

RULERS SINS: The Causes of National judgments or a Sermon Preached at the Fast, upon the 26th Day of December 1650.

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Notwithstanding the Lord turned not from the fierceness of his great wrath wherewith his anger was kindled against Judah, because of the provocations that Manasseh had provoked him withal.-2 Kings. Chap.23. Vers. 26.

This is the close of the history of the great reformation, wrought by Josiah, whereof we may read from the beginning of the Chapter hitherto, and it is a strange close of such a story; for it was a great reformation that he wrought in Judah; and the 25th verse says of him, "That like unto him was no King before him, that turned to the Lord with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the Law of Moses, neither after him arose there any like him." And yet, notwithstanding the Lord turned not from the fierceness of his wrath.

In the words we have three things. 1. There is God's anger against Judah described, in the height of it, and in the length of it. The height of it, his anger was kindled, and it was great wrath, and fierceness of wrath; the length of it, the Lord turned not away from this his great and fierce anger and wrath. As the flame rose high, so it burnt long. 2. The cause, or reason wherefore, because of all the provocations that Manasseh had provoked him withal. This Manasseh was late King of Judah, and was dead about thirty years before this time; yea and before he died, upon his repentance had gotten mercy for his sins, and yet the fierce anger of the Lord is not turned away from Judah, because of all the provocations of Manasseh. This may seem strange. 3. But that which seems most strange of all, is the third part of the text, notwithstanding, that is, for all the great reformation that was wrought in Judah in Josiah's Days, and with all his soul, and with all his might; For it relates to all the Chapter going before, especially verse 25.

The words are plain; I will say no more on the explication, neither will I gather everything that might occur, but some chief points only that most suit with the present occasion.

(1) We consider the context which is as strange as readily we read again in Scripture, Josiah works a great reformation in Judah, like unto him there was no King before him, neither after him arose there any like him, who turned to GOD with all his heart, and yet notwithstanding the Lord turned not from the fierceness of his wrath. Hence observe, that the persons and honest endeavours of the Lord's worthies, that do their uttermost for turning away the Lord's wrath from his people, may be graciously accepted with him, when their labours and endeavours come to little purpose, and are ineffectual for the turning away of his wrath and anger. There is here a testimony given to Josiah, that like unto him there was no King before him, neither after him, and yet his work came to nothing, in respect of his main design, the turning away of GOD's wrath from Judah. Take the proposition by parts, and it will be the more clear. I. The honest endeavours of worthy instruments in the Lord's Work, which they use for turning away his anger from his people, may come to little purpose and prove ineffectual for that end; and this comes to pass two ways. 1. When that very thing they do for this end doth miscarry among their hands. How many of the Lord's servants have followed honest and great endeavours in their generation, that have come to nothing in respect of the end they aimed at, that is the turning away of wrath from people, by turning them to God? Jeremiah, an eminent instrument, and tender of God's glory, and the good of his people, as any we read of, yet look through all his prophecies, when he hath done this, he can prevail nothing with neither King, Princes, Priests,

nor people, and often he is tempted to quit the work, and yet falls to it again. So Chap. 20:7, 8, 9; "I am in derision daily, every one mocketh me, for since I spake, I cried out, I cried violence and spoil, because the word of the Lord was made a reproach;" then said, "I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name, but his word was in my heart, as a burning fire" &c. Elijah another of the most eminent instruments that ever was heard tell of, he labours much to prevent wrath, (1 Kings 18:37,38) by turning the people to God, he gathers all the Kingdom together, and convinces them of their evil way, and of the difference betwixt God and Baal, and causes slay the priests of Baal, yet the next day as Chap. 19:2,3. he is said to fly and hide himself from the persecution of Jezebel. 2. Not only may their endeavours come to nought by miscarrying, but even when they have done the work they intended, they may miss their design. And this is that which is here spoken of. What was Josiah his great aim and design? We may read it, 2 Kings 22:11,13, &c. That he and the people being humbled, the great wrath of the Lord might be turned away. He goes about an outward reformation, and he gets it wrought, and his own heart is humbled before the Lord; but he gets not the Lord turned from his fierce anger and wrath; which was kindled against Judah for all that.

The second part of the proposition is, that even when it is so, that the honest endeavours of the Lord's worthy servants for turning away of God's wrath comes to nought, yet even then they in their persons and endeavours are graciously accepted and highly commended on him, so verse 25. Josiah gets the highest testimony and commendation, that hath been given to men on earth. Moses, Joshua, David, Solomon; and all there worthies, that prevailed often with God, to turn away his anger from his people, are no more commended, and some of them not so much as Josiah here. That which I would say, for application of this. I draw it to these three uses.

