

OR, THE WORK OF THE LORD, AND THE
COWARD CURSED.

A

SERMON,

DELIVERED

IN THE

First Presbyterian Meeting House

IN

CINCINNATI, OHIO,

TO THE

CINCINNATI LIGHT COMPANIES.

MAY 14, 1812.

BY JOSHUA LACY WILSON, V. D. M.

*ursed be he that doeth the work of the Lord deceitfully, and cursed
that keepeth back his sword from blood.*

JEREMIAH.

lished at the request of Captain's MANSFIELD and
SLOAN, shortly before they marched to Detroit.

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1812.



A SERMON.

JEREMIAH xlviii, 10.

Cursed be he that doeth the work of the Lord deceitfully, and cursed be he that keepeth back his sword from blood.

*Gentlemen Officers, Gentlemen Soldiers, Friends,
Brethren, and Fellow-Citizens,*

THE time is come, when the voice of our long insulted and injured country calls to arms. The time is come when you gentlemen Officers and Soldiers are called by the voice of your country to exchange for a season your honorable, peaceful occupations and the sweets of domestic life, for the toils, the dangers and the glory of warfare.

It must be a consolation to your friends, whom you leave behind, to witness the part you are acting this day, in assembling at the house of prayer, before your departure ; and I consider it a high honor conferred upon me, that I am thus afforded an opportunity of delivering to you a parting address. You know, gentlemen, that I am a public minister of that Holy Religion, which gives *glory to God in the highest*, speaks *Peace on earth and good will to men*. Among the many benevolent precepts of this religion, the following occupies a conspicuous place—"If it be *possible*, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men." This plainly implies, that cases may and do occur, in which it is impossible to maintain *peace* but at the expense of *principle*, which would be sinful and inglorious. Therefore from the same divine source whence this peaceful precept emanates, we receive the following lesson of instruction :—"To every thing there is a season, and a time for every purpose under heaven—a time to kill and a time to heal—a time to break down and a time to build up—a time to love and a time to hate---a time of war and a time of peace."

The passage chosen as the foundation of my present address, forms a part of our sacred canon. It was originally spoken by a prophet of the Lord, when an important military

xpedition was set on foot against Moab, one of the most haughty, tyrannical and God-provoking nations then upon earth. The strong features of this text are, that war is the work of the Lord, and that God's curse rests upon the heads of traitors and cowards.

"Cursed be *he* that doeth the work of the Lord deceitfully, and cursed be *he* that keepeth back his sword from blood."

The original word here translated deceitfully, signifies treacherously, carelessly, negligently, or inattentively; and the sword, by a usual figure in rhetoric, is made to signify any weapon or instrument of war. The plain meaning of this passage of Scripture is, that when men are legally called to take up arms in a just cause, the curse of Heaven falls with vengeance upon the head of that wretch, who, through the love of ease, the tenderness of connexions, or the fear of his enemies, loiters and shrinks back, betrays or refuses to use his weapon of defence against the cruel, unjust invaders of his country's rights.

- In speaking upon this subject, I design,

I. To shew, that war is the work of the Lord.

II. Point out how men perform this work deceitfully—And then improve the subject.

"Cursed be *he* that doeth the work of the Lord deceitfully, and cursed be *he* that keepeth back his sword from blood."

I. I am to shew, that war is the work of the Lord.

This I shall do by producing the Scripture testimony upon the subject, and shewing its correspondence with sound reason.

I hope gentlemen you will keep in your eye, what I am about to prove, that war is the work of the Lord. I commence the evidence upon this head, by calling to your recollection, the song of Moses after the overthrow of Pharaoh and his host. in the Red Sea.

"I will sing unto the Lord for HE hath triumphed gloriously. The Lord is my strength and my song, and HE is become my salvation, the LORD is a man of WAR, the LORD is his name—Pharaoh's chariots and his host, hath he cast into the sea, his chosen captains also are drowned in the Red Sea."

King David, the sweet singer of Israel, delivers his testimony to the same point. "Who is God, save the Lord—HE is a buckler to all those that trust in Him—It is God that girdeth me with strength; HE teacheth my hands to WAR, and my fingers to *fight*—for by Thee, have I run through a troop, and by my God have I leaped over a wall." And in the xxivth

Psalm, he gives us the following sublime view of Jehovah—
 “Lift up your heads, O ye gates, and be ye lifted up ye everlasting doors, and the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The Lord strong and mighty—the Lord mighty in BATTLE.”

