

THE LORD A STRONGHOLD IN THE DAY OF TROUBLE.

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A

THANKSGIVING SERMON,

PREACHED IN THE

Presbyterian Church,

NEW BLOOMFIELD, PENNA.,

BY

REV. W. B. CRAIG,

PASTOR,

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## CORRESPONDENCE.

NEW BLOOMFIELD, PA., Dec. 15, 1862.

REV. W. B. CRAIG.

DEAR SIR: Having listened with much pleasure to the discourse which you delivered in the Presbyterian Church in this place, on Thanksgiving Day, and believing that the publication thereof will be the means of doing good, at the present time, we respectfully request a copy for publication.

Very truly, yours, &c.,

ISAAC LEFEVER,

J. B. HACKETT,

J. R. McCLINTOCK.

NEW BLOOMFIELD, PA., Dec. 16, 1862.

GENTLEMEN: The discourse to which you refer in your note, was prepared in great haste, and without any view to its publication. Hoping that the great Head of the Church will make it the means of inciting to deeds of loftier patriotism, and that the priceless heritage hallowed by our fathers' memories, prayers and blood, may be transmitted, in all its preciousness and glory, to the generations that shall come, I yield to your request.

Yours, in the best of bonds,

W. B. CRAIG.

To DR. I. LEFEVER, and others, of the Committee.

# S E R M O N

“THE LORD IS GOOD, A STRONGHOLD IN THE DAY OF TROUBLE; AND HE KNOWETH THEM THAT TRUST IN HIM.”—NAHUM 1 : 7.

THE prophecy of Nahum was written about a century after the time of Jonah. It is concise and majestic in tone. In arrangement and style, it occupies a place among the first of inspired epistles. It relates chiefly to the destruction of Nineveh, that great city, of which it is said that “the walls thereof were a hundred feet high, and capable of admitting three chariots abreast upon them, and fortified with fifteen hundred towers on the walls of two hundred feet high.” So totally was this city destroyed that in the second century after Christ scarce a vestige of it remained. This remarkable prophecy, thus remarkably fulfilled, affords a signal evidence of the inspiration of Nahum, and a striking lesson of humility to human pride. But not only does the prophet speak of the destruction of the time-honored city, but also of God as a great and terrible God, manifesting vengeance towards his adversaries, and reserving wrath for his enemies—mingling mercy with justice and judg-

ment, faithfully executing his own righteous law. "The Lord is slow to anger, and great in power, and will not at all acquit the wicked. The Lord hath his way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet. He rebuketh the sea, and maketh it dry, and drieth up all the rivers. Bashan languisheth, and Carmel and the flower of Lebanon languisheth. The mountains quake at him, and the hills melt, and the earth is burned at his presence, yea, the world, and all that dwell therein. Who can stand before his indignation? and who can abide in the fierceness of his anger? His fury is poured out like fire, and the rocks are thrown down by him. The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; and he knoweth them that trust in him."

I. I will notice the text in its individual bearing. The Lord is good. His goodness is displayed in all the works of his hand,—in the creation of the world, in the azure vault above, in every star that shines, and in the greater lights rolled into space for signs and for seasons, and for days and for years. He might have made a very different world from this—made it a vast plain without any intervening object to relieve the eye, or a continuous mountain range unadorned by beauty. But he has interspersed it with hill and valley, and mountain and plain, with majestic seas and lakes and rivers bearing the commerce of nations. Nature with a thousand hues proclaims his goodness—the greenswards and foliage of spring and summer, every plant that grows, every flower

that blooms, the rose and the lily, the woodbine and the ivy, the aloe and magnolia. God

"Might have made enough,—enough  
For every want of ours,—  
For medicine, luxury, and for toil,  
And yet have made no flowers."

His goodness has been specially manifested in the creation of man, and in providing for his wants, temporal, spiritual, and eternal. He might have left man as he left the fallen angels, reserved him in everlasting chains, under darkness, unto the judgment of the great day. Or, he might have witnessed the ruins of the fall, and then have retired to the silence of his own eternity, and been just to himself, just to man, and just to the requirements of his own holy law. But when there was no eye to pity and no arm to bring salvation, his eye pitied and his arm brought salvation. He is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. Believers especially enjoy his goodness in all their privileges and immunities, in their justification, regeneration, adoption, sanctification, and in their final and complete triumph and admission into heaven. The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble.

