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COLLECTION OF SERMONS

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IN THE UNITED STATES,

O F

DIFFERENT DENOMINATIONS

IN THE

CHRISTIAN CHURCH.

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S E R M O N VI.

THE EVIL AND DANGER OF SECURITY IN SIN.

B Y

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M A T T. xxiv. 38, 39.

For as in the days that were before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the Ark : and knew not until the flood came, and took them all away ; so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be.

THE discourse, of which these words are a part, was addressed by our Lord to his disciples—The express design of it was to animate them to a steady vigilance and attention to their immortal interest—to preserve them from sloth and stupidity, the *too common effects* which divine patience has upon mankind. This design is sufficiently visible in the account St. Luke gives us of this discourse ; but what is here related by St. Matthew, puts the matter beyond all doubt :---

Watch therefore, for ye know not the hour when your Lord doth come.

Hence, the propriety and force of the words of our text, with regard to the general argument and exhortation of our Lord to vigilance, stand thus :

“ There can be no season whatsoever in which it
 “ is proper or safe to grow secure, and neglect a
 “ daily preparation for the solemn appearance of
 “ Christ ; either to summon us before him by
 “ death, or to pour out trying and terrible judg-
 “ ments upon our land ; or to bring on the general
 “ judgment of quick and dead : I say, there can be
 “ no season in which it can be safe to be secure and
 “ unprepared ; because, there is no season in which
 “ he may not come, in one, or other of these ways :
 “ and it would be shocking and irretrievable, to be
 “ surprised in an unprepared condition.”

And besides, Christ's coming, both to the general judgment, and to punish wicked communities, will certainly be in a time of general security, as it was in the time of the flood, and destruction of Sodom. It is generally in this condition he comes, and surprises men by death. Therefore, it is greatly to be apprehended, that the season of our security and negligence about his coming, will be the very juncture in which he will come, to our great surprise, and to the everlasting sorrow of many---we ought then, always, *to watch, and to be ready.*

The words of our text, considered independent on their relation to the general argument, present us with the following observations.

I. We may observe the state of the old world, before the flood. They were perfectly secure--- *They were eating and drinking, &c.* They were eagerly pursuing their pleasure, each in his own way, and according to his own taste. Their attention was universally engaged in those affairs, projects and applications, that were calculated only for a present *sensual happiness*, utterly inapprehensive both of the wrath of God, that was already enkindled against them, and of those fatal effects into which it soon burst out, and mingled them in one common destruction. They had no misgivings of heart with respect to their danger; although the justice of God is always awake, and attentive to the growth and prevalence of vice; or if some of them had any apprehensions of evil, they did not suffer them to mature into serious considerations and sincere repentance. They were seduced either by a passion to imitate the general practice and opinion; or carried away, by an innate desire for sensual gratifications; or overwhelmed in the cares and business of life.

Nor was this insensibility owing to want of sufficient warning. In the sixth chapter of Genesis, God tells us with an original regard to mankind in that day, *that his spirit should not always strive with man.* This, in the strongest man-

ner, implies, that God had remonstrated against their wickedness---used proper methods to reform them, and had given them sufficient assurance of the fatal issue of their impenitence. The Apostle Peter informs, that Jesus Christ, by his spirit, preached to them their danger, and the necessity of repentance. He acquaints us also, that Noah was employed to declare to them, in the name of God, the wickedness and danger of their practices. They had, likewise, the strongest confirmation of the truth of Noah's doctrine, for a great while before their eyes, in that long and tedious labor of his building the Ark. So singular a machine must needs have struck their attention and awakened their curiosity. The use of which, when known, we may well suppose from their temper, did not fail to be matter of pleasantry and ridicule among them. How often did they call him an old foolish fanatic, and wild enthusiast! How much was he the subject of the scoffs and sneers of the gayer sort; while the graver ones among them, who were admired as oracles by the meaner rabble, pronounced his conduct, the height of frenzy and madness. Would not some say, 'see the doating fool, how he toils and labors to build himself a machine, by which he may escape a deluge, that his disordered brain suggests to him is to come.' While others reply, 'Curse the old enthusiast, I wish he was drowned ten thousand fathom deep; for he does nothing but interrupt business, and distract the world with his reveries and nonsense.'

