

F
128
44
-574



Chap. 17

4 17

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS.

Chap. F128
Shelf 44
574

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

1338
29/5 ②

THE CONFLAGRATION

IN THE

CITY OF NEW-YORK:

A DISCOURSE.

DELIVERED IN THE SECOND PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN BROOKLYN,
DECEMBER 20th, 1835; ON THE SUBJECT OF THE FIRE IN NEW-
YORK ON THE NIGHT OF DECEMBER 16th.

THE CONFLAGRATION

IN THE

CITY OF NEW-YORK:

A DISCOURSE

DELIVERED IN THE SECOND PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN BROOKLYN,
DECEMBER 20th, 1835; ON THE SUBJECT OF THE FIRE IN NEW-
YORK ON THE NIGHT OF DECEMBER 16th.

BY ICHABOD S. SPENCER.

PUBLISHED BY REQUEST.

NEW-YORK:

J. Post's Press, 101 John street, second door north of Pearl street.

1836.

J

SERMON.

EZEK. xxviii. 18.

Thou hast defiled thy sanctuaries by the multitude of thine iniquities, by the iniquity of thy traffic ; therefore will I bring forth a fire from the midst of thee, it shall devour thee, and I will bring thee to ashes upon the earth in the sight of all them that behold thee.

MY DEAR FRIENDS,

It is seldom that we assemble in circumstances of so much sadness, as we assemble this morning. That flood of fire, which has rolled over so much of the adjacent city, has laid in ashes the possessions of some of our beloved congregation, and extended its injuries to a greater or less degree to almost every one of us ! We see around us, our respected and beloved friends, whose wealth is now ashes, whose stores are but piles of smoking ruins, whose plans of industry and enterprize have all been dashed in pieces in a single night, whose hopes are disappointed, and whose hearts, as they remember their wives and children, and others who look to them for support, are forced to feel sen-

sations of bitterness and sorrow of no common kind! This calamity has deeply affected us. It has caused a bitter and general mourning. It has fallen upon those respected and beloved—upon those, whose prosperity is peculiarly important to their own families not only, but to every class of society! Now, the heart of the wife and the mother is filled with sadness, as she beholds the husband of her love and the father of her children, the friend on whom she leaned, made desolate in a single night! Now, families of children, recently hopeful and happy, are filled with fear and distress, as they know the fire has burnt down the possessions of their father, and perhaps made him too poor to give them bread! No man can yet tell the extent of this calamity. It may reach multitudes in some of its disastrous effects, whom none of us suppose to be at all affected by it. And though it may not create so much immediate suffering, but there will be some alleviation and some resource, yet it cannot but be, that its effects shall be very dreadful!

We would improve this calamitous event. Standing here to speak to men for God, we would say to them,—that was God's work! It was by his permission that the blaze, no bigger than *a man's hand*, extended itself, till one pile after another became a sheet of living flame, and an "ocean of fire" was rolling over the noble and happy city! It was by God's control, that the ordinary resour-

ces against the progress of the devouring element were of so little avail ! It was God's cold that congealed the quenching waters, which activity and promptness would have poured upon it ! It was God's wind that fanned and drove onward the flames, consuming the costliest fabrics, crumbling down the most noble buildings, spreading from pile to pile and from street to street, till it seemed as if the whole city were devoted to ruin ! It was by God's power, that the pieces of burning material were borne up into the heavens, and fell, like a shower of fire, upon even the roofs of your own city ! And it was God's power that stayed its progress. After it had attained such a mastery, after it had perfectly defeated the attempts of man at so many points, and arrived at such a pitch of resistless rage ; it would not have been at all wonderful, if it had doubled its desolations ! But it was controlled by him *who sitteth in the heavens*.

And now it should be our aim to make a judicious and solemn use of this affecting judgment. In attempting to do so,

I. Let us guard against any unauthorized conclusions to be drawn from this providence.

II. Let us glance at some of the lessons of instructive admonition which it seems to speak.

III. Let us inquire what may be the design of heaven in sending it.

IV. Let us mark the mercies, which, after all, we believe to characterize it.

I. In the text we read to you, it has pleased God to mention the reason of that ruin, which he threatened to bring upon Tyrus, a noted commercial city of the East. *Thou hast defiled thy sanctuaries by the multitude of thine iniquities, by the iniquity of thy traffic.* This was the reason of his threatened judgment.

