

THE AMERICAN
NATIONAL PREACHER.

No. 7. Vol. XV.)

JULY, 1841.

(WHOLE No. 175.)

SERMON CCCIII.

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GOD EXALTED IN THE DISCIPLINE OF NATIONS.

A Sermon delivered on the 14th day of May, 1841;

BEING THE DAY OF THE NATIONAL FAST

Recommended by the President of the United States.

“ *The lofty looks of man shall be humbled, and the haughtiness of man shall be bowed down, and the Lord alone shall be exalted on that day. For the day of the Lord of hosts shall be upon every one that is proud and lofty, and upon every one that is lifted up; and he shall be brought low: and upon all the cedars of Lebanon, that are high and lifted up, and upon all the oaks of Bashan. And upon all the high mountains, and upon all the hills that are lifted up, and upon every high tower, and upon every fenced wall, and upon all the ships of Tarshish, and upon all pleasant pictures. And the loftiness of man shall be bowed down, and the haughtiness of men shall be made low: and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day.—Isaiah, 2 : 11—18.*

How often in the annals of the ancient church did Jehovah announce himself a jealous God! He declared that he would share his honors with no rival power, whether it were the deity of a depraved fancy or the occupant of an earthly throne. Any approach to idolatry he viewed as casting contempt on his infinite majesty. He alone must be exalted by his creatures as the object of their supreme homage.

It was in view of this high claim, and of its practical disregard by the Israelites, who had become the imitators of proud and idolatrous nations, that Isaiah was directed to utter that pro-

cious event occurs this day in the solemn prostration of the nation before the King of kings. This surely betokens good for America and for the world. The thunderbolt strikes not the lowly but the lofty object. May the cloud of indignation pass over us with but one startling shock! That has riven our hearts, and laid a noble citizen in the dust. Yet in *his* case it was not an *avenging* but a gracious stroke. It took him, as we have reason to believe, from an earthly to a heavenly principality. The hero, the statesman sleeps, but the *christian* lives. Life is renewed at the fountain of life. Oh may his mantle be transmitted to his successors; and may we derive from his death a benefit, which, perhaps, in our ingratitude, we might have been unwilling to have acknowledged in his life, however devoted to his country's good! May this day's humiliation precede a return of the smiles of heaven, expressed in the revival of true religion—in a general respect for law and social order—in the diminution of partizan strife, and the prevalence of christian patriotism—in the suppression of intemperance, profaneness and infidelity! Then shall our nation, as with the predicted moral beauty of ancient Zion, "arise and shine, her light being come, and the glory of the Lord having risen upon her."

SERMON CCCIV.

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"THE ISSUES OF THE FINAL JUDGMENT."

"And the books were opened."—Rev. 20 : 12.

Amidst much that is obscure, the Revelation of St. John presents occasional gleams of prophetic truths too plain to be misunderstood.

Towards the close, especially, the lurid clouds are gilded by a terrific brightness. The awful future is unveiled. Scenes of overwhelming grandeur come into view, as the destinies of an accountable universe are plainly foreshadowed. If critics are at a loss for a clue, amid the accumulated imagery of the central portions of this wonderful book, they must be all agreed as to the import of the close. Let any mind contemplate the chapter from which the text is taken, and it will be seen that the final conflict between

the powers of light and darkness is to be followed by that closing act of the Divine administration, viz. the universal judgment.

This prospective event was an appropriate revelation, in order to clear up, to the mind of the apostle, the otherwise disturbed aspect of the world's affairs; to assure him that Jehovah would in the end rectify apparent disorders, and vindicate before the universe the principles and decisions of his government.

His mind is carried even beyond this scene of solemn grandeur; and the images of sadness which may be supposed to have rested on his imagination are chased away, amid the sun-light of heaven and the harmonies of the blessed. Let us enter into the scene of wonders, and, so far as possible, sympathise with the seer of Patmos, under the awful disclosures of a yet unaccomplished providence.

Deep is the interest which each of us should feel; for the events not only respect ourselves, but 1800 years have placed us, as it were, on the verge of fulfilment. If it be true, as is plausibly affirmed, that every two thousand years is to be marked by a great moral epoch, the signal lights of heaven may soon be expected, announcing in the third era of our race, disclosures analogous in moral grandeur to the destruction of the old world, and the advent of Christ.

