

SERMON

ON

HORSE RACING;

PREACHED IN THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, ELIZABETH-TOWN, SEPTEMBER 27, 1809.

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SERMON, &c.

ISAIAH, LVIII. 1.

*Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet,
and shew my people their transgression, and the
house of Jacob their sins.*

THE prophet Isaiah lived in a degenerate age of the Jewish nation, and was called to bear testimony against their vices, and to denounce the judgments of God on account of them. In our text, he is commanded to *cry aloud and spare not, to lift up his voice like a trumpet, and faithfully shew to this wicked people their transgression and their sins*; which he does in this chapter and the following.

It is the duty of ministers of the gospel to do the same, when there is the same cause for it. They are set as watchmen upon the walls of Zion, to guard the interests of religion, and watch for the welfare of the

kingdom of Christ, and the souls of men ; and whenever they see these in danger, to sound the alarm.—to reprove the wicked—to encourage the good—to warn the unwary, and shew them their danger—and to endeavor, by every just motive, to dissuade from vice, and correct or lessen its influence.

The good of the souls of their people requires of them faithfulness in this respect. They have solemnly taken charge of the souls of the flocks committed to their care. And can they be faithful to these souls, if they do not sound the alarm when they see them in danger? Can they love their people, if they see their dearest, even their everlasting interests, in danger, and yet keep silence ?

Besides, ministers are commanded by God to be faithful ; and he awfully threatens the unfaithful watchman. Hear what he said to the prophet Ezekiel, and through him still saith to every minister—*O Son of Man, I have set thee a watchman unto the house of Israel ; therefore thou shalt hear the word at my mouth, and warn them from me. When I say unto the wicked, O wicked man, thou shalt surely die ; if thou dost not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity ; but his blood will I require at thine hand.* Ezek. xxxiii. 7, 8.—Brethren, when I read such a solemn charge as this, addressed to the ministers of God ; and look forward to the awful solemnities of the judgment bar ; when I must give an account of my faithfulness to you the people of my charge—can I, dare I keep silence, at such a time as the present, when iniquity is breaking in upon us like a flood ?

In looking over the pages of history, we find the

virtuous, in almost every age, uttering the lamentation, *O the times! O the manners!* The same lamentation may be taken up, in the present day, and in this place.

The kingdom of Christ, we have reason to believe, is, upon the whole, increasing in the world generally. It is undoubtedly increasing in this land; the number of the visible, and we hope real disciples of Christ, have, within a few years, greatly augmented, and are still augmenting. The cause of Christ has also, within a short time, gained considerable strength in this town; the number of professing christians have within two years, been almost doubled.

But notwithstanding these things, the wickedness of the wicked seems evidently to have increased—Their enmity against religion has risen to a higher degree; and though fewer in number, they have become more bold and daring in vice. The cause of this is apparent. *The earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it*, if the husbandman neglect its cultivation, produces more abundantly noxious weeds; so persons, who have lived in places on which the influences of the Divine Spirit have been shed down in special and copious effusions, and yet have not improved them, generally become more fruitful in vice. In the revival of religion which we have had, the consciences of many have been, in a measure, aroused; and to rid themselves of its painful admonitions, and to drown reflection, they have made extraordinary efforts, and run into greater excesses than usual, and thus have become more hardened in sin. Besides, the native enmity of the carnal mind against God and his law has, by the pros-

perity of his cause, been called forth, in many hearts, into more active exercise. This is the natural course of things. The vial, which, as prophesied in the Revelation, was to be poured out upon the seat of the Beast, and fill his kingdom with darkness, was to cause the wicked, on account of the blow given to the kingdom to which they belonged, and the advancement of the interests of true religion which they hated, to gnaw their tongues for pain and blaspheme the God of Heaven. This is especially referred to the time of the Reformation from Popery; but it is applicable to almost every time of reformation, as the natural course of things, considering the enmity of the carnal mind against God. Another cause of the increase of vice among us at the present time is, that the grand adversary Satan has become alarmed for the interests of his kingdom, and is struggling to stop the progress of religion. He is called *the prince of the power of the air—the spirit that worketh in the children of disobedience*. Eph. ii. 2. And he is now working in them in this place, and exciting them to take a bold stand in defence of his cause, and to introduce and exhibit such scenes of vice among us, as may tend to grieve the Holy Spirit away from us—draw down the judgments, and particularly the spiritual judgments of God upon us—and, especially, corrupt the morals of the rising generation, that they may be a seed to serve the evil one. May God, of his infinite mercy, defeat his devices.