Now, I suppose we are very liable to err, when we attempt to ascertain the reasons for providential afflictions. These reasons are known only by God, and those to whom he is pleased to reveal them. In those cases, and those only, where he is pleased to tell *why* he sends calamity, we have a right to tell. We know, on this subject, just what God has told us, and we know nothing more. The ways of God are mysterious and dark. He is a God *who hideth himself*. It belongs to no mortal eye to scan the secrets of his counsels. A wise man will aim to be instructed by divine providences, will aim to be improved by them, will aim to conspire with the desolations of fire, or famine, or tempest, to have his heart made more humble, more filled with awe of the divine majesty, and with sensibility of his own creature dependance. But a wise man will not assign reasons for calamitous events, where God has not assigned them. On this point our knowledge is all general. There is no speciality in it. We know, in general, that sin is the cause of all human misery; that God has often punished wickedness and forgetfulness of

himself by desolating judgments ; that the acts of divine providence are all monitory. But we have no right to go beyond this. We must not assign the reasons for God's acts, when he has not, by express revelation, himself assigned them.

Among fallen sinners like us, there is often a disposition to overlook the providences of God, on the one hand, and on the other, to make an unauthorized use of them. The one proceeds from a half-atheistical disposition, no desire to find God in his world ;—and the other proceeds from a disposition scarcely less honorable to the Deity, pride, self-righteousness, or some kindred feeling of sin.

Against the first of these dispositions, it would seem that we were sufficiently instructed in those passages which tell of God's *numbering the very hairs of our head,—clothing the grass and the lilies of the field,—watching over the sparrow in his hedge,—and assuring us we are of more value than many sparrows.*

Against the second, Jesus Christ has sufficiently cautioned us. *There were present at that season, some that told him of the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And Jesus answering said unto them, suppose ye that these Galileans were sinners above all the Galileans, because they suffered such things ? I tell you, Nay ; but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish. Or those eighteen, upon whom the*

tower of Siloam fell and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, Nay; but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish. We have no right to say, that personal sin has brought the judgments of God. True, the judgments of God are all on account of sin. But there are so many ways unknown to us, in which he may accomplish his designs by them; there are so many of them involved in utter darkness; there are so many of them sent only to turn his best beloved people from dangerous ways, and thus prevent a more severe visitation; that we are alike foolish and presuming, when we say it is peculiar wickedness on which the calamity has fallen. Neither the individuals, nor the city, that has suffered, must be thought by us more wicked than others, because they have *suffered such things: I tell you, Nay.*

To indulge the idea that the calamities of this life are judgments upon those who are called to endure them, tends to render us too inattentive to that final judgment, where justice shall be vindicated, and iniquity receive its appropriate reward. This life is a mere shadow. The sands of three-score years and ten are soon fallen. The joys, the pains, of this little space will soon be over. All that we could reap from the most luxuriant field of earthly felicity, would be a boon scarcely worthy of God to give, and scarcely worthy of man to receive, if he could look forward to no

richer and more enduring joy. All the “ills that flesh is heir to” fall far short of the punishments, which God sees iniquity to deserve. Beyond this life, the throne of final judgment is reared. It stands in the midst of Eternity. God is seated upon it. And when *all nations shall be gathered* before it, it will be little to the terrors of that day, that all the cities in the world shall be burnt up; that even *the sun shall be turned into darkness; the heavens shall be on fire, and the elements shall melt*. The dread idea will be, the ETERNITY, on which the immortal spirit shall be launched! From that dread tribunal, the spirit must go forth, to awards as deathless, as the God that made it! It is this,

“Which makes a hell of hell, a heaven of heaven.”

Change shall be no more. Among the redeemed of Jesus Christ, there shall be *no more sorrow, nor crying, nor pain*. *God shall wipe away all tears forever from their eyes;—while the wicked shall go away into everlasting punishment!* Let us not entertain diminutive ideas of the goodness or the terrors of the Lord. Let us remember that judgments await wickedness, more dreadful than any to be found in the fires that burn down our cities; in the famines, or floods, or pestilences, that visit the earth.

II. Still, divine providence is a divine lesson. Our King would have us notice his acts. And if with your usual kindness you will continue to listen, we will attempt to mention some considerations which we deem appropriate in respect to this disaster.