Man is born unto trouble as the sparks fly upward. There is no exemption from this lot.

"Tis vain to dream of things impossible!  
Of joys perpetual in perpetual change!  
Of stable pleasures on the tossing wave;  
Eternal sunshine in the storm of life!"

Such are the trials of the believer that his life has been compared to a conflict, in which he is exhorted to take unto himself the whole armor of God. "Wherefore take unto you the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all to stand. Stand, therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness, and your feet shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace; above all taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints." Believers have been the subjects of trial and conflict in all ages. Said the pious man of Uz, "As a servant earnestly desireth the shadow, and as a hireling looketh for the reward of his work, so am I made to possess months of vanity, and wearisome nights are appointed to me." One messenger brought to him the tidings, "The Sabeans! they have swept off the oxen and asses, and murdered all the men." The second exclaimed, "Fire from heaven! it has burned up the sheep and the shepherds." And the third, "The Chaldees! they have carried off the camels and slaughtered their conductors." But before the startled chieftain had time to realize himself a beggar, the fourth messenger burst in with the wild announcement, "A wind from the wilderness! it has overthrown the house, and crushed your sons and daughters in the ruins." So

great was his affliction, that he was advised to curse God and die. But he exclaimed, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." Said the Psalmist, "In the day of my trouble I sought the Lord; my sore ran in the night, and ceased not: my soul refused to be comforted; I remembered God, and was troubled; I complained, and my spirit was overwhelmed." There are times when all things seem to be against the believer, when his peace and comfort have fled, and he cries out, "O my leanness, my leanness!" "O that I were as in months past!" "Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of thy waterspouts: all thy waves and thy billows are gone over me." "O that I knew where I might find him! that I might come even to his seat! I would order my cause before him, and fill my mouth with arguments. Behold, I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him: on the left hand, where he doth work, but I cannot behold him: he hideth himself on the right hand that I cannot see him: but he knoweth the way that I take; when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold." "The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble."

He is a stronghold at all times, but more especially in the day of trouble,—in the day of domestic trouble; in the day of personal trouble; when tempted, tried, afflicted, persecuted, dying, he is a stronghold, and he knoweth them that trust in him. He knoweth them that trust in him as a stronghold, that come to him for eternal life. He knoweth them so as to distinguish them

from others; he knows them so as to approve of them; he knows them so as to deliver and save them. He knows them in all the changing scenes of life, knows them in all its toils and conflicts, knows them in the dark valley, and through all eternity he will know them; and they shall know even as they are known. Then trust him in the morning, trust him in the noon of life, trust him in the evening, trust him in the sunshine, trust him in the storm,—everywhere and always trust the Lord. Trust in the Lord with all thy heart. “The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; and he knoweth them that trust in him.”

II. I will notice the text in its national bearing. In a national point of view, “the Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; and he knoweth them that trust in him.” To-day, as you are aware, has been set apart by the Governor of this Commonwealth to be observed as a day of solemn prayer and thanksgiving to the Almighty. Such days have been observed from an early period in the Church’s history. The Jews had their national fast-days, their days of holy convocation, of solemn assembly. “Over and above the solemn joy of the daily Temple service, there were several great occasions every year, when the whole Jewish people kept religious festival by divine appointment.” Those anniversaries served as perpetual memorials of grand historic events in their national experience. They counteracted the unsocial tendencies of the times, removed local and sectional jealousies, and consolidated different tribes into

one composite nation. Our forefathers had their days of holy convocation. In 1776, the Legislature of Massachusetts ordered a Thanksgiving, the proclamation for which concludes as follows: “And with these thanksgivings we exhort all ranks to mingle their fervent prayers: That our General Congress may be inspired with unanimity, wisdom, and firmness, necessary for their important departments. That the life and health of our General, his officers and soldiers, may be precious in God’s sight. That our brethren everywhere may be spirited to take the field. That all the movements may be in divine mercy. That they may be victorious in every engagement. That peace may be restored on a just and permanent basis. That the people may be placed under the wisest and best form of government; and that the Union of these American States may be established by a confederation never to be dissolved.”