We have many crying sins among us, on which we might particularly speak. But a species of vice novel in this place, and connected with many others, and, in its consequences, very dangerous to the in-

terests of religion, morality, and civil order, has made its appearance among us, and demands our special attention in this discourse. I mean the *Horse-Racing*, which commenced yesterday in the neighborhood of the town, and which is expected to be continued through the greater part of this week.

I view this vice to be of such a heinous nature—so disgraceful to the character of this place—so offensive to heaven—so dangerous to the interests of civil order, morality, and religion—and such a source of corruption to the rising generation, that I cannot keep silence. My conscience, the love I bear to my people, and my fear of God will not permit it. The fear of man suggests, keep silence; but God commands me, *cry aloud and spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and shew my people their transgression and sins.* And which should be feared and obeyed, wicked men or God? Judge ye. I hear a voice, in the divine word, saying, *Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do; but I will forwarn you whom ye shall fear: fear him which after he hath killed, hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, fear him.* Luke xii. 4, 5. May the Lord deliver me from the fear of man.

Although the practice of horse-racing be not particularly pointed out, and forbidden in the Scriptures, yet the sinfulness of this practice may be clearly deduced from the Scriptures. They direct, *whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.* Coloss. iii. 17. And, *whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.* 1 Cor. x. 31. There are many other

texts of Scripture of the same import; and such texts clearly condemn this practice.

Again, as Christ is proposed to us in the Scriptures as our example, and we are commanded to *follow him*, and to *walk in his steps*—it is a good rule, by which to try whether an action be right or wrong. to ask ourselves, how would Christ have acted? would he have done so or not? The bare asking these questions must expose the sinfulness of this practice.

Again, that this practice is wrong, may be shewn also from this consideration, viz. that we should not wish to be surprised in it by the approach of death. But, if we would live aright, we ought always to act in such a manner, as our consciences would approve, should we suddenly be called to our account at the bar of our Judge.

Another evidence that this is a wicked practice is, that the laws of our State declare it to be unlawful, and make provision for the punishment of those guilty of it. The law is an evidence that it was viewed by our Legislators as an evil to society. And the mere infraction of the law apart from the evil of the action in itself considered, is a sin, as it is a transgression of that express command, *submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake.* 1 Pet. ii. 13.

Again, that this practice is a sin, may be learned from the characters of those men who are its authors and chief abettors. Who are they? the pious, or the virtuous part of community? those who fear God, and reverence and obey his laws? or are they not? I need not answer these questions. The bare asking them is sufficient to shew the moral, or rather immoral, character of this practice.

Further, the wickedness of this practice may be proved from the character of those places where it is frequent. It is a good rule by which to try actions, to observe their influence upon society ; and if they have a demoralizing influence, they must be wrong ; for God authorizes no practices which have such an influence—his laws are all *holy and good*—Rom. vii. 12 ; and whatsoever is otherwise must be contrary to his law. Look then at those places where these races are frequent, and observe the state of society in them. Are not the inhabitants of such places, in general, immoral ? Is not this uniformly the case ? And if we inquire for the principal cause of the licentious state of society in such places, will it not appear to every candid inquirer after truth, acquainted with the history of those places, that the practice we are condemning was the principal cause ? And if so, the practice is undoubtedly a wicked one.

But the principal argument to prove the wickedness of this practice, is, that there are many other vices connected with it.

It leads to idleness and wasting of precious time, contrary to the injunctions of the word of God, *not slothful in business*. Rom. xii. 11. and, *redeeming the time*. Eph. v. 16. Multitudes will doubtless attend these races, all of whose time is wanted to be employed for the support of their families ; and who will, for several days, not only not be earning any thing, but be spending something of the little they have. This may appear to some to be a small sin ; but it is a heinous sin in the sight of God. We hear much of the advantage it will be to the place in a pecuniary respect. If it were proper to have gain as the highest motive of conduct, as many do have it ;

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even then, I am inclined to believe, the present course would be improper; for more money will probably be taken from the place than will be left in it. It is probable that some few individuals, who are the authors of this nefarious business, and who are absorbed in self, may be advantaged, but the town will most probably suffer loss. And those who are aggrandizing self in this way are heaping treasures together for the last day—the gold and silver thus obtained will be swift witnesses against them, and one day eat their flesh as fire.