But our text, in painting the scenery of a future judgment, brings before our consciences that personal investigation which is far more solemn in its bearings than *any* or *all* of the attending circumstances. "And I saw," says the apostle, "a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heavens fled away, and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead small and great stand before God; and the books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books according to their works."

Your attention is invited more especially to the clause, "and the books were opened." It will be my aim to explain, to illustrate, and to apply this sentence, in order to impress each of us with the responsibility of our existence, and the solemnity of our approaching destiny.

It is manifest, at a glance, that the imagery of the text is taken from the formality and solemnity of a judicial process.

In all ages of the world, where civilization has prevailed, it has been found necessary to erect and maintain a judicial tribunal. Human responsibility has been recognized; and the violator of law, after a fair opportunity for exculpation, has been obliged to submit to the stern decrees of justice. In some countries the formalities of the judgment-seat have been invested with an imposing solemnity. This was the case under the Roman government, where the tribunal was at times the throne itself; and where even the poorest citizen had the right of carrying his appeal up to the imperial decision. Hence we discover in the text and context allusion to this earthly tribunal, but amplified and exalted by the

unapproachable grandeur of the scene and circumstances. "I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it." Vastness and purity are here ascribed to the very throne itself. Earthly tribunals are not always stainless. Justice, when delegated to the human administrator, may be outraged in her own sanctuary; but when she sits upon her *great white* throne, and holds the balances in her own hand there is no possibility of mistake or of partiality. He who shall occupy this throne has no sinister ends to answer. Justice, as said the immortal Hooker, makes her home in the bosom of God. When that great white throne comes into view, it will be the signal for the dissolution of the material universe. The first act of homage will be given by the heavens and the earth, which will flee away before it. It will stand forth amid the unobstructed expanse of eternity. What saw the prophet next? "I saw the dead small and great stand before God." The universe of accountable beings arraigned, standing in awful expectation of their joyous or their dread reward. "And the books were opened." No arbitrary decision is announced; but a deliberate investigation forms the basis of heaven's concluding verdict. This we must infer from the opening of the books, and the investigation according to their recorded items. "And the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books.

Without further preliminary, we will consider what must be the nature of those books out of which we are to be judged.

They manifestly refer to the *past*. Without imagining a literal volume, we may suppose them to express some clear method of revealing to us, and to the universe, all past transactions. They must have reference to the entire period of our accountability. Hence they must embrace, in the *first place*, THE BOOK OF DIVINE PROVIDENCE. The providence of God is concerned in the creation, support, and destiny of every accountable creature. It enters into the arrangements of the natural world, which, however, are but subordinate to the rational and accountable universe. External nature becomes important as the machinery by which Providence acts upon the mind. It is felt to have a great influence in the formation of character; in modifying human responsibility; and its influence must enter largely into the final account which each inhabitant of earth is to render. Hence we cannot separate Providence from the complex operations of nature any more than we can from the confused affairs of nations and of individuals.

It would be impossible, if not inappropriate, to trace this thought in all its bearings. That angel to whom may be committed the task of our moral biography, called sometimes the recording angel, great as is his intellect, could not, it seems to me, trace the connection of Providence in its entire bearing on our mortal history. But there is a Mind which *can*,—which embraces the end from the beginning—which "numbers the hairs of our heads, and understands even our thoughts afar off." The first leaf in this book

of Providence is our birth, and the circumstances of it. That a Sovereign Providence is concerned in the introduction of every human being into the world, none will deny who admit in any form the doctrine of providence. When we begin to *BE* we begin to *ACT*; and if our existence began under circumstances more favorable than that of another, our responsibility is *enhanced* by these circumstances. A pious parentage, early religious instruction, and the favoring influences of a christian community, arranged by Providence to meet us at the threshold of existence, must surely lay a greater responsibility upon us than if our infancy was marked by a total *reverse* of these circumstances. We have no right to suppose that the book of Providence, wherein is recorded our moral history, will fail to notice these things. When the seals of the judgment are unloosed, the dread account will commence far back in our history; the amount of our guilt will be measured by the light and advantages against which we have sinned. That Providence which ushers us into being, and which orders the circumstances of our earliest years, never withdraws from us its care and its control. "It is not in man that walketh to direct his steps; and whilst the *HEART* of man deviseth his way, the *LORD* directeth his paths." Hence, under the constant action of Divine Providence, every human soul is receiving an impress from circumstances which enter largely into the formation of a permanent moral character. This occurs in a way not to lessen the responsibility of man, nor to impair his liberty of choice. His circumstances elicit moral character, and confirm it; whilst the good or the evil is the result of his unobstructed preference of heart. This for the present we must take for granted. It would involve the necessity of too much abstract reasoning to make it plainer. It is easy, however, to see that one's early companions and acquaintances must have a direct bearing on the formation and fixedness of moral character. Creatures of imitation and of sympathy, we take imperceptibly the type of character with which we are most constantly in contact. If this companionship be accidental, the effect may not be so great as where it is the result of a sympathetic preference. One thing, however, must be observed, that the tendency of social influence, where the grace of God does not intervene, is generally to increase the amount and power of depravity. For this reason it is that we find the base and the vile will more generally succeed in poisoning the principles of the moral, than the virtuous, by their efforts, can effect a reformation from vice and error.