Use 1. This speaks sad things to the Kingdom, whilst we consider that the honest endeavours of public and gracious instruments come to nought. It, says the Lord, is not turned from the fierceness of his anger towards the land. Josiah essayed this, and it could not be with him. And there are a number of honest-hearted men, who have stretched their endeavours to the utmost for this end, and when their endeavours miscarry, it speaks yet more wrath to the land.

Use 2. It may be for the comfort of many, whose hearts are sad throughout the Kingdom, for the breaking of the honest party that would fain have turned away the Lord's wrath. I know there are many who are glad and rejoice at it, which is a black mark to them: But I know also there are many whose hearts are smitten with sorrow, to whom (I say) this is ground of comfort, that though the endeavours of that honest party have been ineffectual, yet their persons and service have been accepted, and the sadness of heart and reproach of men that lie under, and under all the sufferings they endure, and against the wrath of the Lord that appears to be not yet turned away. Reason, the Lord renders to every man according to his works. Rom. 2:6. and not according to every construction put upon it, not according to the success it hath, therefore let the broken forces, and the broken hearted who sympathize with them, comfort themselves in this, the acceptance and commendation of Christ. They shall be glory and honour, and immortality and eternal life put upon them, when indignation, wrath, tribulation and anguish shall be upon the contentious who do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness. Josiah is accepted and commended for his works, when the Lord's wrath is not turned away.

Use 3. For encouragement to all to join in the duty of this day; and I shall speak this the rather, because I know many godly hearts are ready to look hopelessly on this day's work, or that for all that can be done, the Lord's controversy will take no end. But if thou for thy part honestly endeavour to turn away the controversy, though the wrath of the Lord should burn against them, for whom thou art humbled, and wrestles with the Lord for that end, thou and thy service shall be

accepted and commended of GOD. Therefore trouble not yourselves with what GOD will do with the King or Rulers, but be found in your duty as Samuel, 1 Sam. 12:23, "God forbid that I shall cease to pray for you," and Chap. 16.

1. He mourned for Saul. Thy endeavours in thy duty shall be no less accepted, though GOD should never be pacified with this evil generation, but should sweep us all away. 2 Cor. 2:15, We are unto God a sweet savour of Christ in them that are saved, and in them that perish. And to clear and confirm this point to the full, read Isa. 49:4. where the Prophet speaking in Christ's name, and in his own name, and in the name of all the Lord's faithful instruments that shall have a finger at his work to the end of the world, proposing an objection, saith, "Then I said, I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nought, and in vain." But what is his answer? "Then said he, my judgment is with the Lord, and my work with my God." Deal thou honestly in thy duty, and though wrath be not turned from the King, nor the Land, thy person and work shall be accepted and commended.

2. Observe, that the Lord's anger may be so kindled, and burn so fiercely against his own people, that by no means it shall be turned away, till he have taken vengeance on them, till his anger break out and consume them. There are many examples of this in Scripture, there is one; for all that Josiah could do, "the wrath of the Lord was not turned away from Judah, until he removed them out of his sight." So it was with the house of Eli, 1 Sam. 3:14. "I have sworn unto the house of Eli, that the iniquity of his house shall not be purged with sacrifice nor offering forever." Ezek. 14:14. Though these three men, Noah, Daniel and Job were in it, they should deliver but their own souls by their own righteousness. And Jer. 15:1. "Though Moses and Samuel stood before me, yet my mind could not be towards this people, cast them out of my sight, and let them go forth." This is a point, which sometimes ye have had occasion to hear of, and that which I would speak of it in application, I shall draw to these two things. 1. How it may be known, when the Lord's wrath is so kindled, that by no means, neither outward reformation, nor true repentance, it will be turned away from a people, till it consume them. 2. What may be in our condition that speaks ought to this purpose. As to the first, such a thing may be known by diligent observers of God's way and working, who may be prognosticators of the time when God's anger is come to this height; for the Lord is angry at his people, for their stupidity, and neglect of seeking and knowing to take up this. Jer. 8:7. "The stork in heaven knoweth her appointed times, and the turtle, and the crane, and the swallow observe the times of their coming, but my people know not the judgments of the Lord." Hos. 7:9. "Strangers have devoured his strength and he knoweth it not, gray hairs are here and there upon him, yet he knoweth not": that is prognostications of their ruin, which they did not observe. Math. 16:3. Christ reproves the pharisees, because they could discern the face of the sky, but had no understanding to discern the signs of the times. And what was like to come upon that generation?