Another, and a leading vice, connected with these races, is gaming; and this, I am told, in public view.

A vice directly against the laws of our State, and declared thereby to be an indictable offence—a vice which tends to enflame the passions—which generally destroys every moral principle—which has ruined many individuals and families, and reduced them to beggary—and which has not unfrequently issued in suicide—and a vice which tempts and leads to, and is connected with many others.

Another vice connected with these races, is that of Sabbath-breaking; a vice expressly and repeatedly forbidden in the word of God; and also contrary to the laws of our State—a vice the most dangerous in its effects, as it opens a door for almost every other, and a vice which has brought down the signal judgments of heaven upon communities. On this day, it is probable, many from a distance will be travelling to this place. Many will have their thoughts occupied about the expected business of the week; yea, this will be the conversation of many on this holy day; yea, doubtless, many will this day be laying plans for the week, and be consulting together

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in what way they shall serve the wicked one. And, it is probable that many will go further than all this, and that revelling, gaming, training the horses, and many other enormities will be practised, on this holy day, in this place. Such things, I am told, are frequently practised on the Sabbath on such occasions. Such awful wickedness, I have been credibly informed, was practised on the Sabbath at the races, which have been recently held not far from this. And if we were witnesses of what has been, and will yet be practised, this day, on and near the ground selected for this scene, we should probably see all these and many more acts of wickedness committed. O! what a disgrace to a christian land!

Another vice which will doubtless prevail at these races is, that of prophane swearing—a vice, which as much, if not more than any other, tends to destroy the fear of God, and prepare men for any excess.

Another vice is intoxication. Many temptations will be presented to excite to this beastly sin; and, doubtless, many will comply with them.

Again another awful vice, which, probably, will be practised in this place during the scene which has commenced, is lewdness or debauchery. Abandoned females, I am credibly informed, frequently attend these places. And that vice, so shocking, that it can scarcely be named without giving a wound to delicacy, and which has ruined thousands, body and soul, in time and through eternity, will probably be one of the black catalogue of the sins of this wicked scene.

Again, revelling in a great variety of forms, by night and by day, will doubtless belong to the list of

vices. Indeed, the whole transactions will probably exhibit one continued scene of revelling. This is a sin expressly forbidden in the word of God, and declared to unqualify for the kingdom of heaven.—Gal. v. 21.

These, my brethren, are some of the sins connected with this horse-racing. Review the long and black catalogue—idleness, gaming, sabbath-breaking, prophane swearing, intoxication, debauchery, and revelling; and to these we might add cheating, quarrelling, fighting, and perhaps many more. Is this description exaggerated? Answer ye, who are in the secrets of this scene; if there be any such in this house of God this day. No, my brethren, we have reason to fear that the half has not been told, and that the reality is wickedness beyond description.

And there are circumstances which greatly aggravate the guilt of this wickedness. The scene thereof is laid in a christian land—in a land blessed with the light of the gospel—in a land which Providence opened as a religious asylum to our pious forefathers—and in a land peculiarly favoured with the goodness of God, while his judgments are abroad in the earth; and in a town which has long been favoured with the stated means of grace, faithfully dispensed—a town which has been blessed with the ministry of several of the most eminent servants of God which our country has produced—and a town where God has lately been doing wonders, in pouring out his Spirit, and manifesting in a remarkable manner, the riches of his grace, by bringing home many souls to the saving knowledge of himself. O! what a shocking thought! that there should be such a public scene of

wickedness, for a week together, in this place, where there lately has been such a remarkable revival of religion ! that this ground, so lately consecrated by the special presence of the Holy Spirit of God, should now be devoted to the public service of Satan.

And what is a still further aggravation of this dreadful wickedness is, that the day before the Sabbath should be selected as the time for its commencement, that the sin of Sabbath-breaking might be added to complete the list of sins.

Let us now consider the consequences of this complicated wickedness.

One very common consequence of such scenes is, that accidents happen, and not unfrequently lives are lost ; and this will probably be one of the dreadful consequences of these races—Yea ! already, in the very commencement of this wicked business has a life been lost ! and an immortal soul been suddenly hurried to the bar of God !

