Jonah did not reveal this to the Ninevites appears from my text, where they speak of the event as dreadfully uncertain, even though they should repent.

And now, while the prophet is delivering his message, their consciences tell them how ripe they are for this dreadful doom; and the Spirit of God no doubt concurs, and impresses the conviction upon their hearts. Now, methinks, I see eager, gazing crowds following the prophet from street to street; paleness in every countenance, and horror in every heart! Now the man of business remits his eager pursuits! Now the man of pleasure is struck with an obstacle in his thoughtless career! Now pride and grandeur lower their haughty airs! Now a general horror spreads from the cottage to the throne!

The people agree upon a public fast: and when the emperor hears of the solemn message, he issues forth his royal edict, requiring a universal abstinence from food, and a deep repentance and reformation. He enjoins all to put on sackcloth, the garb of mourners and penitents in those ages and countries; and laying aside his royal robes, and descending from his throne--he puts on the mortifying dress himself, and lies in the dust!

That the humiliation might be the more moving and affecting, he orders, according to the custom of the time upon such occasions, that even the beasts, the flocks, and herds, should be restrained from food, and compelled to join, as it were, with more guilty men--in the general humiliation, and in deprecating that vengeance which was about to fall upon man and beast!

We have now a very moving sight before us; a mirthful magnificent city--in mourning; thousands mourning in every street; king and subjects, high and low, old and young, all covered in sackcloth and rolling in ashes. And their repentance does not wholly consist in these outward ceremonies; the royal proclamation further requires them to cry mightily unto God; and turn every one from his evil way. They are sensible of the propriety and necessity of prayer, earnest prayer to God, and a reformation of life--as well as of afflicting themselves with fasting. The light of nature directed them to this as the only method of deliverance, IF deliverance was possible. The case of such a people looks hopeful. That so many thousands should be brought to repentance by one warning, the first and only warning they had ever received from a prophet of the true God; a prophet that was a contemptible stranger from the despised nation of the Jews; this certainly appears promising.

Alas! friends, we are not so easily brought to repentance! No, this is not an easy thing among us. Ten thousand warnings, not only from conscience, from divine providence, from this very Jonah, and the other prophets of the Old Testament--but also from the gospel, that clear and perfect revelation; I say, ten thousand warnings, thus peculiarly enforced, have not so much effect upon our country, this 'Christian' country, as one short warning from the mouth of Jonah had upon a city of heathens and idolaters!

All along, as I have been considering this case, I could not cast out of my mind that dreadful declaration of Christ, "The people of Nineveh will rise up against this generation on judgment day and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah. And behold, someone greater than Jonah is here--and

you refuse to repent!" Matthew 12:41.

Nineveh never had such loud calls to repentance, and such a rich plenty of all the means of grace, as Virginia. The least in the kingdom of heaven, that is, the least Christian under the full revelation of the gospel--is greater in spiritual knowledge, not only than Jonah--but than John the Baptist, the greatest prophet that ever was born of a woman. And therefore, I may accommodate these words to us, "Behold, someone greater than Jonah is here!" Here are clearer discoveries of the will of God, and stronger motives and encouragements to repentance, than ever Jonah could afford the men of Nineveh!

But alas! where is our repentance! Where are our humiliation and reformation! Shall one warning from a prophet--bring the heathen to their knees before God; and shall not the gospel, and all its loud calls, have that effect upon a 'Christian' land! Shall Nineveh repent in sackcloth and ashes; and shall Virginia sin on still, impenitent, thoughtless, luxurious and mirthful? Alas! what will be the end of this?

The case of the Ninevites, who were brought to repentance so readily, and so completely, looks hopeful, and seems to promise them an exemption from the threatened vengeance. And yet, so sensible was the king of Nineveh of their demerit, and the insufficiency of their repentance to make atonement for their sins--that he is doubtful, after all, what would be the consequence. "Who can tell," says he; "who knows, if God will turn and repent, and turn away from the fierceness of his anger, that we do not perish!" That is, "Let us humble ourselves ever so low, we are not assured that we shall escape! Divine vengeance may, after all, seize us--and we may be made monuments to all the world of the justice of the King of kings, and the dreadful consequences of national impiety and vice!"

His uncertainty in this matter might proceed from the just sense he had of the intolerable height to which the national wickedness had arrived, and of the strictness of the divine justice. He knew, that even in his own government, it would have very bad consequences, if all crimes should be 'simply forgiven', or pass unpunished, upon the mere repentance of the offender; and he forms the same judgment concerning the divine government.