When the book of Providence is opened many a soul will be found to have received an important bias from its social relations. One will be seen whose early training justified the hope of a good moral character; but a companionship was preferred which blasted these hopes in the bud. On the part of the seducer from virtue, we do not deny, there exists a deeper criminality than in his un-

practised victim; but the *latter* is far from being *guiltless*. In answer to excuses and palliations, we would say that Providence may be vindicated in the following manner, at least I think it will so appear in the judgment-day: When the vitious are thrown into the company of the virtuous, the first impulse with the former is that of respect for moral character. There is an instinctive homage paid to virtue. The vilest feel this. Milton makes even the devil to partake of this sentiment; for, in presence of the yet unsullied Eve, "he felt how awful goodness is, and virtue in her form how lovely." Is it not the design of Providence to force upon his depraved mind, by the power of contrast, a sense of his own guilt—to lead him to see and deplore his own melancholy fall? Yet such is not in general the effect. Satan-like, he sets himself to work, with a malicious selfishness, to reduce this companion to his own grade of infamy. He abuses the opportunity of self-improvement, and in making his companion *like* himself, he makes himself ten-fold more the child of hell than before.

But is the companion who falls into the snare guiltless? By no means. Why did Providence place him in contact with the seducer? We might answer this by asking why he placed *himself* there? But admitting that he is there by the action of Providence, what are his first emotions at the sight of a deeper depravity than his own? Is it not, in the first instance, revulsion—condemnation? Does not the conscience revolt, and cry out against all contact with such pollution? Are not these feelings the sentinels of God in the soul? And must not repeated efforts be made before a hearty companionship can be enjoyed? Do you ask, then, why Providence placed you in contact with evil companions? Manifestly to do them good; not to *accede*, but to *resist*; and the moment you *did* accede was a moment of guilt. If your moral character has been shaped in this way, blame not PROVIDENCE, but blame YOURSELF; for, whilst the voice of God within called you to resistance, your own stronger inclinations hurried you into conformity. We are responsible every one of us for our social influence upon others, and for their allowed influence upon us. This we shall see more fully and clearly in the day of judgment. "No man liveth to himself" is a *fact* as well as a divine maxim. Social sympathy will be seen at last to have had a powerful influence in making heaven more blessed and hell more dreadful.

AGAIN, *Providence arranges our business and pleasures so that they become to us unconsciously the instruments in the formation of our moral character.*

Amidst its avocations, the busy mind reflects but seldom on the fact that the pliant moral powers are affected constantly by all we do and all we say in the varied transactions of life. Yet such is the solemn fact. We can scarcely perform an act which has not some remote bearing on the awful future. Character is elicited and confirmed by the very occupations which we pursue. We

may make such occupations conduce to holiness or confirm the soul in sin. We may prosecute them for the glory of God or for the aggrandizement of self. In the one case we shall grow better, in the other we shall grow worse. In the one instance, we may be maturing for heaven ; in the other, driving with more headlong impetus to hell. Those things which men are apt to imagine relate only to this life, will be found to reach forward into eternity, and will meet us as witnesses for God in the last solemn adjudication. Think you that a man's business will have nothing to do in settling and sealing his eternal destiny ? Will he who thrives on the miseries of his fellow-men—who "builds on their ruin"—who lives on their death—will HE have nothing to answer for at God's awful tribunal ?