1. *I will bring forth a fire from the midst of thee.* How different is our situation from what we are accustomed to imagine! We are prone to fear external ills. We are quick to look out for foreign danger. In that great city, what a strong and universal sensation has existed, lest a rupture with a foreign government should derange its commerce, injure its trade, diminish its profits and its felicity; while at the same time, there was little thought, that it contained within itself the prepared elements of a more terrible disaster! Such elements were all there. They waited only the bidding of God to come forth and lay her pride in the dust! The very merchandize, from which industry and enterprize make their gain, can easily be turned by God into fuel, to burn down with more dreadful conflagration the very edifices that contain it! It needed no war with France to spread desolation from street to street. God has other agents, than the thunder of artillery, the embattled legions, and the whetted sword. He can turn our very pride into an enemy. He can bid the fire, and at his bidding our choice possessions, our rich stores of merchandize, our clothing and our food shall feed

the flames, and add to our danger! Thus it is, that we have the materials for ruin among ourselves. Our prized possessions may be turned against us;—in no few circumstances they tend to enhance our danger.

We are prone to forget our condition. The instruments of our felicity, may become the instruments of our ruin. A great city, prosperous in trade, filled at the close of the year with the results of prosperity, food and fuel accumulated for a winter's supply, seems well prepared to furnish as much security and felicity as mortals can expect. But how easy for God to turn it all into ruin! A single night,—and the morning may dawn upon its ashes!

Are we not too unmindful that we have the materials for misery among our most valued objects? Do we not too often forget, that we need the protection and care of an overruling God, as much in our very enjoyments, to keep them from turning to our injury, as we do in aiding us to attain them? Hence,

2. This calamity strikingly illustrates the vanity of earthly possessions.

It has fallen upon a class of men, whose possessions were apparently as secure, as those of a commercial people can be. Many of the principal sufferers were men of extensive wealth. Industry and enterprise and skill, attended with the smiles of heaven, had put into their hands the

means of extensive usefulness, and opened before them, as promising a prospect of competence and of earthly felicity, as it rarely falls to the lot of man to behold. Nothing was threatening them. No wars had begun to interrupt their commerce. No year of barrenness had held back the needful supplies, sent in from a thousand fields of luxuriant richness. The plenty that filled the land, had sent to the mart of trade the accustomed purchasers, and every thing was as rich in promise, as the fondest expectation could have anticipated. But in a single night, how wonderful the change! The sun went down, upon as smiling and happy a city perhaps, as the world ever saw. The sun rose, and an extensive part of it, was nothing but one wide and smoking ruin! In that dreadful night, the oldest, most wealthy, most substantial part of the city, was blotted out! The devouring element seized upon the very centre and citadel of business and wealth! At a single stroke, multitudes were ruined in fortune, in happiness, if not in hope! The rich were reduced to poverty! Their possessions melted away before their eyes, like the vanishings of a gilded dream! Oh! how vain are the hopes men build upon earthly things! God can blast them in a single hour! At his bidding, any one of a thousand causes may start into action, and strip us of all we possess! The truth is, we have nothing only by sufferance. No man has any firm hold on his riches. Their flight is

most easy and natural. *They make to themselves wings and flee away.* If God does not restrain the elements, our possessions vanish. If *he* please, the richest shall be as poor as the poorest; the most secure shall be defenceless; and every hope based on the possessions of the world shall melt into nothing. *I will bring forth a fire from the midst of thee, it shall devour thee, and I will bring thee to ashes upon the earth in the SIGHT of all them that behold thee.* Yes,

3. This calamity illustrates the powerlessness of man.

That great multitude of anxious and interested people, who gathered around their property to defend it, willing to do any thing and hazard any thing but life, (and in many cases even that,)—how utterly powerless! Their promptness, their vigor, their distressful anxiety, their plans, all their power,—how feeble and ineffectual! They could do little more than look, and wonder. They were ready for all that man could do, or man could dare. But it seemed as if God would teach man his littleness. He took the work into his own hands, and made it bear the marks of his mightiness. The ordinary means of vanquishing the destroying element appeared like folly before its power. Numbers availed nothing;—strength, nothing;—intrepidity, nothing! Friend could not aid friend, nor brother, brother! It seemed as if God would cut off every hope but in himself, and

teach a great city the utter powerlessness of man!