Such days are as appropriate now as in other times. If properly and spiritually kept, they awaken pleasant associations, reminiscences of the past, rekindle the fire of patriotism, and incite to loftiness of purpose as in the Jew and old Puritan fathers. They revive strongly in the American heart the memories of Plymouth Rock, and Jamestown, and Bunker Hill, and Saratoga, and Mount Vernon,—“memories of our old deliverances and triumphs.” The Chief Executive of our State has designated the special object of this day,—“solemn prayer and thanksgiving.” The kind of prayer is designated,—not heartless prayer, not formal prayer, not prayer such as the Pharisee and the fool may offer, but prayer like

Jacob, and Abraham, and Moses, and Elias offered,—solemn prayer. Prayer is a duty clearly enjoined in Scripture. “I will,” says God, “that men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands without wrath and doubting.” “Watch unto prayer.” “Continue instant in prayer.” Ask, seek, knock; for every one that asketh receiveth, and he that seeketh findeth, and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. Connected with prayer as a duty is thanksgiving. “Be thankful,” is the divine command. “In everything give thanks.” “Offer unto God thanksgiving.” “Enter into his gates with thanksgiving and praise.” The subjects of prayer and thanksgiving are specified in the Proclamation,—giving humble thanks that God has been graciously pleased to protect our free institutions and government, and to keep us from sickness and pestilence. From pestilence we have been sheltered as by the visible wing of Omnipotence. We have been protected from the arrow that flieth by day, from the pestilence that walketh in darkness, and from the destruction that wasteth at noonday. How different our condition might have been. Our cities and villages might have been laid in ashes; our harvests trodden down by the hoof of civil warfare, our beloved ones sepulchred under the breath of the pestilence. “Our streets might have been filled with creatures of sunken cheeks, and shrivelled sinews,” famine-struck and perishing. But instead of all this, we have health and plenty,—have been crowned with loving kindness and tender mercy. For these things we give God thanks to-day. We give him thanks that he has caused “the

earth to bring forth her increase, so that our garners are choked with the harvest; that he has looked so favorably on the toil of his children; that industry has thriven among us, and labor had its reward.” The past year has been one of unusual prosperity. Honorable industry, in all its departments, has been encouraged. No financial embarrassments, no commercial distresses, have interrupted or checked the energies of the people. The great interests of education, morality and religion, have been cherished and sustained. To him who rules the nations by his power, and from whom cometh down every good and perfect gift, are we indebted for these mercies. For these things we give God thanks to-day.

We give thanks also “that he has delivered us from the hands of our enemies, and filled our officers and men in the field with a loyal and intrepid spirit, and given them victory; and that he has poured out upon us, albeit unworthy, other great and manifold blessings.” Though all has not been accomplished that might have been accomplished, the flag of our country, proud emblem of freedom, still floats over our national Capitol. And though some have been disloyal, recreant to the nation’s trust, and, with an Arnold or a Burr, would strip the eagle of his pinions and his plumage, there have been those ready to testify their devotion to country, to avenge its wrongs, and pay the price of freedom. We can point to such martyrs as Ellsworth, and Winthrop, and Ward, and Lyon, and Baker, and Mitchell. Greener laurels will twine the brow, and more enduring monuments consecrate the dust of the heroes of this



conflict than of the Revolution. In after times, when men shall recite the heroic deeds of the past, the deeds of the latter will wane before the deeds of the former, and unborn millions yet speak the praises of American young men of this generation. For the success that has attended our arms in the great struggle, we give God thanks to-day.

But our duty is also that of earnest prayer and supplication. We are to beseech "him to help and govern us in his steadfast fear and love, and to put into our minds good desires, so that by his continual help we may have a right judgment in all things; and especially praying him to give to Christian churches grace to hate the thing which is evil, and to utter the teachings of truth and righteousness, declaring openly the whole counsel of God." Had there been a faithful ministry declaring the whole counsel of God, instead of yielding to the prejudices and caprices of men; revealing the mind and will of God, teaching that obedience to law is man's first and highest duty, instead of darkening counsel by words without knowledge, or proclaiming a theology outside the Gospel of Christ, there would have been a different state of things in church and state from the present. And had there been more fidelity on the part of Christian churches, a hating the thing which is evil, less of an exacting spirit, a withholding from the Lord that which is his due, more self-sacrifice, more of the burning zeal that characterized the Master, instead of the thorn there would be the fir-tree, instead of the brier there would be the myrtle-tree; the desert and the solitary place would