Indeed, it is natural to a penitent, while he has a full view of his sins, in all their aggravations, and of the justice of God--to question whether such sins can be forgiven by so holy a God. He is apt even to fall into an extreme in this respect. It does not now appear so easy a thing to him to obtain a pardon, as it once did, when he had no just views of his guilt. Now his sin appears a great thing indeed; so great, that he can hardly think it possible.

Or the uncertainty of the king of Nineveh, in this point, might proceed from Jonah's being so reserved upon it. He might have had no commission from God to promise them deliverance upon their repentance; but he was to warn them, and then leave them in the hands of a gracious and righteous God, to deal with them according to his pleasure. This tended to make them more sensible that they lay at divine mercy, and that he might justly do what he pleased with them.

The event indeed showed there was a condition implied in the threatening; and that God did secretly intend to spare them, upon their repentance. But this was wisely concealed, and it was sufficient that the warning alone, should make it known.

It is certain that national as well as personal repentance, may sometimes come too late; and that sometimes the punishment may fall by way of chastisement; even when the repentance is sincere, and the sin is forgiven, so that it shall not bring on the destruction of the sinner in the eternal world.

But we may well suppose a heathen monarch, who probably had no instruction but from Jonah's short warning, would be much at a loss about these things. From this uncertainty of his about the fate of his empire, we may infer this truth which I intend to illustrate with regard to ourselves, namely: That sometimes a nation may be in such a situation, that no man can tell what will be the outcome; or whether it shall be delivered from the threatened vengeance--or destroyed.

But though the king of Nineveh was uncertain about this; yet, there was one thing that he was very certain of, namely--that if there was any possibility of escape, it was to be hoped for only in the way of earnest prayer to God, general humiliation and reformation of life. This is evident from the connection of the context. "Let man and beast," says he, "be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily to God, yes, let them turn every one from his evil way; who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we do not perish!"

That is--"Who can tell, but that God MAY turn away from his fierce anger--if we turn from our evil ways, and humble ourselves before him? If we do not reform and humble ourselves, the case is dreadfully plain; anyone can tell that we cannot escape; there is not so much as a 'perhaps' for it; unavoidable destruction will be our doom, beyond all question! But if we repent--who knows what God MAY do? Who knows but God may repent, and turn from the fierceness of his wrath! If there is any hope at all--it is in this way!" This he learned from the light of nature, if not from Jonah's preaching.

And this suggests another seasonable truth, which, if my time will allow, I shall also illustrate, namely: That when a nation is in such a state that no man can certainly determine what its doom will be--if there be any possible hope--it is only in the way of general humiliation, earnest prayer, and public reformation.

To prevent mistakes I have one thing more to observe upon the text; and that is, that when God is said to repent, it only signifies that the visible conduct of divine Providence has some resemblance to the conduct of men when they repent; and not that he is capable of repentance in a proper sense, or of that changeableness, imperfect knowledge, sorrow, and self-accusation, which repentance among men implies. When men repent that they have made a thing--they destroy it; and therefore, when God destroyed man by a deluge, he is said to repent that he made him; and when he deposed Saul, it is said, "he repented that he had made Saul king."

When men do not execute their threatenings, it is supposed they repent of them; and hence, when God does not inflict the threatened evil, he is supposed to repent of the evil. That is, he acts as men do--when they repent of their purposes. Though when he made the denunciation, he well knew the outcome of the event, and determined not to execute it--upon the repentance of the offenders.

So with regard to Nineveh, there was no proper repentance in God--but a uniform, consistent purpose. He purposed to denounce his vengeance against that city; and he did so. He purposed and foresaw their repentance; and it accordingly came to pass. He purposed to spare them upon their repentance--and he did so. All this is very consistent, and implies no proper repentance in God; for in this sense, "God is not a man that he should repent," Numbers 23:19; but "he is in one mind, and who can turn him? and what his soul desires--even that he does." Job 23:13.

I now enter upon the illustration of the first reference upon the text, namely:

I. That sometimes a nation may be in such a situation, that no man can tell what will be their doom; whether the threatened vengeance will fall upon them, or whether they shall escape.

This, we have seen, was the situation of Nineveh, though now lying in deep repentance, and not in present danger, as far as appears from any visible cause. Thousands were now mourning, praying, and reforming; and we have no account of an enemy preparing to invade them.

And if Nineveh, in this situation, which seems so promising, was, notwithstanding, in such danger that no man could determine what would be their doom, alas! what shall we say of Virginia and the kingdoms to which we belong, when they are neither penitent before God, nor safe from the arms of a powerful and victorious enemy? If the repentance of the Ninevites gave them no assurance of escape--but only a 'perhaps', "Who can tell if God will turn from his fierce anger?" Certainly our doom must, at best, be equally uncertain, when, instead of repentance, reformation, and mighty crying to God--we see the generality impenitent, unreformed, and prayerless still.