It is natural for us, (we are so much dependant upon one another,) to fly to our fellows for assistance. In our calamities, we cry to our friends to aid us. It is right; and it tells no bad tale for human nature, that there is a spot in the heart of man, that is touched by the cry of distress. But our Maker sometimes shows us the vanity of all power but his own. It is a profitable lesson. Man ought to feel his littleness. Neither on himself, nor on his fellows, should he ever place such reliance, as to forget that all power *belongeth unto God*. Man is a very little thing! When God wakes the elements against him, what can he do? Multitudes were forced to see their all sinking down in fire, and feel that they could do nothing to save it. At most, they could only seize an item of their possessions, and not lodge even that in security. Large quantities of merchandize rescued from the burning buildings were consumed in the streets, and even the altar was no protection,—the sanctuary mingled its own ashes with those of the precious fabrics placed within it for security. Oh! how little, how little a thing is man! When God pleases to show him his nothingness, there is not a lowly reptile that crawls upon the earth, but may boast of being his equal. The rich, the influential, the vigorous, the intrepid, can do no more than the veriest worm beneath their

feet. Contending against God, they are alike wise and alike powerful. Hence,

4. This calamity also strikingly illustrates how vain are human contrivances and human securities if God please to make them so.

There is nothing improper in the plans of men to secure themselves against loss. We are not going to censure them. Forethought is one of the most commendable employments of mind; and when our plans for security do not lead us to rest in them and forget God, no wisdom can frown upon them. But in this disaster it has pleased God to illustrate their vanity. You were compelled to see all the arrangements of the fire department, all the fearlessness and promptness of the firemen utterly baffled, hour after hour, while the unpitied flame was extending the field of its desolation. In ordinary cases, you have found the arrangements effective and sufficient, as soon as the alarm has extended far enough to bring them into action. Not so now. The whole power of the department could do little more to breast the destroyer, than the child, that throws a feather in the way of the tempest. God seemed to have united the two extremes, to teach man the vanity of his contrivances. He seemed to have yoked heat and cold together, to give dreadful emphasis to the lesson. While the fire consumed your palaces, the cold congealed the waters that would quench it. With one hand, God was sending on

the destroyer; and with the other, holding powerless the arm that would arrest its progress. He made even the ocean heave back his tides with unwonted force, as if denying any thing to the forsaken city,—that mistress of commerce, to whose glory he had so long and so largely been tributary, and deserting her now in her utmost extremity. The lowness of the waters, at the very time of the most terrifying alarm, rendered almost useless the exertions of the most energetic body of firemen in the world.

And besides this, he showed the vanity of the resources of the prudent. The cry of alarm fell powerless upon many an ear, because of the securities of effected insurance. The thought crossed many a mind, that herein was security against personal loss. But this disaster has revealed the vanity of the thought. It has been so extensive as almost to crush the contrivances of prudence and forethought;—it has almost swept away at once the insurer and the insured. Some alleviation, indeed, may come from this source; but far less than the feeblest hope anticipated. And even this comes from the miseries of others. The owners of the insurance stocks, many of them widows and orphan children, dependant on these for their daily bread, and supposing this the most secure of all investments, have been deprived of all their living. This is the saddest item in the whole chapter of

distress! The widow's wail and the orphan's cry, are borne on the moaning winds!

Man is more likely to forget his dependance in securing his possessions, than in acquiring them. To attain, he feels his need of God's blessing; but to secure, he is more apt to feel his own sufficiency. At the very moment, when gratitude ought to make him mindful of God, he is prone to forget him. Sin is as unthankful and proud, as it is foolish. From many a man, God has taken away the investments, that he thought most secure of all; and in which, he hardly realized that he needed God to protect him. But God has written the admonition in letters of fire! He has shown, that there is no device, no prudence or contrivance of men, which can secure them. He has given the very lesson, which seems to be most peculiarly needed at the present moment, when great accumulation of individual wealth is tempting men to ingratitude and pride. He has shown, that there is only one place, where men can *lay up for themselves treasures*, and find them safe. Let us place them there. Let us take the insurance of Almighty God. The treasures of grace are never burnt up. If we have *treasures laid up in heaven*, the world may burn, and we shall be rich. Hence,