rejoice and blossom as the rose. It may be that God is now accomplishing by the world what the Church has failed to do, or might have done. Those are very solemn words in the book of Esther: "Think not within thyself," said Mordecai, "that thou shalt escape in the king's house, more than all the Jews. For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place, but thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed." The eternal wheel of Providence rolls on. The eternal necessities cannot wait on our loitering. If not aroused from our stupor, the eternal light will pass far beyond us in its infinite career. If the Church is false and recreant to her high trust, God shall not be wanting in means for the accomplishment of his purpose; but laid aside like an effete engine, or thing of nought, in the convulsion of nations, in the crumbling of thrones, and dash of ruined systems, he shall marshal the very elements to his aid, and bring from other sources the agents who will be the actors in the world's last great drama.

Not only should we seek to-day that Christian ministers and churches may have more heroic courage and fervent zeal, but also entreat God "that he would bestow upon our civil rulers wisdom and earnestness in council, and upon our military leaders zeal and vigor in action, that the fires of rebellion may be quenched; that we, being armed with his defence, may be preserved from all perils, and that hereafter our people, living in peace and quietness, may, from generation to generation, reap the

abundant fruits of his mercy, and with joy and thankfulness praise and magnify his holy name." Such is our duty to-day. Not to censure, not to find fault. Had there been less of this spirit, and more of a spirit of prayer, there would have been more wisdom in council, more success by land and sea. I am not one of those, however, who think that little has been accomplished in the present conflict. We have made progress in mind, in freedom; evinced a military prowess unequalled in the history of the world. The rebellion has been the means, in the hands of Providence, of giving us a sound national paper currency; a protective tariff; an overland telegraph to the Pacific; of erasing one of the foulest blots from our national escutcheon, polygamy in our territories; of arousing, as nothing else could, the national heart, and revivifying the spirit of patriotism, which was threatened with extinction; of stripping off the mask of pretended friendship from England and France, and fully exhibiting their embittered hostility; of convincing all that there is a God that ruleth among the nations of the earth, and that blessed only is the people whose God is the Lord. Such are only a few of the blessings secured by a despotic and bloody rebellion. In view of all, and a thousand other kindred blessings, can we not say with the prophet: "The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble."

He knoweth the nations that trust in him. He hath declared that the nation and kingdom that will not serve him shall perish, yea, those nations shall be utterly wasted. The pages of history are luminous with the

examples of such nations. Egypt, once so distinguished, exists only in name. Assyria, and Babylon, and Media, and Persia, have perished for want of conformity to the will of God. Greece, the cradle of civilization and science, the land of eloquence, has been rocked with revolution. Rome, deemed proof against destruction and decay, whose poets predicted that her empire would be eternal, and that even to the eye of inspiration appeared to be "strong exceedingly," has been shivered into fragments, and all her glory levelled with the dust. The Hebrew commonwealth, so blessed with peculiar privilege, and with the bright lustre of the clearest revelation from heaven, is still a more impressive example of departing greatness under the chastening hand of Omnipotence. The will of God must constitute the basis of all national greatness, and form the ground of all human enactments. Such is not only the teaching of inspiration, but of all wise commentators on diplomacy and civil law, as Vattel, and Blackstone, and Whewell, and Burlamaqui, and Locke, and Hooker, and others; all announcing, in tones of mighty earnestness, the great principle that a nation's glory consists not in policies of human wisdom, in accumulations of wealth, in extent of empire, in the splendor of achievement or far-reaching commerce, but in the unfeigned recognition of Jehovah as supreme.

If we trust in him we shall be saved; if not, like a potter's vessel we shall be dashed to shivers. We are guilty of sin, individual and national. God is angry with us. "Woe unto them," saith Isaiah, "that regard