Hear now what the Lord *mighty in battle*, said to Cyrus.
 “Thus saith the Lord to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have holden to subdue the nations before him; and I will loose the loins of kings to open before him, the two leaved gates, and the gates shall not be shut: I will go before thee, and make the crooked places straight: I will break in pieces the gates of brass, and cut in sunder the bars of iron; and I will give thee the treasures of darkness, and hidden riches of secret places, that thou mayest know, that I the Lord, which call thee by thy name, am the God of Israel. For Jacob my servant’s sake, and Israel mine elect, I have even called thee by thy name; I have surnamed thee, though thou hast not known me; I am the Lord, and there is none else, there is no God besides me: I girded thee, though thou hast not known me: I form the *light* and create *darkness*; I make *peace* and create *evil*; I the Lord do all these things.”

But what puts this subject beyond all controversy is that unequalled portrait of the Alpha and Omega drawn by the hand of a divine artist in the book of Revelation. “I saw Heaven opened, and behold a white horse and he that sat on him was called faithful and true, and in righteousness he doth *judge* and make *war*—His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns—and He was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood, and out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, and he treadeth the wine-press of the fierceness of the wrath of God—and He hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.” Here you see the great I AM, the *Theos een’O Logos*, the word which was God, in all the pomp and grandeur of Jehovah Jesus engaged in the inseparable transactions of *Judgment* and *War*. *In righteousness He doth judge and make war.*

Christians adore your Savior—ye Kings of the earth embrace your sovereign lest ye perish—Heathens bow to the sceptre of his grace—Infidels fear before the “Prince of the kings of the earth;” while devils tremble to the lowest pit of hell.

Let us now see how this Bible doctrine corresponds with sound reason.

Here gentlemen, I take it for granted, I am speaking to those who believe in God, who reject the principles of ancient and modern Atheism. A belief in God implies a persuasion that God governs the world, yea the universe. The doctrines of Polytheism, of Fate or Chance, cannot gain the credence of your enlightened minds. You admit the intervention of second causes, but you "look through nature up to nature's God." And in this gaze of rational prospective you behold Jehovah from the spear of grass to the majestic oak—from the smallest particle of dust to the lofty Andes—from the microscopic animalcule, to the mammoth of the forest, or the Leviathan of the flood—from the glow worm to the blazing comet, or more dazzling beams of noon day splendor. In the forked lightning you behold his glory, in the thunder you hear his voice, in the earthquake you feel his power, and in the gleaming of shields and the clangor of arms, HE shews his just and righteous indignation.

The doctrines of Justice and Judgment, are no unseasonable tenets. Sin is in the world, and death by sin. Nations are sinful as well as individuals. But nations can only be judged in their national capacity, and rewarded or punished in the present world. God, who is the only giver of life, has alone the right of disposing of life. And if he determine to destroy a sinful nation, shall any dictate to him the means or second causes of destruction? Famine, pestilence, earthquake, fire and sword, become, in turn, the ministers of his vengeance, and when in righteousness He doth judge and make War, HE exercises the most complete dominion over the passions of men—*HE maketh the wrath of man to praise Him, and the remainder of wrath he will restrain.*

Reason and revelation, when well understood, always appear harmonious. They correspond in saying, Jehovah hath made and doth govern the world. HE ruleth, HE judgeth, HE maketh War.—Having proven, that war is the work of the Lord, I proceed to point out how men do this work deceitfully. *Cursed be he that doeth the work of the Lord deceitfully.*

1. Men do the work of the Lord deceitfully, when they protract forbearance to too great a length.

The spirit of forbearance, when properly exercised, is amiable in individuals and governments; but there is a point at which it ought to cease, and I give it as my opinion that if our government have erred, it has been by exercising too long forbearance towards those who have trampled upon our rights. I do not speak here of one nation more than another.

When Spain, with insult and injury, trampled on our rights, national forbearance was lengthened out till those who felt themselves most deeply injured were almost roused into rebellion and treason, the union of the states was jeopardized, and that at last was purchased with money, which might in justice have been taken by the sword. I mean the free navigation of the Mississippi. But as human life is more dear than treasure, Americans, in that case, acquiesced in withholding the sword from blood.