5. An occurrence like this, contains a lesson on the *equality* of men.

Perhaps, if you were to look the whole country

over, you could find no body of men, who seemed in more enviable circumstances, than those who have suffered in this calamity. They had accumulated much ;—their property was as wisely secured, as prudence could make it ;—they were engaged in extensive and prosperous business, and seemed to be far removed from the fears of poverty and want not only, but far above the fear of embarrassment. On such men, the world are accustomed to look with envy. They seem to be raised above a thousand fears and troubles, which afflict others. The embarrassments, which fall to the common lot of men, do not reach them, and the great mass of the world look upon them, as standing in a most enviable position. But a stroke like this, scorns all such distinctions. Like death itself, it shows how easily the Ruler of the world can reduce all to the same common level. Let Him but will it, and in a single hour, the rich man shall be as poor as the poorest ; and perhaps even more miserable by sinking down from his envied elevation, than if he had never risen to it. God shows us, that in his hands we are all alike ;—he rebukes pride, on the one hand, and envy, on the other.

How pitiful, before God, are all those feelings of pride and vanity, which circumstances engender ! He has but to speak, and at his bidding, the world shall change its aspect ! He made it, and he controls it. *He stretcheth out the north over*

the empty place, and hangeth the earth upon nothing. He bindeth up the waters in his thick clouds. The pillars of heaven tremble at his reproof. He divideth the sea with his power, and by his understanding he smiteth through the proud. He sitteth upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers. He weigheth the mountains in scales and the hills in a balance. Behold the nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance; he taketh up the isles, as a very little thing. He poureth contempt upon princes, and weakeneth the strength of the mighty. He thundereth in the heavens, the Highest giveth his voice, hailstones and coals of fire. A smoke goeth out of his nostrils, and fire out of his mouth devoureth; coals are kindled by it. Who is God, save the Lord? The meaning of all this is,—God is great, and there is none great but God. As for man, his wisdom and his pride are vanity! His choicest goods, his loveliest possessions, his costliest palaces, give him no sure pre-eminence! The breath of the destroyer may crumble them all into ashes, and leave him deserted of every thing,

“And none so poor to do him reverence.”

6. The *extent* of this calamity is another idea that should not escape us. Nothing like it has ever before been experienced, on the continent of America. Since that awful time, when the pal-

aces of imperial Moscow were given up to the flames, nothing of equal disaster has fallen upon any city in the civilized world. It is a calamity, not merely here, among those who are the first and greatest sufferers, and for whom our hearts bleed in sympathy; but it is a public calamity,—it is a disaster to the whole country, and indeed to the commercial world. The Deity has laid his hand upon the very heart of commercial activity on this side the Atlantic. Commerce will suffer: Trade will be deranged: Improvements arrested. The whole business of the land will feel the shock. To have *forty acres*, out of the centre of business in the city, blotted out at a single stroke,—its goods to a great extent consumed, and its palaces crumbled into ashes;—to have *fifteen millions* sunk in a single night;—to have so many hundreds of mercantile houses interrupted in business, and many of them made utterly bankrupt;—is no common calamity! It cannot but be, that the whole land will feel it,—that the whole commercial world will realize a shock! The activity, the enterprize, the confidence, of the community will be damped. The government will suffer. The church will suffer. The cause of Christian benevolence will suffer. God has taken away from some of the most benevolent, (among a people proverbially liberal,) the means of doing good; and if men of commerce, of science and the arts, must mourn, the children of God are

called on to mingle their tears with theirs! And it seems to me, (I know not with how much truth,) that this dear congregation has experienced more than its proportionate share! May the Infinite God pity the sufferers! May consolations come down from heaven, and the distresses and fears that oppress us be graciously assuaged!

The city, the country, many of the individuals, will recover again from this disaster, and business and prosperity will flow on in their accustomed channels. But many a widow's heart will bleed, and many an orphan will weep unseen! Theirs is the bitterest chalice of wormwood and gall! For them, no enterprize and industry will recover the loss! They will suffer unseen; and while for others, a new edifice shall rise, a phoenix from its ashes, for them remain the desolation of mind and tears of loneliness!