Now I will not dip far in this point; politicians and some divines do speak of the fatal periods of Kingdoms, but what they say is not our rule. We find one sure rule in the Word, according to which the Lord hath proceeded through the whole of Scripture from the beginning to this day, and it is this. There is a measure of iniquity which the Lord hath set to a Kingdom or people, which when it is accomplished or filled up, out must his wrath go, to ruin that Kingdom or people, Gen. 15:16. "The iniquity of the Amorites is not full." Math. 23:32. "Fill ye up then the measure of your Father." And when that measure is filled up, then shall not be one stone left upon another, that shall not be thrown down, and Zech. 6. We have a vision of an ephah, or a talent or lead, a woman sitting in the ephah, &c. The key of the vision is in a word, this is wickedness, there was a measure of sin and wickedness, which that nation had to fill up, and

when they had filled up the measure, a talent of lead is cast upon the mouth of the *ephah*, and the *ephah* is carried to the land of Shinar. Ezek. 21:25. "And the profane wicked Prince of Israel, whose day is come, when iniquity shall have an end," when the cup of thy sins is full, thou shalt not sin a day longer. This is a rule that has never yet failed from the beginning of the world. But what are the evidences whereby it may be known, that the cup of a land's sins is full (and we may speak and hear of them with fear and trembling) this, 1. is certainly on evidence, it goes ordinarily with the overflowing and abounding of sin. Gen. 6:5, 6, 12 "The Lord said, he would destroy man, because the wickedness of man was great, for all flesh had corrupted his way upon earth.

(2) When folks sin proudly and incorrigibly, it is an evidence the cup of their sin is near full, and ruining wrath approaching. 2 Chron. 36:16. "They mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and misused his Prophets; until the wrath of the Lord arose against his people, till there was no remedy." Isa. 5. "why should ye be stricken anymore? Ye will revolt more and more." Isa. 3:9. "The show of their countenance doth witness against them, and they declare their sin as Sodom, and they hide it not, wo unto their soul," &c. 3. A third evidence is, when it comes to this, that these to whom God has given power and authority, become ringleaders in sin and sinful courses. Isa. 3:12. "O my people, they who lead thee cause thee to err, and destroy the way of thy paths." Jer. 5:5. "I will get me unto the great men, and will speak unto them; but these have altogether broken the yoke, and burst the bands, wherefore a lion out of the forest shall slay them, and a wolf of the evening shall spoil them, a leopard shall watch over their cities, every one that goeth out thence shall be torn in pieces." 4. And when added to all the former, the Lord has sent lesser and smaller judgments upon a people, and these do no good to reclaim them from sin. Ezek. 24:13. After the vision of the great pot, the Lord says, "because I have purged thee, and thou wast not purged, thou shalt not be purged from thy filthiness any more, till I have caused my fury to rest upon thee." I shall not stay upon the application of these evidences, take it in a word. I doubt, if there be one of all these four evidences I have named, wanting in Scotland's condition this day.

For 1. Hath not sin overflowed all ranks like a speat? 2. Do not Men sin proudly and incorrigibly? 3. For these in public places of trust and power, that should bear down sin, are they not rather ringleaders in sin? And 4. Have we not been under lesser judgments these years past, and yet we revolt more and more.

As to the second, what may be in our condition, that speaks our GOD's fierce wrath, besides what hath been said in the former word of application, I shall only add these three things more. 1. When a people after stroaks sin still, and sin more, and wax worse and worse. Psal. 78:32. "For all this they sinned still." And has not the land sinned more, and gone further back after the stroak at Dumbar than before? And yet further, after the late stroak at Hamilton? 2. The Lord's taking away of the righteous with the wicked, is one of the saddest tokens of fierce wrath that can be, when it is not the vile only, but the godly also. Isa. 57:1. "The righteous perish and no man layeth it to heart, and merciful men are taken away, none considering that the righteous is taken away from the evil to come," that is an evidence of sore wrath coming, and Ezek. 21:4. "Seeing then that I will cut off from thee, the righteous and the wicked, therefore shall my sword go forth out of his sheath against all flesh from the South to the North." 3. The Lord is beginning with judgment at the best of the land, or at these parts of the land, wherein I may say comparatively most of religion, and manifest seekers of GOD are to be found; and when these parts are begun at, what may other parts of the land expect? Luke 23:31, "If they do these things

in a green tree, what shall be done in the day?" When the West, which was known to have more religion than the North, is begun at, judge what they may expect.