When the book of Providence is opened, what terrific lines will be found there in relation to millions whose earthly prosperity exacted the transient homage of a selfish world, but whose whole course through life was one continuous training for DAMNATION.

Mercies and judgments enter into the arrangements of Providence, and modify moral character by their influence on the mind and heart. With what a lavish hand does the Almighty bestrew with blessings the path of mortals ! This goodness of God may lead to repentance, or it may be abused to increasing obduracy of heart. So also the judgments of God may become the occasions of humiliation ; or, as in the case of Pharaoh, may lead to a spirit of defiance. The subject of these mercies and judgments is responsible for their effect upon his soul. Every dispensation of Providence is intended to have a moral bearing ; and such it WILL have and will be SEEN to have when the record of its proceedings shall be unfolded.

The talents and privileges conferred enter largely into the action of Divine Providence, and by their use or abuse serve to give emphasis to our final account. What and how many these talents are, will be seen more fully when the books are opened. How they have been neglected or improved, employed or buried, well-directed or perverted, will also then be seen.

These, and a thousand other circumstances dependent on Providence, go to make up an influence bearing directly or indirectly on the formation of character, and consequently on the final issues of the judgment. All these employ the thoughts—draw forth conversation—lead to action ; and thus modify the whole man, whose history and destiny are interwoven with every movement of Providence. What a solemn and important book will that be, which, commencing with our birth, covers the entire history of our responsible existence ! And this is *one* of the *books* which shall be opened !

II. *Another book, whose seal will then be broken, is the book of conscience.*

Conscience is a sort of moral memory ; but may be said to *anticipate* as well as to reflect. When it reproves for sins committed, it delivers a verdict preliminary to the awful judgment. The book of conscience is a sort of sealed or secret book ; inasmuch as its record is carefully concealed from the public eye, however dark its registrations on the memory of the sinner himself. It opens its eventful page in early life. It begins with the first impressions of accountability. It stirs in the bosom of the child, and sends a tremor through the young heart whenever its growing depravity leads it into sin. Nothing escapes the all-vigilant eye of conscience, stationed in the soul as God's minister, and as the herald of his retributions. Every crime is duly notched. Every corrupt imagination, every wrong principle professed or indulged—every unhallowed word—every guilty act, goes into the account-book, to swell the score against the great day of reckoning. Even when sins are as frequent as the breath, and when the sinner fancies he has bribed conscience into acquiescence, the account still goes on. Page after page is indited, and day after day the leaves are filling, until the last awful hour, when, in the dreadful volume held up by conscience before the dying eye, the sinner sees at a glance the uncanceled magnitude of his crimes. But the seal is not broken, until the great white throne is set, and the books are opened.

Many a sinner dies without disburdening his conscience. Many conceal from their dearest friends the maladies and terrors of the soul. They are even themselves not aware of *all* that conscience has to say against them. Some sins of special enormity may have gotten a firm hold on the memory, and may occasionally disturb their peace ; but how many thousands are obliterated amid the ceaseless recurrence of business and of pleasure ! The deluded man may even attempt, by some partial reformation, to demand of conscience a quit-claim for all that has past. But conscience, my hearers, never lets go her hold on the accountable soul. She is not to be bought off by any supposed virtues ; nor will she waive her claims for any equivalent which mere human merit can supply. If her voice be unheeded here, it shall be heard hereafter. If her record be denied on earth, it shall be admitted in eternity. In the great audit, when every accountable soul shall be weighed in the balances, the book of conscience must be unsealed, as an important record in those awful proceedings. What a tremendous revelation will that be, when every dark and unhallowed thought or desire which has dwelt in the human bosom shall be brought forth ! Will it need any other witness to close our lips, and to certify our doom ? Tell me, sinner, if conscience ALONE be thy accuser, will not her testimony be overwhelming ? Will any apologies remain, after *she* has spoken ? Will any virtues be seen, after her record has been laid open ? Can *you* or *I*, or *any*, talk of human merit then ? As her finger points to one dark scene after another which has transpired in the deep bosom—as she expatiates on the aggrava-

tions of the act, tells of her remonstrances and of our determination to sin—what shall we have to answer, or to what subterfuge can we retreat? How will she strip off all disguises, and read in our ears the unvarnished report of a life spent in folly and in sin! If on earth her upbraidings be so terrible—if *here*, where the single remonstrance hangs like a viper upon the soul—if *here*, where so many objects are present to divert the mind and break the force of her blows, her rebukes are yet so fearful—what *WILL* they be when her accumulated account is laid open at the judgment-bar! O for one drop of peace-speaking blood! But *THEN* that blood will have exerted all its intended efficacy, and the prayer for its application will be utterly unavailing. Who is prepared to see opened, first the volume of Providence, and then the book of conscience? And yet all the dead, *small* and *great*, must encounter this scene, and must read their fate for eternity out of these dreaded records.