II. We observe, that their wickedness, insensibility and unbelief, continued to the last. The representations of the divine displeasure against them, were utterly disregarded—God's threatenings carried no terror to their hearts, and consequently formed no prevailing argument, or reason for reformation. The denunciations of general ruin, without a speedy change of heart and life, were no doubt looked upon *imaginary and romantic*; fitted, only to alarm weak and superstitious minds, incapable of examining such predictions by the laws of reason, and the perfections of God. We may easily conclude, that they objected to Noah's prophecies, that they could not be true, because they were repugnant to the divine attributes. It was natural to blind, and unbelieving sinners to assert, that it was inconsistent with the mercy and goodness of the common parent of the universe, to destroy so many millions of his creatures, and that too, only for indulging those very appetites with which himself had formed them. How plausible would such arguments be? How well adapted to the taste, and depraved reason of licentious and presumptuous sinners? How would they triumph in this reasoning, as a complete confutation of the falshood and absurdity of all the divine declarations by his servant. "What! might they not say—"Is not God's mercy and goodness infinite? Do not "all his works proclaim it? Are not his goodness "and benevolence as evident as his existence? But "where is his goodness, or his mercy, upon the doc-

“trine of this romantic fellow, this upstart preacher? Is not this strange divinity grossly unreasonable? Such things cannot come from God, that are plainly contradictory to his known and essential perfections.” Noah, of consequence, must have been deemed an old fanatic; mad with new notions, and zealous to propagate the infection, and make others as mad as himself; or an artful knave, who endeavored to dupe mankind to his private purposes, under the pretence of a divine commission.

With these principles, with this perversion of reason, it was plainly impossible, that divine threatenings could have their proper effect upon them; or that any means which were judged proper by infinite wisdom should prevail. Hence they quickly fell sacrifices to the falshood of their strong and plausible reasonings. Vain were all attempts to undeceive their minds, and discover the uncertainty of their elaborate arguments. But the event convinced them by an awful experiment, of what their reason could never reconcile with the perfections of God, or admit as worthy of their attention and credit. Their arguments drawn from the nature and perfections of God, mightily comforted their hardened hearts, and supported their blind minds, until the day in which *the fountains of the great deep were broken up*, and then their refuge of lies was swept away; and the conviction of the truth of divine revelation was forced in upon their minds, with all the horrors of despair—Thus ma-

ny, even at this day, pretendedly argue from the divine perfections against divine revelation ; and like these unhappy antediluvians, will receive conviction when it is too late, from the deluge of Jehovah's wrath, which they would not believe.

III. We observe, that the vengeance of Heaven executed by a general flood, was to them extremely sudden and surprizing.—They had for a long course of years, the loudest calls to repentance, and the most express warnings of universal ruin, in case of disobedience. Noah, it is probable, was a preacher of righteousness an hundred years, and endeavored to stem the current of general wickedness, by the application of divine threatenings, and exhortations to repentance. In this view, therefore, their destruction was not at all sudden, nor unexpected. But they did not believe the truths of God ; the divine threatenings were to them as idle dreams.—*They ate, they drank, they married, and were giving in marriage, until the day Noah entered into the Ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all.*—They were sure in themselves no such event would happen—they were sure God was merciful, and in this confidence they blessed themselves, and bid defiance to such shocking and barbarous declarations. They could not, in any shape, believe them, until the fatal event administered demonstration, *with confusion* to their senses—until they found themselves overwhelmed, and strangling in the flood, and the same ven-

geance pursuing them down to Hell. How awful was the security and confidence, in which they were surpris'd ! While all were chearful, gay, easy, and happy, sacrificing to pleasure, indulging their natural, and as they imagined, innocent desires, looking for no such thing ; they lift up their eyes, and behold, the awful torrent from afar, rolling irresistably along ! Oh dreadful consternation ! shocking change ! In a moment, from mirth, music, tranquillity and joy, to horror, amazement, and despair ! Hear how they shriek and howl ! but God laughs at their calamity ! See how they run hither and thither, mingling without distinction ; in distraction, looking for places of refuge and security ! See some ascending to the tops of houses, and aspiring domes ! Vain expedient ! for the impetuous surge overturns their strong places, and confounds their hopes ! See millions fleeing to the lofty mountains, before the encreasing flood ! But Oh ! how fruitless is their attempt ! Thousands sink in the vale—Thousands are overtaken upon the brows of the steep hills, and dashed to pieces by the lashing waves, among the craggy rocks—The residue are swept from the deceitful summit, down the long precipice, to deeper ruin ! Hark, how they cry for mercy ! But alas, it is now too late ! These cries might have succeeded, had they been made in time ; but then they judg'd them unnecessary, and that it was too soon : as many, even at this day, put off seeking God, and crying for mercy, until they are surpris'd in death.

IV. We observe, that the circumstances and state of mankind at those seasons in which Jesus Christ will come to punish and judge them, will greatly resemble those at the time of the flood.—They will be times of great security, of eminent inconsideration and carelessness, with respect to the matters of religion and eternity: Seasons in which both wise and foolish virgins will be sleeping; in which profaneness and wickedness will prevail; the love of pleasure, and the love of the world, will be remarkably great and general.