This is no common disaster. The Almighty has surpassed his usual measure of afflictive visitation; as if to show us that he is our God. Every thing was going on in the full tide of prosperity. Commerce was extending,—trade rapid and prosperous,—credit easy,—property deemed secure,—improvements projected and completed with unparalleled rapidity and ease,—literature and science advancing,—and the streams of Christian benevolence going out to water the whole earth!—and all, all but RELIGION, that concerns men

on earth, seemed in a most happy and promising condition ! I ask, therefore,

III. If it does not seem to be a most appropriate warning of God to call men to reflection ! He has tried us with prosperity. At the monthly concert, on the first Monday of this month, we expressed the opinion that there never had been a nation, who had enjoyed twenty years of such unbroken prosperity as this nation, since the peace of eighteen hundred and fifteen. We expressed the fear too, that unless more piety and zeal and devotedness should characterize the church, the thousand worldly influences would draw in our sons and our daughters, our neighbors and friends, and they would be lost to heaven, and the whole church rendered comparatively feeble ! But little did we think that Almighty God was about to send such an admonition, to remind us, that all was prosperous, but RELIGION ! This *seems* like such a voice. We leave you to contemplate it, as you see the contrast, the dark contrast, between the prosperity and the piety of our land.

In periods of great worldly prosperity, men are prone to forget God. With such hearts of corruption as we possess, it is easy for us to be led astray. We need some strong monition. When God's *judgments are abroad in the earth the in-*

habitants thereof will learn righteousness. Without such judgments, aside from some visible tokens of the power of God, we are too much prone to rely on second causes. That very goodness of God which leads him to govern the world by uniform laws, leads us to forget him. Perhaps, our fertile country, our progressing improvements, our national peace, our successful enterprise and skill, our safe harbors, our extending commerce, and salubrious skies, have all been so many temptations to our impiety. Our God has shown us how easy it is to render them all vain! Let us recognize his hand. Let us confess that we deserve its strokes. Let us avert his indignation by timely repentance. Let us *take refuge in the shadow of his wings until these calamities be overpast.*

No question, the intention of the Deity in the miseries he sends upon the world, and forces us to feel or to witness, is to lead men to holiness. He writes TEKEL upon the world, that our eye may see it, and be directed to the *world to come.* We may not say, that he smites always in anger,—we dare not aver, that vengeance and indignation guide the strokes of his hand. We remember the *darkness that is round about him,* and how little we are able to penetrate the particular designs of God. We remember that *a man must be born blind,* not because *he sinned, or his parents,* but in the language of Jesus Christ, *that the works of*

God should be manifest in him. We remember an Abraham must be called to offer up Isaac, not as a judgment, but for a trial. *Now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, from me.* We remember, that a Lazarus must die, in the language of the Savior, *to glorify God*: a Job must suffer, to baffle Satan, perfect his faith,—and exemplify godliness to the world. And in the same calamity, we remember too, that God may have different designs among the sufferers. One may suffer, that the *trial of his faith being much more precious, than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.* Another may suffer like David: *before I was afflicted I went astray, but now have I kept thy word.* Still, a scene like this, in circumstances like this, does seem like a strong rebuke to the worldliness of the land. Is it not true, that the aim after riches has almost swallowed up all other aims? Talents and industry and enterprize in this land have been devoted to the acquisition of wealth, which might have been enough to have improved the condition and heightened the felicities of half mankind. Talents have here been devoted to acquiring wealth, which might have made successful rivalry with the proudest of ancient genius, and pushed on the achievements of science beyond those fields of mastery, where

men like Bacon and Newton and Locke have gained their laurels,

“And left their name

“A light, a landmark on the cliffs of fame.”

Talents have here been devoted to wealth, which might have been enough to have carried the gospel of Jesus Christ over every sea, over every mountain, into the unexplored regions of every island and continent, and lodged the offers of salvation in the habitation of every living man! We have not forgotten, that *if any provide not for his own, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel*. Nor do we forget the streams of Christian bounty, which have been swelled, and rolled along in deeper and wider channels, and to more blessed results, by the liberality of wealthy, commercial men. But we believe, there is a growing passion for accumulating riches, which can never be needed by one's family; and surely, there are devotements of heart, in grace, and of life, in exemplifying it, which constitute a better offering to God, than all the riches, which wealth can pile upon the altar.

And has not wealth become almost a national idol? What other object, in our land, wakes to energy the capacities of men? Where now do we witness contentment with a handsome competence? To be learned, to be useful, to be esteemed for wisdom and virtue, to do good in the

every-day walks of life, to one's own family, and friends, by teaching them to be virtuous and contented and happy;—to *use the world as not abusing it*, remembering the *fashion of it passeth away*;—are objects, which seem almost like matters of fiction, or tales of another age! And in this eager rush after the world, is it not true, that the people of God have been too much borne along? Ought we not, therefore, to view this disaster, if not, as a judgment, at least, as a voice of warning, cautioning us, *love not the world, neither the things that are in the world*,—*set your affections on things above, where Jesus Christ sitteth on the right hand of God*.