(3) Observe, that God is sometimes angry with a Kingdom, and so angry as his fierce wrath shall not be turned away from them, for the sins of their King: Therefore the sins of Manasseh are given for the cause of all the fierce wrath against Judah, and 2 Chron. 28:19. The Lord brought Judah low, because of Achaz King of Judah, for he made Judah naked, &c. So God may be many times angry, and his anger kindle and burn hot and long against a people for the sins of their King, as here for Manasseh's sin, remedies wrath goes out against the land, because the Kingdom was not free of the King's sin, therefore they might be the more justly judged. Look either to Jer. 15:4, 6: or 2 King 21:5-10. and this will be clear. Now three ways was the Kingdom of Judah involved in the guilt of Manasseh's sins. 1. By their connivance at his sin, the people and rulers should not have suffered him to go on in these abominations, but as they withstood Uzziah, 2 Chron. 26:18, so should they have done him. 2. They did not mourn for the King's sin, Ezek. 9, therefore they were guilty. 3. They were guilty also by imitation, 2 Chron. 33:9, 10. Manasseh made Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to err, and to do worse than the heathen, and the Lord spake to Manasseh and to his people, but they would not hearken. All the Kingdom wheeled about in the defection with him. Now Manasseh's sins were chiefly two: 1. Against the worship of God. 2. Against the blood of God's people, he gave himself to all fort of idolatry, and corrupted the pure worship of God, and he made the streets of Jerusalem to run with blood of the Lord's people. And we have heard that these are the main sins pointed at in the paper that was read, which may be reduced to these two heads: 1. The opposition made by the King and his predecessors to the covenant and work of God; and corrupting of worship of God, and secondly, The shedding of so much innocent blood. For application of this point I shall speak to this purpose, to let you see, that when the Lord was so wroth with Judah for the sins of Manasseh, how much more reason the Lord hath to be wroth with Scotland for the sins of their Kings. And I shall hold it forth to you in these two, 1. I shall show you, what there is in our condition and estate, that speaks more wrath to us, than what was in the condition and estate of Judah that did speak wrath to them. 2. I shall show you how just reason and cause there is to charge the King's sins on this Kingdom. And I shall speak a little to these two the rather, because I fear there be many that look upon the causes of this humiliation, as things that they are not much concerned in.

As to the first, what is in our condition more than was in the condition of Judah, that speaks more wrath to us for the sins of our Kings, I shall draw it to these particulars: 1. If the fierceness of God's wrath past against Judah for the sins of Manasseh in the following generation, which the foregoing generation had sinned, how much more reason have we of the present generation to fear the fierce wrath of the Lord go forth against us; for we must have a greater fibness to the Kings' sins in the present generation than the Kingdom of Judah could have to the Kings' sins done in the former generation. 2. If the Lord was so angry against Judah for the sins of one King (although both Ezekiah did reign before him, and Josiah, that did succeed him were gracious Kings, and free of his sins) how much more reason have we to apprehend fierce wrath against this Kingdom for the sins of a family, that is not terminate in one person, but hath gone along in a continued opposition to the work of God, and the persecution of his people from the grandfather to the son, and from the son to the grandchild, from the very beginning of their reign. 3. If the Lord was angry, and his wrath was kindled against Judah, for the provocations of Manasseh though he did repent, and obtained mercy ere he died, and reformed what was wrong in many things, how much more have we reason to apprehend wrath for the sins

of a King, who when the Lord brought him low, did never thing, for ought we know, or was made known to the world of his repentance. Manasseh, in the time of his distress, and when he was laid in irons, mourned and found mercy, and yet notwithstanding fierce wrath comes on Judah for his provocations; may we not then be afraid of wrath for our late King's sins, of whose repentance the world never heard? 4. If the Lord's fierce wrath went out against Judah for the sins of Manasseh, notwithstanding his grandchild Josiah was a gracious man, and was not accessory to his sins, but did repent for them, how much more reason have we to apprehend fierce wrath for the sins of the son who has followed his father and grandfather's footsteps, as the paper relates? 5. If the Lord's fierce wrath went out against Judah for the provocations of Manasseh, notwithstanding his son Josiah began early to be a gracious instrument of Reformation, was truly gracious himself, and have evidence of true humiliation for the sins of his father (as chap. 22:19. "Because thine heart was tender and thou has humbled thyself before the Lord") how much more reason hath this Kingdom cause to fear the fierce wrath of the Lord for the sins of this same King, and his opposition to the work of God who did not begin early to humble himself before God, and in whom as yet, for ought that can be seen, there is no evidence of humiliation, but rather pregnant evidences to the contrary. And do ye not think it then a matter that concerns you to mourn for the King's sins, and for the sins of his father and grandfather when ye see how great and fierce wrath goes out against Judah for the sins of one King that ruled there, notwithstanding he repented and obtained pardon?