not the work of the Lord, neither consider the operations of his hands." The same prophet complains that while the hand of Jehovah was lifted up the people would not see, but adds, "*they shall see.*" If lighter chastisements will not suffice, he has heavier in reserve; if they despise his reproofs he will "*render his anger with fury, his rebukes with flames of fire.*" It is very easy on these days of thanksgiving and prayer to see the sins of others, the defects of public men in high places of trust, the general forgetfulness of God which pervades all classes, and yet be quite unconcerned about our own. Whatever be our views of the character of others, our chief concern is at home. To consider national sins as merely comprehending the vices of rulers, is to take a very inadequate view of the duties of this day. It is sin individual,—making up in the aggregate national sin,—that is calling down the wrath of God upon us as a nation. It is your sin and mine that constitute, in part, the fuel that feeds the fires of this rebellion. And not till sin is repented of by the inhabitants of the nation in their individual character, will the wrath of God be turned away from us. Oh let us walk softly before him, lest we be consumed by his burning anger. Let us flee to him as our stronghold in this the time of our national trouble. Let us trust in him. Thus coming, we will survive this assault, and emerge from this conflict only more radiant and powerful. Fiery trials will work out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. Sharp antagonisms will prove means for the development of a higher nationality. This is manifestly the law of all life,

from the lowest to the highest organism. The acorn falls into the ground, and at once the elements of the soil set to work to destroy it. Shortly, these destructive agents are seen only to have weakened the husk, and quickened the germ of a higher organism. The lion's awful strength is matured in savage wilds. The eagle's mighty wing is nerved by the hurricane. "The Columbus of the seas is tempest-tossed into seamanship. The Cæsar of empires is fought into courage." And so with national existences. By sharp antagonisms they grow, are strengthened, are developed for some grand purpose in the government of God. For this was America born, and is being baptized with God's baptism, that in the embodiment of a vast moral power, and the movement of a vast moral machinery, she should solve the great problem of a world's freedom, and work out the glorious accomplishment of an emancipated race.

We are surely on the eve of great events. We seem to be near, if not in the midst of the times spoken of by the prophet, when there shall be signs in the sun, and moon, and stars, and in the earth distress of nations with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring, and men's hearts failing them for fear and for looking for the things that are to come on the earth. Europe lies breathless and still; but it is only the smothered stillness which precedes the hurricane, the earthquake, the fearful rush of the avalanche. There is an under current like the slumbering fires of a volcano eager to break forth into action. Judging from the signs of the times, the wisest commentators may not have been mistaken in fixing the

millennial dawn at the year eighteen hundred and sixty-six. If not, then for the great event God, by a fiery ordeal, is now preparing us. In the great struggle who of us will prove faithful, and who false and recreant? Who of us will prove loyal and who disloyal when the nation's life is in the balance, and the great problem of the world's freedom is to be solved? If the pilots are false, and the crew treacherous, then the ship of state is on the breakers. If this Government is overthrown, hope not for a better; hope not for its equal, it shall not be. To quote the words of the great defender of the Constitution: "It were but a trifle even if the walls of yonder Capitol were to crumble, if its lofty pillars should fall, and its gorgeous decorations be all covered by the dust of the valley. All these might be rebuilt. But who shall reconstruct the fabric of demolished government? Who shall rear again the well-proportioned columns of constitutional liberty? Who shall frame together the skilful architecture which unites national sovereignty with state rights, individual security, and public prosperity? No! gentlemen, if these columns fall, they will be raised not again. Like the Coliseum and the Parthenon they will be destined to a mournful, a melancholy immortality. Bitterer tears, however, will flow over them than were ever shed over the monuments of Roman or Grecian art; for they will be the remnant of a more glorious edifice than Greece or Rome ever saw: the edifice of Constitutional American liberty." Let our prayers be to the living God, who is a stronghold in the day of trouble. Let us trust him in the

darkest hour; in the storm as in the sunshine, and he will save us. He knoweth them that trust in him. Let the sentiment of every heart be:

"Sail on, O Union, strong and great,  
 Humanity with all its fears,  
 With all the hopes of future years,  
 Is hanging breathless on thy fate!  
 We know what Master laid thy keel,  
 What Workmen wrought thy ribs of steel!  
 Who made each mast, and sail, and rope,  
 What anvils rang, what hammers beat;  
 In what a forge and what a heat  
 Were shaped the anchors of thy hope!  
 Fear not each sudden sound and shock,  
 'Tis of the wave and not the rock;  
 'Tis but the flapping of the sail,  
 And not a rent made by the gale!  
 In spite of rock and tempest's roar,  
 In spite of false lights on the shore,  
 Sail on, nor fear to breast the sea!  
 Our hearts, our hopes, are all with thee."

Let us on this day of solemn prayer and thanksgiving seek, individually and nationally, to realize the truthfulness of the text: "The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; and he knoweth them that trust in him."