Let us be instructed and improved by this fiery visitation. After all, it seems more like a *warning*, than like an act of *vengeance*. And this idea will gather strength and clearness, as we,

IV. Notice the mercies which seem to characterize it. We have time only to name them.

1. One is, the *season* of its occurrence. How much more disastrous, if the same spot had thus been made desolate at the commencement of the business period of the year. Many more millions must have perished, and the gains, the living of the year been lost.

2. Another is, the *peculiarity* of the season. By the early closing of the rivers and canals, and by the unusually protracted voyages of merchant

vessels coming from the East, large quantities of provisions and merchandize were detained from the city, and thereby saved from the flames.

3. Another is, the *locality* of the infliction. Had it fallen upon a thickly inhabited part of the city, though the loss in property might not have been so extensive, the suffering would have been far more appalling. Let as many *private dwellings* burn, and no man can tell the wretchedness that would ensue. Exposure, nakedness and hunger, would swell the amount of wo.

4. Another is, the facilities for recovering from the loss. Activity, enterprize, and the proverbial buoyancy of a commercial spirit, will tend to secure a speedy recovery.

5. Another, that so few persons were themselves the victims of the fire.

6. Still another, that it spread *no farther*. A slight change of the wind might have doubled the disaster.

7. Another still, that this extensive loss has come in a way to produce less real suffering, than if it had occurred in any other way or place. Destroy as much property, at a single blow, in any other place you can imagine in the whole land, and you produce far more extensive suffering.

God is good, even while he afflicts. This congregation should be especially thankful for his goodness. Twice, that shower of fire, that was

raining down upon us, kindled the flames, just by the spot where we are standing; and had it not been for timely and providential discovery, your own *sanctuary* had now been lying in ashes.

That, which is most to be feared, is a misimprovement of this voice from heaven. Men seem hardly to think, that God *means any thing* by it. Hence, is our *greatest* fear! *Already*, we hear the vain boast, how quick the city will recover! The danger is, that instead of being warned and corrected by the voice of God, men will only learn to glory in themselves! This is most of all to be avoided. This disaster may be borne. But if the design of it is not answered; if, instead of an increase of holiness, there is an increase of worldliness and impiety and sin, we may fear something more dreadful still! Calamity is not the worst evil. It is far worse, when men refuse to recognize the hand of God in it. Then stroke follows stroke! or God gives up the hardened to their loved impiety! We fear it will be so now. The pestilence has been among us, and where is the piety, which should have sprung up along its track! The tempest on the lakes and the fires in the city have come; and rely upon it, if men will not remember God and recognize his hand, other and heavier evils will ensue!

There is a way to avert them. Let us bring our motives to the light of the gospel of God, and consent to have our aims all governed and

guided by the principles of holy and eternal truth.

Some of us have professed to be the people of God. Have we not reason to be *ashamed*, that we have served him so little? Have we not over-valued the world? In our earthly prosperity, have we not forgotten our heavenly pilgrimage? Has not our heart been too well satisfied, while every thing was prosperous around us, except the cause of God;—and while multitudes were in the midst of us *doing despite to the Spirit of Grace*, and neglecting the salvation proffered by the eternal Son of God? Let us be ashamed to live so much for the world. Let us *break off our sins by repentance, and our iniquities by turning to the Lord*. Let us remember *this is not our rest*,—these are not our riches;—our home is Eternity, our house is heaven.

Some of us have never yet crucified one feeling of worldliness. We are still *without God in the world*. We are spending our energies for naught; we are exhausting the best of our days, for that world, which shall soon be burnt up, *when the Lord Jesus Christ shall be revealed from heaven, with his mighty angels, in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ!* That time will soon come. You who *put far off the evil day*, aiming to be rich in the world, and not to be *rich towards God*, are trifling with your

dearest interests! Bitterly will you rue it, if you turn not speedily from a vain world, and make Jesus Christ your friend! Think of your *soul*! What will the world be to you, when the God of the world shall call you to the Eternal Judgment? You must leave your riches. You must forsake your choicest possessions and your loveliest palaces. *We brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out.* Then ponder the question,—*what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?*



LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



0 014 220 424 1