Another consequence of this wickedness will doubtless be, that many of the wicked will become more hardened in their wickedness ; and the probability that they ever will be brought to repentance and salvation will be lessened : yea, it is highly probable that the eternal damnation of some will be sealed on this occasion ; that the very last moment of God's patience, with respect to them, has arrived ; and that by their wickedness, in the present season, God will be provoked to say, they are joined to idols, let them alone, and to give them up to hardness of heart, blindness of mind, a reprobate sense, and strong delusions to believe a lie. Awful condition ! none, this side of hell, more awful !

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And the evil consequences of this hardening of the wicked in their wickedness, will affect not only themselves. They will not only become less likely to be led to repentance, or else have their doom sealed; but they will be more fitted to injure others.— Their example will become more pernicious, and others will be more likely to become corrupted; and thus their hearts will be more effectually closed against religious impressions, and they also become more dangerous members of society. Thus, one dreadful consequence of this scene of wickedness, will most probably be the destruction of many souls, and extensive injury to the interests of religion, morality, and social order.

Especially, we have much reason to fear the effects upon the rising and future generations. This is one of the greatest causes of alarm. The young are particularly prone to imitation; and, from the native corruption of their hearts, they are much more prone to imitate evil than good examples. Many of our youth will be present on this occasion. All parents, guardians, and masters, will not have the disposition to restrain them. Many will encourage them to go, or at least permit them; and many of those who have the disposition to restrain them, will not have sufficient authority, or resolution, or vigilance to do it.— Multitudes will be there. And, consider for a moment what scenes of wickedness will be exhibited before them—what examples will be set them—and, to what temptations they will be exposed, and then say—are not the morals of the young greatly in danger? will not habits now be formed in many that will affect their future lives? that will tend to make them dangerous members of society?—Yea, that may affect

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their eternal state? And the evil will not probably stop with the present rising generation; but their character and example will influence the next, which in their turn will corrupt the succeeding, and so on; and generations to come will most probably be affected by the transactions of the present week; and thousands of souls, yet unborn, will in future misery curse this season, and imprecate curses on the heads of those who have been instrumental in the introduction of this scene of wickedness among us. Awful consequences! May God, of his infinite mercy prevent it.

Another probable, and almost certain consequence of this dreadful scene of wickedness will be, the judgment of God upon us. Is there a righteous God in heaven? and will he not visit for these things? We have every reason to believe, both from his character as a sin-punishing God, and from what he has done in all ages in pouring out his judgments on account of sin, that he will, sooner or later, punish this place for these things. In what way, he will do this, we know not. Perhaps he may punish us with temporal judgments, and, perhaps, with spiritual, by taking his Holy Spirit from us, and leaving us to barrenness under the means of grace, and a general corruption of manners—a kind of judgments, though less deplored, more dreadful than any other in this world. May God, of his infinite mercy, hear the cries of his children, and avert these merited and dreaded calamities.

From a review of this subject, learn the great depravity of human nature, which is capable of running into such excess—which can thus disregard the in-

terests of mankind, and *in sport cast firebrands, arrows, and death*—And which can thus cast off the authority of Jehovah, trample on his laws, temper his vengeance, and rush on the thick bosses of his buckler.

And, how admirable the patience of God ! that he restrains his wrath, and does not immediately pour out his fury on such rebellious creatures ; and, since they trample on his authority, make them feel his power. When we look around on the world, and consider the wickedness practised in it (of the thousandth part of which, we have no conception) we may well exclaim—O the riches of the patience of God ! and wonder that he suffers such a world to stand.—Truly, saith the Lord, *my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways : for as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.* Is. lv. 8. 9.

An address to different classes and characters of persons who may be in this assembly will now close this subject: and,

1. Permit me to address those present, who move in the higher walks of life. You have influence—your opinions and your example have great weight. Let me earnestly exhort you seriously to consider this subject. Take a view of the crimes openly practising among us—consider their dangerous influence on the interests of religion, morality and civil order ; and especially their demoralizing influence on the young. And let me earnestly intreat you to frown upon these things—do not sanction them by your presence—keep at a distance from them—bear your testimony against them—and use your influence, and exer-

tions to suppress them. Acting thus, you will have the sweet felicity of the approbation of your own consciences—you will deserve well of your country—the blessing of the virtuous and pious will rest upon you—their prayers will be offered up for the blessing of heaven upon you and yours—and future generations will rise up and call you blessed.