As to the second, that ye may see yet more, what cause and reason ye have to mourn, let us see how far the Kingdom has been involved in the King's sin, and how justly it may be charged on the Kingdom. And to hold out this to you a little, I shall go no further back than the causes of this fast: consider therefore how the public representative bodies of the Kingdoms had no small accession to the defection of the King's grandfather, for did he not draw Parliaments and nobles, and many in the church after him, and to have accession in the guilt of the change of government in the church, and in corrupting the worship of God by popish ceremonies, and in persecuting faithful ministers, who opposed the same. 2. If we look to the second step, the sins of the present King's father, how many of all sorts were involved in the guilt of blood with him, some by counseling, others by connivance, others by assisting, and holding of him on in that way, and others by taking commission from him to that effect. And hath not Scotland cause to mourn for that? 3. Look to the third step, the sins of the present King, whether we look to any thing he did before his coming to this Kingdom, or since. Have not many in the Kingdom been involved in his guilt the same way, by consenting and counseling to, and holding him on in a sinful way in opposition to God's work, and by taking commissions from him, especially in the late passage of his deserting the counsels and public judicatories of the Kingdom, wherein numbers, not only of the old rotten malignants, but many others, who are not yet known, will be found guilty. 4. The King's sin may be charged on the Kingdom, though it were for no other reason but this, that many who have withstood his opposition to the work of God, never mourned for his sin in so doing, as Ezra, and Daniel and other godly men of old did. And the King's sin becomes the Kingdom's sin, in so far as it is not mourned for, and repented of. 5. The Lord hath yet more cause to charge the King's sin on the Kingdom, because of our way of carrying on, and closing a Treaty with him, without evidences of any real change in him, not but I do think (though some be of a contrary judgment) a King may be a King, and a lawful King, and a people may have a good life under him, though he be not a regenerate man, albeit I confess he would be the better of that, but the Treaty was carried on, and closed with him, without clear evidences of his joining cordially in the cause and covenant, and forsaking the counsels and company of

malignants, and the men not as careful for Christ's interest, as they were for the King's interest, and their own. 6. We are yet further involved in this guilt, if we consider what the carriage of the Kingdom hath been, since he came in among us; what good hath been seen and heard? and what company hath been about him? that if ever the King should turn an enemy to the work of God (which the Lord forbid) we cannot think but these should be guilty of his so doing, who have let him see nothing, but what may confirm him in his former principles, and cause him think that the covenant for God and religion hath been but a political draught, for men's particular interests and ends. And when they have committed the same sin, which they bid him and us mourn for, is it not the highway to harden the King's heart, and to make him think he did right, when he employed the Irish in his strait, and of late betook him to the malignants, when he conceived he was in straits. And considering these things, hath not the Kingdom come to the King, and not he to them, and have they not rather laid a snare to the King, then brought him out of the snare wherein he was?

(4) I shall only name another point, and it is this, there may be something, which in our eye looks like the turning away of God's wrath from the Kingdom, which will not prove real for the aversion of it, " notwithstanding the Lord turned not from the fierceness of his great anger." There are two things in this "notwithstanding." 1. Notwithstanding of the outward reformation wrought in Judah by Josiah. 2. Which is more terrible, notwithstanding of the true repentance of Josiah the King's son, which seemed very promising to the people of God, the fierce wrath of the Lord was not turned away. So, though outward reformation were never so exactly gone about, both upon the King's part and the Kingdom's part. Nay, though true grace and repentance were given to a King, and many in the Kingdom, God's fierce wrath may pursue, and not be turned away for all that. The King may be humbled and get repentance, as here Josiah got, and yet the Lord's controversy not turned away from the Royal Family, nor from the Kingdoms. And what great cause of fear and trembling then may we have, when there is so little of either of these to be seen amongst us, whether we look to the King, or to his people. And to walk humbly, and mourn and wrestle with the Lord this day, and afterward, that at least if wrath shall not be turned from the land, but the overflowing scourge go through from the South to the North, wrath may be turned from the men and women that repent, and they may find mercy, and be hid in the day of the Lord's anger.

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