1. This is often the case when Jesus Christ comes to remove particular sinners by death.—It frequently happens that careless and impenitent sinners, who have had many warnings of their danger, and made light of them, are taken away when they least expected such an event. Innumerable are the instances of this sort. How often are men checked in the career of their madness, folly and security, with that awful language, *Thou fool! this night shall thy soul be required of thee.* Oh! my brethren, a state of security is a dangerous state! When sinners cry, *peace, peace*, then sudden destruction cometh; when they imagine themselves most distant from death, judgment, and eternity, then those events are nearest. How tremendous is it, to be arrested by the grim messenger in the midst of scenes of pleasure, or worldly projects, and not one day more allowed to prepare for another state!

2. This is the case when Jesus Christ comes to punish and destroy guilty and impenitent nations and churches.—Nothing is more certain than that in all past ages, seasons of divine judgments on communities, either civil or sacred, have ever been seasons of great security, and reigning impiety.—The truth of this observation is evident with respect to the Jewish nation, in all the public judgments God poured out upon them.—And the conduct of Providence towards this nation, ought particularly to be observed; for it is designed as a specimen of the ordinary methods, in which God will deal with communities that he has distinguished with the honorable relation to himself, as his church and people.—It is evident God never visited them with any public remarkable calamity, but some remarkable public defection is mentioned as the immediate reason and ground of it.—They indeed often disowned the imputation; they denied their guilt; were insensible of any such remarkable degeneracy, for which they should be so severely visited; they refused to accept those judgments as the punishment of their sins; and had the common disease of an unhumiliated heart to exculpate themselves.—But from them we learn, that public judgments on a professing people, are always the ordinary effect, and designed punishment of public declensions from their duty, and regard to the covenant and oaths of God they are under. And their not seeing themselves in this light, nor being affected with them is no argument at all that this is not the case.

3. This will be the case, when Jesus Christ shall be revealed from Heaven to hold the general judgment.—Awful security, and awful wickedness will then prevail; for scarcely will faith be found upon the earth.

There is a day, a dreadful day, fixed by divine decree, when Jesus Christ shall be revealed from Heaven, with his mighty Angels in flaming fire, to take vengeance on them, that know not God, and obey not the Gospel—to call all nations, tongues and languages; all the kindreds of the earth, and every individual that ever existed, to his bar;—to lay open the secrets of every heart—to disclose the hidden springs of action, and determine the real characters of men, and fix their eternal destiny! One would imagine, that the certainty of an event of such high consequence, and everlasting importance, would have an irresistible effect: that it would interest and penetrate every heart, and determine all universally to the most studious and incessant attention to those things, whereby they might be prepared to stand in the awful day! And yet we are assured, notwithstanding, that it will be a time of great and general security. Jesus Christ's coming will be as a thief in the night; when men are in a profound sleep, altogether inapprehensive of danger. *As in the days that were before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the Ark, and knew*

not until the flood came and took them all away ; so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be.

I proceed now to close this discourse with a few reflections.

I. How great is the resemblance between our present state, and that of mankind before the flood ! The similitude bears in all respects, and that too with peculiar aggravations on our part. It is so glaring to every serious observer, that the very mention of it were sufficient to bring all to an humble confession, and mournful sense of our danger. But, it is the dreadful unhappiness of sinners, the nearer they approach to judgment and ruin, the more blind and insensible they grow.— This arises from two general causes. 1. The proper nature of sinful courses, which always blind the mind, and harden the heart. 2. The additional judgment of God, who permits the malignity of the human heart to exert itself with less control.— He ceases to apply those usual methods of restraint—gives them up more to themselves—leaves them to the government of their own heart's lusts—denies them restraining grace—takes his spirit from them.

The resemblance between us and the old world, is evident in the following respects.—The universal prevalence of deep secularity—the great means which God is using with us to reclaim us—and the amazing wickedness which abounds among all ranks of men notwithstanding.

I. The resemblance is evident in the universal prevalence of deep security. Let us look around us, and do we not find in ourselves and others, stupidity and unbelief in its strongest likeness, to that we see drawn for those beyond the flood? Are we acting any otherwise than they? Are we doing any thing else but *eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage*, buying, selling, planting, building, &c.—though the wrath of God is ready to burst upon our devoted heads!—Are we doing any thing but increasing our guilt, which is already gone up to Heaven? Are we not by adding iniquity to iniquity, blowing up the fury of God Almighty to an unquenchable flame? Are we not walking in security, taking no notice either of his word or providence, as though we were resolved to make trial of what God will do after all his threatnings? Oh foolish people! do you thus provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are you stronger than he? Remember if you thus continue, your feet shall slide in due time. The things that come upon you make haste:—And nothing but repentance—nothing but a speedy entrance into the Gospel Ark—nothing but taking refuge immediately under Emmanuel's wings, can secure you an escape.