I would not dampen you with unmanly fears--but I cannot help saying that our doom is dismally uncertain. I know not what a perpetually provoked God intends to do with us and our nation. I have my hopes indeed; but they are balanced, and sometimes over-balanced, with fearful and gloomy apprehensions. But,

1. The outcome of the present war will appear dreadfully uncertain--if we consider the present posture of affairs.

We are engaged in war with a powerful, exasperated enemy--and blood is streaming by sea and land. Some decisive blow will probably be struck before long--but on what party it will fall, and what will be the outcome of this struggle and commotion among the nations--is an anxious uncertainty. It seems but too likely, though it strikes me with horror to admit the thought--that a provoked God intends to scourge us with the rod of France, and therefore gives surprising success to her military.

Who can tell--but the king of France may have the same commission given him by that God whom we and our mother country have so grievously offended--as was given to the Assyrian monarch, in Isaiah's time, when God speaks of him as "his rod"--to chastise his own people, and as acting by a commission from him, though he neither knew or designed it--but only intended to gratify his own ambition for power? "O Assyrian, the rod of my anger, in whose hand is the club of my wrath! I send him against a godless nation, I dispatch him against a people who anger me, to seize loot and snatch plunder, and to trample them down like mud in the streets. But this is not what he intends, this is not what he has in mind; his purpose is to destroy, to put an end to many nations!" Isaiah 10:5-7.

But at the same time it is foretold, that "When the Lord has finished all his work against Mount Zion and Jerusalem, he will say--I will punish the king of Assyria for the willful pride of his heart and the haughty look in his eyes!" Isaiah 10:12.

And if God gives the same commission to the king of France against our country, I doubt not but his end will be the same. When God has finished his work of correction with this rod--he will break it, or burn it in the fire.

The like commission was given to Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon; and when he, and his son, and his son's son, had served as the executioners of God's wrath upon the Jewish people, and the neighboring nations--they and the Babylonian empire were destroyed together.

"But you would not listen to me," says the LORD. "You made me furious by worshiping your idols, bringing on yourselves all the disasters you now suffer. And now the LORD Almighty says: Because you have not

listened to me, I will gather together all the armies of the north under King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, whom I have appointed as my deputy. I will bring them all against this land and its people and against the other nations near you. I will completely destroy you and make you an object of horror and contempt and a ruin forever!" Jeremiah 25:7-9.

"Then, after the seventy years of captivity are over, I will punish the king of Babylon and his people for their sins, says the LORD. I will make the country of the Babylonians an everlasting wasteland. I will bring upon them all the terrors I have promised in this book--all the penalties announced by Jeremiah against the nations." Jeremiah 25:12-13.

Thus you see it is no uncommon thing for God, when transgressions are come to the full, to raise up some national power to perform his work of chastisement and vengeance, and render it victorious and irresistible, until that work is done--and then to crush that conquering country in its turn.

And whether divine Providence is now about to employ the power of France for this purpose, is a dreadful uncertainty! We hope, indeed, matters will take a more favorable turn; but the present posture of affairs, and particularly the rapid conquests of France, which has now become so formidable even in America, give us reason to fear this may be the outcome, and that matters are now ripening fast for this dreadful result.

I may add, that we have reason to fear--from the disposition and conduct of many among us Britons. A spirit of carnal security, sloth, and cowardice, evidently prevails; as may justly alarm our fears. Now if the French should invade our frontiers; and if the Indians who are now neutral, should join with them, and with those tribes that are already so active upon their side; and if their united forces should pour down upon us; I say, should this be the case--I need not tell you what unexampled scenes of blood, cruelty, and devastation would open in our country! This may not be the outcome; and I hope and pray it may not be: but it is not so improbable as we could wish; much less is it impossible. Who knows but this may actually be the consequence!

And if the natural allies of France should form a confederacy against England, our mother country, and attack her with their united strength, how terrible would be the consequence be--both to her and to us! This event may not happen; and I hope and pray it may not: but it is not so unlikely as one could wish. But,

2. The outcome of the present war, and the doom of our country and nation, will appear dreadfully uncertain--if we consider our national guilt and impenitence.

Let Atheists and Epicureans say what they please, it is an eternal truth, which all the world will be made to know at last: that Jehovah is the Ruler of the universe; that the fate of kingdoms is in his hands; that he is the sovereign Arbiter of war, and determines both victory and defeat--just as he pleases. It is also certain that rewards and punishments are as essential to his government, as they are to all other governments.