France in turn, has held the cup of insult and outrage to the lips of the American people. The laws of Napoleon's empire have been rigorously executed to the flagrant violation of neutral rights, to the ruin of many of our citizens, and to the disgrace of the American name, and yet we forbear.

But England at present, deserves our more particular notice. England related to us by blood, by language, by interest, by laws, by customs and religion, with all the infernal principles of devils incarnate has ruined (as far as in her power) our commerce, impressed our brave seamen into her service, insulted our government in her negotiations, and stirred up the heathen against us. American rights purchased by the blood of our fathers, have been trampled under foot—Some of the best blood of our nation has already been spilt—The companions of our youth have fallen—Our women and children have been massacred. I do not pretend to doubt but some among ourselves have had a sinful hand in exciting the Shawnoe Prophet to hostilities. But much excitement and much aid have been from the British. The British and American governments have both made presents to the Savages—this was politic and fair; but have we excited them to hostilities against the Canadians? No. But they have excited them against us by bribes, if not by threats; and surely in such a combination against our frontiers hell must make a third party. But you will perhaps say this is not an act of the British government. How do you know? If the corrupt ministry of England can send emissaries among us in time of peace, to divide and distract our union, which only comes to light by the perfidy of Henry himself, laboring under disappointment, what will they not do? Before we ever consent to peace with such a ministry the question ought to be fairly settled—are they men or devils? England was forced to acknowledge our independence against her will, and she remains still our implacable enemy. After a treaty our outposts were detained, and the fury of the savages made to rage against us

for many years. The decisive battle was at length fought under the command of the brave Wayne, in sight of a British garrison on our own territory.

In time of the French revolution, to the astonishment of Europe, it was found that America had 60,000 seamen. The number has since increased, and such is the abomination of British outrage, that 5 or 6 000 of our brave Americans forced into the service of that despotic government, are made to fight her unjust battles, and commit depredations upon their fellow citizens. If this statement be incorrect I will stand corrected here or elsewhere, but such is my information. I know, gentlemen, that many of these have been pressed out of British merchant ships, they hire in the East-Indies, to man the merchant vessels to Liverpool, Dover, &c. and the press-gang takes them out of British bottoms; but still it is unjust and tyrannical. If Americans expatriate themselves and voluntarily enlist in the British service, they may do so; but Britain has no right to force an American into her service, and detain him without his consent—And if there were but 6 instead of 6,000 it would be a sufficient cause of war. War cannot justly be waged but in self-defence; but self-defence consists either in opposing the enemy when he directly moves against us, or by a collateral stroke, in case of collateral invasion. Invasion of rights we have by sea, war we have by savages; both are British, both unjust, and both cruel. If we cannot strike at the head, let us strike at the heel—the great Achilles fell by a wound in the heel. *Cursed be he that doeth the work of the Lord deceitfully.*

2. When men seek their own ease, more than the just defence of their country, they do the work of the Lord deceitfully. How far this curse may fall upon lazy men, who seek places in the army in time of peace, in order to indulge themselves in idleness, or loiter in time of war to avoid the fatigues and dangers of the field I shall not pretend to determine; but I have little fear of its lighting upon you, gentlemen. I know you to be men of industry, and I believe you to be men of valor.

3. When men engage in war for the sake of spoil, they come under the curse.

To be greedy of spoil is a hateful disposition, and beneath the dignity of a true patriot. But spoil cannot be your object in the present campaign, for you are making great sacrifices for your country's service.

4. When men effeminate themselves by rioting in places of safety. If you, gentlemen, should at any time be stationed in a place of safety and plenty, avoid indulgence as you would the deadly poison. Accustom yourselves to the fatigues of the march and the handle of arms.

5. When men shun their enemies, they do the work of the Lord deceitfully.

This does not imply that retreat under certain circumstances is not lawful. Sometimes there is more real merit in a retreat than in a combat ; but what I mean is, if men through cowardice betray the confidence and the safety of their country by shunning the foe, they deserve the execration of our text.