II. The resemblance between us and the old world is strong, in respect to the great means God is using with us to reclaim us. Noah was a preacher of righteousness to them, but we have Jesus Christ and his Apostles preaching righteous-

ness to us. The exhortations to repentance—the warnings of our danger recorded in the scriptures, are very many; and these exhortations and warnings are so clear and pointed, that he that runs may read them. He must be absolutely stupid, and nearly sunk into a state of Atheism, that does not perceive and understand thier voice. They proclaim aloud the height and enormity of our wickedness, and the displeasure of Heaven against us.

How loudly have we been called upon to repent and change our ways! How earnestly and frequently has the importance and necessity hereof been inculcated upon us!—How express have been the warnings we have had, and still have of the danger of our natural courses of sin and pleasure!—How often have the terrors of that wrath, to which we expose ourselves by impenitence, formality and negligence in religion, been painted and exhibited to our view, from the word of God!—How distinctly have the glories and divine rewards of the Gospel been set before us, to induce us to prefer the service and work of Jesus Christ, to all the flattering, delusive, and sinful enjoyments of this world!—How many events have we met with in the course of our lives, to rouse our attention to the vanity of all things below the sun!—*We have had line upon line, and precept upon precept*—and notwithstanding all this, does not an awful and fatal security prevail among us, as it did among the inhabitants of the antediluvian world?

III. The amazing wickedness which abounds among all ranks of men, bespeaks a too great likeness between us and them. It is recorded of them, that *all flesh had corrupted their way, and the earth was filled with violence.* And is not this awfully true with regard to us?—I cannot now pursue this argument in all its parts, or give the black detail of reigning vices, which demonstrate the imitation to be general and true. Would to God that the matters and evidences, applicable to the support of this representation, were less obvious and less abundant!—What a growing contempt for divine revelation takes place among us?—What attempts are daily made to weaken its authority and influence?—Vain are all devices to support virtue by ingenious theories, and labored arguments, when the plain and simple doctrines of the Gospel of Jesus Christ are set aside. Oh! how blasphemous an insult on the perfections of God, is the attempt to substitute other methods to promote virtue in the room of the ever blessed Gospel, in the place of this glorious instrument of Heaven for the support of Religion! Will not a jealous God take vengeance, and confound the designs of all such deistical and antediluvian builders!—But leaving this, what sort of wickedness does not abound among us? How is the name, the dreadful name of God profaned? How often are our ears stunned with hellish oaths, and direful imprecations?—How are God's sabbaths abused? How are the ordinances, and special institutions

of Jesus Christ neglected? What restraint of prayer? What thoughtlessness, respecting all the great realities of eternity, take place? How does beastly drunkenness, and more than beastly uncleanness, in all their horrid forms, defile our land?—And how has love and friendship among mankind ceased? What extortion and injustice—what tricking, defrauding, over reaching, and cheating, almost every where abound?—Alas! how few are of clean hands, how few are of pure hearts!

How are mankind plunged and sunk into iniquity!—How do they add drunkenness to theft, licentiousness to liberty, profaneness to foolish jesting, and to all these, a total neglect of divine admonitions, and yet vainly imagine they shall have peace!—Will not the eternal God cause his jealousy to smoke against such secure and bold transgressors?—Jehovah's wrath is already enkindled, and unless we awake to repentance and reformation, it will surely *burn unto the lowest hell!* It will consume *the young man and the virgin, the suckling also with the man of grey hairs.*

Let us hearken to the divine voice, and not be found proclaiming defiance to the vengeance of Heaven. Oh! that secure, stupid, and careless sinners would make a stand; lay your ways seriously to heart; consider what is likely to become of you, and what you will do at the awful appearance of the Son of Man!

Go, confess your sins ; mourn for your iniquities ; break off from your transgressions ; and cry unto the Lord, and it may be that he will restrain the fierceness of deserved wrath, and bestow blessings upon you.

Let the wicked man forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts ; and let him return unto the Lord and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

Prepare to meet thy God, O Israel.—Let there be a general preparation. The Lord is on his way. Behold he comes quickly ! Gird up the loins of your minds, and go ye forth to meet him, repenting of your sins, acquiescing in the Gospel plan of reconciliation, observing all the commandments and ordinances of God. But if this advice seem evil unto you, prepare, O Sinners, for judgment ! Prepare to meet an incensed judge ! Our God is a consuming fire !—*Upon the wicked he shall rain snares, fire, and brimstone, and an horrible tempest ; this shall be the portion of your cup.*

Let it be the fervent prayer of all, that God would awaken the secure, alarm the stupid and inconsiderate, and turn multitudes to righteousness.