In the world to come--he will reward or punish individuals, according to their personal works; and in the present world--he will reward or punish nations, according to their national work. In the present world I say, because it is only in the present world they exist in a national capacity, and are capable of national rewards and punishments.

Now there is a time, when the transgressors are come to the full, Daniel 8:23; when the measure of a people's iniquity is filled up, and they are ripe for vengeance. And then the executioners of divine

vengeance--the sword, famine, pestilential diseases, earthquakes and the like--are turned loose among them; then the dread commission is issued out, "Swing the sickle--for the harvest is ripe. Come, trample the grapes--for the winepress is full and the vats overflow--so great is their wickedness!" Joel 3:13. Then all the undertakings of such a people are blasted; and even the worst of the heathen (Ezekiel 7:24) succeed against them. That nation is thrown off from the hinge on which empire turns, and therefore must fall. The Lord Almighty is against them; and by a secret but irresistible hand--brings on their destruction!

Now whether that fatal period has arrived, with respect to us and our nation, I will not determine, nor indeed am I capable. But I am sure our land is full of sin against the Holy One of Israel. On this subject I have often enlarged; and now I am afraid it is a trite, disregarded tale. The sins of our land lie heavy upon it; the sins of all ranks and denominations: the sins of past and present generations: sins against the law and against the gospel; sins against mercies and against judgments; sins in heart, in language, in practice; sins of all kinds and degrees, and against all sorts of obligations!

Oh! what a huge heap, what an intolerable burden do all these sins make! The sins of many millions on both sides the Atlantic! Our nation is a huge mass of corruption! The whole head is sick; and the whole heart faint; from the sole of the foot unto the head, there is no soundness in it--but all full of wounds, and bruises, and putrefying sores! Isaiah 1:6. And does not this leave our doom in a dreadful suspense? Who can tell what will be the fate of so guilty a people? Can we indulge high hopes with such a load of guilt upon us? Sin lies like a dead weight upon our counsels, our designs, and our undertakings; and crushes all of them!

What though our enemies are as wicked as ourselves, with only this exception, that they have not our advantages, and therefore cannot sin with our aggravations! But what if they were in all respects as bad? It has been no unusual thing for God to employ one guilty nation to execute his vengeance upon another; and when that drudgery is done--then he executes the executioner! Just as one among a number of criminals may be appointed to execute the rest; and then he is executed himself by some other hand. Thus God employed the Assyrians and Babylonians to punish his people, the Jews. And when they had, though undesignedly, done him that service, God punishes them in a yet severer manner. And thus he threatens the Jews by Ezekiel, that he would bring the worst of the heathen against them: they were good enough to be his executioners! So he employs devils, the worst of beings, to execute his vengeance upon sinners in hell. And so in human governments, the refuse of mankind are appointed his hangmen.

But though our land is so full of sin--yet there would be some ground to hope, could we see any appearances of a general repentance and reformation. But alas! where shall we find it? I have not been a heedless observer of the effects of the corrective and vindictive providences of God towards our land--the sword, a threatened famine, and a deadly, raging plague. But I have been really shocked to observe the outcome. I am afraid that even the people of God are not so effectually roused by these warnings as they should be. One would think they would be all life and vigor--at such a time as this: but, alas! I am afraid it is otherwise. I am especially afraid that impenitent sinners, instead of being melted into repentance, are hardening more and more like clay in the sun!

Alas! I see and hear no more of serious concern about eternal things among us, than if we lived in a healthy neighborhood, and a peaceful, unmolested country. I am afraid the case of some bears a dismal resemblance to that described in Revelation 16:10, 11. "They gnawed their tongues for pain, and blasphemed the God of heaven, because of their pains and their sores, and repented not of their deeds!" No, they are sullenly obstinate to wickedness still!

Brethren, what are we doing! Are we asleep at such a time as this, when the judgments of heaven are around us, and the fate of our country is so terribly doubtful? for God's sake, for our souls sake, for our country's sake--let us rouse ourselves from our carnal security; and let us humble ourselves before God, "and cry mightily to him; and who can tell, but he may turn away from his fierce anger?" Which leaves me to the second inference from my text, namely,

II. That when a nation is in such a doubtful situation that no man can know its doom, if there is any hope--it is only in the way of repentance, reformation, and earnest prayer. This appears the only way of hope on two accounts:

1. National sin has a direct tendency, in its own nature, to weaken and destroy a nation. SIN is the deadly disease of a nation, which will destroy it on the inside--without the hand of an outside executioner. SIN spreads corruption, injustice, treachery, discord, confusion, cowardice, through a nation. SIN destroys public spirit, the love of our country, unanimity, courage, and all the social and heroic virtues which naturally tend to strengthen, defend, and advance a people. Now, repentance, reformation, and prayer, is the proper cure for this disease of SIN; it purges out these internal principles of death, and implants and nourishes the opposite principles of virtue and life. But this is not all; for,

2. Repentance, reformation, and prayer, is the only method to turn away the displeasure of God, and obtain his favor and protection. SIN brings on a people the curse of a provoked God; and under this they fade and wither away, like a blasted flower; or a tree struck by lightning from heaven. But if it is possible to remove it, and obtain the divine favor--it is only by deep humiliation before him, by a thorough reformation from those sins that provoke him, and by earnest cries for mercy!

The light of nature taught the men of Nineveh that this was the only way of hope; and Scriptural revelation assures us of the very same thing. It is only to the penitent, that the promises of deliverance are made; and without repentance, we have no possible claim to them. Deliverances are generally answers to prayer; and therefore without earnest prayer we cannot expect them. National judgments are inflicted for national sins--and therefore reformation from national sins is the only hopeful way to escape them.

Therefore, my friends, let us betake ourselves to this only method of hope. Let us deeply humble ourselves before God; "let us cry mightily to him--and let us turn every one from our evil ways!" And then, "who can tell but God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we do not perish?"

But in all my exhortations of this kind, I remember that repentance and reformation is the duty of fallen creatures; of creatures so depraved and dead, that they are not able, of themselves, so much as to apply the remedy. If you attempt this work with the pride of imaginary self-sufficiency, you may be sure disappointment will be the consequence. Therefore remember, that it is the Holy Spirit alone, who is the author of a thorough repentance and effectual reformation. It is he alone who can effectually convince the world of sin. If he is absent, legislators may make laws against vice, philosophers may reason, ministers may preach, nay, conscience may remonstrate, the divine law may prescribe and threaten, the gospel may invite and allure; but all will be in vain; all will not produce one true penitent!

The strongest arguments, the most melting entreaties, the most alarming denunciations, from God and man, enforced by the highest authority, or by the most compassionate tears--all will have no effect! All will not effectually reclaim one sinner, nor gain one sincere proselyte to righteousness! Paul, Apollos, and Cephas, with all their apostolic abilities, can do nothing to the purpose--without the Spirit. Paul may plant, and Apollos water; but God alone can give the increase. So then neither is he who plants anything, nor he

that waters; they are both nothing together; but God who gives the increase (1 Corinthians 3:7) is all in all.

Until the Spirit be poured forth from on high, says Isaiah, briers and thorns shall come up upon the land of my people; that is, that their country shall be laid waste, and be made a mere wilderness of briers and thorns--by the ravages of war; or the people themselves shall be like briers and thorns--fruitless, noxious, and troublesome.

In this language the prophet Micah describes the same people; the best of them is as a brier; the most upright is sharper than a thorn-hedge. (Micah 7:4.) Such shall they continue--until the Holy Spirit is poured forth upon them from on high. But when the happy time comes, "then the wilderness shall be a fruitful field; then judgment shall dwell in the wilderness, and righteousness shall remain in the fruitful field." This effusion of the Spirit shall put an end to the desolation of war, and establish them in the possession of lasting and extensive peace; for, as it is there added, the work of righteousness shall be peace, and the native effect of righteousness shall be quietness and assurance forever; and my people shall dwell in a peaceable habitation, and in sure dwellings, and in quiet resting places. (Isaiah 32:13, 18.)

You see, my friends, of how much importance and necessity the Spirit is to produce a reformation, and that blessed peace and security, both personal and national, both within and without, which is the effect of it!

And how are we to expect his sacred influences? Or in what way may we hope to attain them? The answer is, Pray for them! Pray frequently, pray fervently. "Lord, your Spirit! Oh give your Spirit! that is the blessing I need; the blessing which families, and nations, and the whole human race need!" Pray in your retirements; pray in your families; pray in societies appointed for that purpose; pray warmly and sincerely; pray without ceasing--for this grand fundamental blessing.

Hear what encouragement Christ has given to prayer in this particular, "Ask--and it shall be given you; seek--and you shall find; knock--and it shall be opened unto you. If you being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children--how much more shall your heavenly Father give his Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" Luke 11:9-13. Endeavor to repent in this humble, dependent manner, and you may hope it will at least avail to your eternal salvation; and who knows, but it may avail also to turn away the fierce anger of God from your country and nation!

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