6. When men are unwilling to submit to necessary discipline and yet pretend to bear arms, they do the work of the Lord deceitfully. Discipline or order is all-important in an army. I have been happy in witnessing the discipline of these Light Companies. You, gentlemen soldiers, are under officers of your own choosing—men who are your fellow citizens, companions and friends, and you have submitted to a discipline which, while it does honor to yourselves, shows the soundness of your judgment in the selection of officers who are capable of commanding without usurpation.

But I fear this curse will fall upon the militia of our country in general. - What is the boast of the American nation? We boast not in fleets or standing armies, but as far as we dare to boast in an arm of flesh, we boast of our militia. The words *well organized* is introduced and the tone of the administration is, *a well organized militia is the bulwark of our nation*. But this is trusting in a non-entity. Men we have, thousands and tens of thousands of militia can be marched into the field, but a *well organized* militia we have not. The law may be good, but it is not executed. Officers hold commissions who are themselves ignorant ; and what is still worse is, that many are too lazy or too proud to learn. Officers we have who know their duty, but such is the licentiousness and indolence of the soldiery they will not submit to command. It is truly painful to attend our musters. What do we see and hear?—While men are in the ranks unarmed, some with sticks and some with their hands in their pockets, we hear some gabbling, and some grunting, and some yawning—we see some sitting, and some lolling, and some standing more like oxen than men. And is this the bulwark of our nation? No ; but a *well organized* militia. I am willing to hazard an opinion that

a well organized militia would supersede the necessity of regular troops; but in the present state of things the militia operates only as a scare-crow. I wish not by this to give offence, but to state facts which are within the knowledge of all, that we may be roused to energy and order.

I am happy to hear that in the eastern states discipline is much better attended to; but I relate facts which exist among ourselves, and fear the curse of heaven for our negligence.

7. Men fall under this curse when they unnecessarily prolong the war in order to live at the public expense.

I have no fear, gentlemen, of your doing this. Let this curse fall upon our enemies. Let it fall upon those corrupt administrations who delight to shed innocent blood. Your interest, your happiness and glory, are inseparable from the privileges of free citizens, of one of the best governments upon earth. Your interest is interwoven with that of your country. At her voice you draw the sword for the protection of those rights, which were purchased by the blood of American patriots and heroes, and at her pacific voice, you will exchange implements of death for those of husbandry, when justice has been done to our injured country. Hail the happy moment! Hail the joyful hour, when you shall return to Cincinnati, covered with military glory, to enjoy all the comforts which you now so nobly relinquish for the safety and peace of our nation.

I proceed now to the improvement of this subject.

1. Let us learn from this subject, that though war is the work of the Lord, yet man is not excusable when he engages in it for base purposes, or from evil motives. It is no uncommon thing for men to fulfil the decrees of heaven, by the works of wicked hands. The history of Joseph, the history of the Jews, and the doctrines of the Apostles respecting the crucifixion of our Savior, go to prove this truth, that men do wickedly what Jehovah means for good. Let us examine well our motives, never engage in war but in a just cause, and when we do engage, let us do the work faithfully.

2. If the curse of God falls upon the negligent, its lights with equal vengeance upon the coward. "Cursed be he that keepeth back his sword from blood." Of all the reptiles that crawl upon the surface of our guilty globe, the coward is the most contemptible. A man who enjoys the privileges of a citizen, and refuses to meet his enemy, when lawfully called to the defence of his country, deserves not the name of a man. He deserves not to be ranked with decent brutes. He is not fit to live, he is not fit to die. Let him rank with the terrapin and snail, or if their motion be too slow for his hasty timidity, let him shroud himself in the precipitant darkness of the mole, or assume the pinions of the nocturnal lapwing. But what shall we say of these

whose timidity is sanctioned by law, who keep back the sword from blood, under pretence of the rights of conscience or a vain excuse of invalidity? Passion, prejudice and cowardice, have each in turn been called conscience. But what has conscience to do in this matter? If, as these people pretend, it is contrary to the laws of Christ, to take up arms in self-defence, then no human law can make it right. When any human law contradicts the divine law, we are bound as Christians to obey God, and not man, if it cost us our lives. The human law says, "If any man conscientiously refuses to bear arms, he shall not be compelled to do so, but shall pay an equivalent for personal service!" With this law these conscientious people comply. They will not fight; but they will pay others for fighting. If the human law says, then "you shall cut your neighbor's throat," you say you cannot in conscience do it, but if it gives you an alternative to cut his throat, or pay for somebody else to do it, you can very conscientiously and devoutly comply. The truth is, conscience has nothing to do in the case before us; it is downright cowardice, interwoven with a confirmed delusion.