2. Permit me, in view of this subject, to say a word to magistrates. I will not undertake to point out to you, your duty on this occasion, as civil officers; you know this better than I can tell you. I would only remind you, that you *are ordained of God*, Rom. xiii. 1, and ordained *for the punishment of evil doers, and for the praise of them that do well*, 1 Pet. ii. 14. You are accountable to God for the faithful discharge of your duty in your office; and see to it that you keep consciences void of offence.

3. I would call upon the whole of this congregation to set their faces against this wickedness. It is disgraceful to the town you live in. It is introducing a flood of vice among you. In its tendency it is destructive of your souls, and the souls of your children. It is a large link in the chain of those causes, which, without deep repentance, will, sooner or later, bring down the judgments of God upon us—and perhaps those exterminating judgments, which he is now, so awfully, pouring out upon the nations of Europe for their crimes. Go not near this scene—bear your testimony against this wickedness—use every lawful exertion to bring the authors, contrivers, and promoters of it to justice—let the public mind be against it, and be expressed—let the authors be held in abhorrence, and it will stop.

4. Permit me to address the young. My beloved

youth, for you especially I feel and tremble on this occasion. You are to form the future members of church and civil society, and the interests of both are intimately connected with the manner in which you are trained up, and the habits which you now form ; yea, your own everlasting salvation is intimately connected therewith. And you are in great danger, from the scene of vice among us, of becoming corrupted and forming vicious habits. Let me, most tenderly, and affectionately, and earnestly, exhort you not to go near these places. Yea, I charge you, as your minister, to keep at a distance. Avoid that place as you would one infected with some deadly contagion. *That place is the way to hell, going down to the chambers of death.*

5. Parents, guardians, masters, I call upon you and charge you to be faithful at this time. If you regard the favor of God, and the interests of his cause—if you regard the good of society—and especially, if you regard the everlasting happiness of the souls of those under your care—be careful to restrain them from going near this scene of vice—keep them from it as you would from a place infected with the plague.

6. People of God, I would next address you. I hope you all feel on this occasion—many of you, I know, do feel most deeply ; and all of you, who have grace in exercise must be sighing for these abominations. Let me exhort you, by every just mode of expression, to bear your decided testimony against these things, and shew your abhorrence of them. Be deeply humbled before God. Why has he permitted these abominations, replete with spiritual judgments,

to come in upon us. Is it not for the same place? for the abuse of such distinguishing mercies as it has enjoyed? And have not the people of God been partakers in these abuses? Therefore let us be deeply humbled—let us mourn for our own sins, and the sins of others. Let us be much engaged in humble and earnest prayer to God. If he does not interpose we are undone—his cause must sink in this place. He may hear us—yea, we have abundant reason to believe, that if we be in earnest, he will hear us; for he is a God, who heareth prayer; and his word declares that *the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much*, James v. 16. *The Lord reigneth—he is stronger than man—the wrath of man shall praise him—and he has given us encouragement to believe that when the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him*, Isa. lix. 19. This is our hope and joy. Let us be engaged, and we may hope that he will help, and open a door of deliverance from the dreadful effects of these abominations. And, O ye people of God—all who bear his name, *come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing*; 2 Cor. vi. 17. *Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness*; Eph. v. 11. *O my soul come not thou into their secret; unto their assembly, mine honour, be not thou united*; Gen. xlix. 6.

7. Are there any here, this day, who are the authors, or promoters of this scene of wickedness, and who are determined still to persevere? Let me call upon you, and charge you to pause, and consider. It may be the last call, while there is hope for you. This may be the last day of God's patience; and if you

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proceed, you may hereby for ever close the door of mercy against you. O pause, before it may be for ever too late. Reflect on the dreadful weight of guilt which will press upon you if you persevere. You are filling God's people with deep distress—they are dear to him—in all their afflictions he is represented as being afflicted, Isa. lxiii. 9. Therefore every sigh, and groan, and pain, which you occasion them will one day rise up against you—the guilt of those, who may be corrupted during this scene, will be laid to your charge—you will have been partakers in their sins. The sins of generations to come may be laid to your charge—and should lives be lost, on this occasion, as will probably be the case—yea, one, already has been lost!—And his blood crieth from the earth to heaven, against you, for vengeance. You have been the occasion of shedding this blood; and however it may be viewed in the sight of men, in the sight of God this blood will be laid to your charge. This town is defiled with blood, and you must answer for it. O! what a load of guilt will press upon you—and what an awful punishment awaits you! Once more, I beseech you, pause; consider, desist, and repent—The Lord have mercy upon you. AMEN.

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Finis.