III. *The book of the law, the record of God's inspired word, must be then opened as the great statute-book of heaven.*

This is the only rule of right. This not only discloses the doctrine of Providence, but teaches its influence and its bearings on the moral history of mankind. This book, coming to us clothed with the high credentials of its Author, challenges our belief, and exacts our obedience. It lays down clearly the principles of holiness, and it defines with exactness the circumstances and the guilt of transgression. It gives us history, in order to instruct us by living examples; and it presents moral precepts, in order to fortify the soul under every circumstance of temptation. It is a history of God's most gracious designs. It is the record of their fulfilment in the wondrous birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Yea, it is the very words of the Son of God, stereotyped for all ages, and presenting a system of faith, to believe which is salvation—to reject which is eternal damnation. Such a book must surely be laid open, when the soul stands for its trial at the bar of God. This, then, is one of the books, whose mysterious page will there receive a flood of light. Will not God appeal to this high standard, and inquire who has received it in faith; and thus set to his seal that God is true? Will not its once-neglected pages flash, as it were, with the fires of indignation? Will not the sinner remember how often its mandates were echoed from the sacred desk, and struck with appalling but momentary force on the conscience, and then were coolly trampled under foot? Will not Jesus the Judge point to its revelations, and say, why did ye not receive them? Will not this glorious Saviour, clothed in the official grandeur of that closing scene, contrast solemnly with the insulted and crucified Man of Sorrows; and will not every line of the Bible that speaks of Him be as a dagger to the guilty soul? How can the sinner bear to meet its opening page? How can he look towards the throne, when his now neglected Bible shall rise up to witness against him?

John saw these books opened, and the dead small and great judged out of the things which are written in these books. Here is a prospect for your contemplation! Turn your eyes off from the pageantry of earth—from the pressing and importunate cares of this transient life. Turn them upon the awful future. There is something here of solemn import; something that concerns both you and me; and from which there is no escape, and no concealment. Every word we utter—every design we conceive and prosecute—every movement we make—our business relations—our social relations—our talents, our privileges—what we *do* and what we *neglect* to do—all are accumulating upon the soul the impress of its eternal destiny.

Existence is a solemn trust: every soul in this house is invested with this trust. No power but God's can annihilate; therefore must existence go on. Yes, it *must* go on. As it proceeds it gathers responsibilities at every step. It is maturing for its eternal state. Think of this, man of the world. Think of it, vain trifler. Think of it, rejecter of the Gospel. Never can you cease to exist. If you become a suicide, you only hasten the dreadful consummation. Death ends not existence. Death *confirms* existence—makes it enduring; sets the seal, and settles the destiny. “*After* death cometh the judgment.” Here is matter, I again say, for your consideration. Think of it you must; not only when the voice of the preacher sounds it in your ears, but think of it you *must* in those intervals when the soul, in spite of resistance, asserts her immortality. But is *thinking* of it all you have to do? Is there no preparation necessary? Are there no sins to be given up; no sorrows to be felt; no penitence to be felt and expressed; no prayers to be offered; no Saviour to be sought? Will you let existence go on, reckless how it is to end? Will you let the trial come, and care not whether it result in heaven or in hell? Will you invite the world to come in between you and all these fearful scenes, and so cheat yourselves of your preparation, until it is too late to prepare? Who will begin to-day the work of preparation? Who will act in a manner worthy of his immortal existence? Who will balance time with eternity, and give to eternity the attention which it deserves? Who will repent and believe the Gospel? All is staked on this. Will you give up your sins? Will you give up the world? Will you make this sacrifice for holiness, and for heaven? Nothing short of this can make death welcome, and disrobe the judgment of its terrors. Nothing else can give your name a place in the book of life; nothing else can place you among the redeemed, and give you a share in their unending joys. Dying sinner, what is your decision? From that decision the appeal, I solemnly declare, shall be to the judgment-seat of Christ.