That there are real invalids, I do not deny. The old and infirm are among us. But how many in time of peace, can caper and prance, who, as soon as the drum beats to arms, are invalids! Others there are, who are exempted from military service, on account of age or office, who might be of service for home defence. While others are called to the field, are we quietly to fold up our hands and snuff the ashes? If war be declared against England, we know not at what moment emissaries and tories may appear among us—We know not at what moment, the negroes may rise against us—It is not more than 30 miles to our frontiers on Whitewater, and we know not at what instant they may need our aid. But if by considering ourselves exempt from duty, we remain unarmed and undisciplined, the moment may arrive when we shall fall an easy sacrifice in our own domicils. I am exempt from bearing arms upon two legal grounds; I am an invalid in fact, and a minister of the gospel by office, but I have armed myself under a sense of duty, and if my country needs my service, God forbid that I should stand back. "Cursed be he that keepeth back his sword from blood," when a just cause and an injured country call upon him to repel the foe.

I will read to you, gentlemen, a piece of ancient history upon this subject. When Jabin the king of Canaan, mightily oppressed Israel for 20 years, deliverance was wrought by the hands of women—Deborah, the wife of Lapidoth, and Jael, the wife of Heber. When this deliverance was wrought, a portion of the people kept back the sword from blood, and the God of armies sent his angel to curse them for their cowardice. "Curse ye Meroz, (said the angel of the Lord) curse ye bitterly, the inhabitants thereof, because they came not to the help of the Lord, to the help of the Lord against the mighty." "Blessed above women shall Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite be; blessed above women shall she be in the tent—She put her hand to the nail, and her right hand to the workman's hammer, and with the hammer she smote Sisera, she smote off his head, after she had pierced and stricken through his temples."

But while we unite in execrating cowardice, let us try to understand true courage. It consists not in the swaggering of a bully, the private malice of the duelist, the rage of desperation, the presumption of the

ambitious, nor a mean display of military pomp. But consists in the deliberate intrepidity of the magnanimous soul, who has justice and righteousness in view in the conflict, and writes his motto, "Liberty or Death."

2. Remember, gentlemen, you are not authorised from this subject, to indulge a spiteful, revengeful temper towards your enemies, or to engage in acts of outrage and cruelty. When the soldiers came to John and asked him, "what shall we do?" he does not tell them to lay down their arms, nor tamely to submit to every imposition, nor to go "with ropes upon their heads, and sackcloth upon their loins," and submit to the sceptre of every invader, but he answered and said, "do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely and be content with your wages."

Consider the state of the times. No declaration of war has yet been made. The present preparations are measures of defence. Though the Savages have killed our brave fellow citizens and massacred women and children, they are not declared enemies by our government. Many of them are our sincere friends. In passing to Detroit, you will pass through their territory, shew them you are just, as well as brave—strike, but discriminate, and strike only your foes. And should a case ever occur that you can secure an enemy without taking his life, shew him that you are humane gentlemen, as well as brave soldiers.

4. I cannot consent to close this subject, without calling you to a more important warfare—a warfare against sin. "Righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people." I know that the doctrine of sin is treated by some with great levity and scorn; but I will take the liberty of saying, "Fools make a mock at sin." The subjugation of lust and passion is of vast moment. "He that is slow to anger, is better than the mighty, and he that ruleth his spirit, than he that taketh a city." The army has been considered the school of vice, but it is not necessarily so. Abraham and David, and Cornelius, and Gardiner, and Washington, were all military men, and all men of eminent piety and virtue.

Take such for your example, and in attempting to conquer sin and Satan, have a proper respect to our Great High Priest, whose blood cleanseth from all unrighteousness, whose spirit leads into all truth, and who rewards his people with an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled and that fadeth not away.

Finally, gentlemen, I bid you adieu. May God prosper you in your way, and give you a safe return. If you live, live to the Lord; and if you die, die to the Lord; and glory, honor, and immortality shall be your sure and unalterable reward. And let all the people say AMEN.

A good Sermon
Say I!!!
