

Warnings against carnality and idolatry (Quality: Average)

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Date: 02 February 1978

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[0 : 00] The Lord's power for evening, we will speak from the prophecy by Isaiah, chapter 59, the letter part of verse 19.

The 59th of Isaiah, the letter part of verse 19. When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against you.

When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against you. We were dwelling upon these words a little, not by way of a text this morning, as those of you who were here will know.

What a vast deep there is in this gracious promise, and what a comfort for those who are in a position, and know what the experience is, for the enemy to cut in like a flood, and sweep out from my office.

We were speaking this morning of that remarkable change after Elijah's translation. Now, the prophet, good men, men of God in, no doubt, but they persuaded Elijah to send, to look for Elijah in case, in case there had been some mishap, something had gone wrong with the divine purpose of conveying in this most exceptional manner the prophet Elijah to glory.

[2 : 09] And the word used was peradventure. And it is a word often used in the scripture, peradventure.

And here, there is no peradventure. Here is a sacred promise mingled in with all these pearly decorations of the complete loss and fall of man, ruined states by nature, and how far he has departed from the living God, their feet are swift to run evil, and make haste, and so on, to shed innocent blood, their thoughts, the thoughts of iniquity, and so on.

The way of peace they know not. Seems out of date to the natural mind, and yet nothing more apposite, nothing more up to date than such a declaration as this that runs parallel with that of the Apostle Paul, his opening chapters to the Romans.

The heart of man has not changed and nor is yours, nor is mine. And it isn't likely to. There's no possibility of reforming human nature.

Human nature, being what it is, will stand unreformed to the end, and be laid in the grave at the end, and then, and there, see corruption.

[4 : 08] At the new nature, we'll never see corruption. In the words that we read this morning was mention of the spirit, which is an infrequent reference in the Old Testament, but perhaps the spirit of the Lord, they said, has taken him out.

The New Testament references to the Holy Spirit of truth, of course, are much more frequent than when the Holy Spirit was given the day of Pentecost, and from then onwards there was a vast development in the growth of grace and knowledge of God and the revelation and the bringing out from the Old Testament its sacred treasures.

So that, as one has said in that little couplet that the New, that is the New Testament, is in the Old concealed, and the New is in the Old revealed.

The sacred treasures that we have in the prophets were amply fulfilled, and it is our privilege and mercy to have such a death, an unpalatable death of God's love and mercy towards his people that can never be found.

The death of it is beyond their amazement, and yet it is ever fresh, it supplies our land with what you ask for in your hymn, crumbs of mercy, and it ever will do.

[6 : 19] And here is one of them. The enemies will come in like a flood. God is ever aware of his enemies. Wherever they are, and by whatever means they seek to undermine his truth and to destroy his purposes, he is aware before, and if he understands how our thoughts are far off, he certainly understands the thoughts of the enemy are far off.

And this is our great mercy. Though we cannot comprehend it, it follows as a divine truth that God foreknows, foresees, every intention of the enemy.

Nothing takes him by surprise. So that he is able to promise that when the enemy does move with all his mighty forces, comes in under the figure here of a flood, the spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him.

That is, he shall put him to flight. The standard was the banner under which the twelve tribes marched, as you know.

it was a God ordained standard. And each tribe picked their tent and marched also under their own particular standard.

[8 : 22] It was a rallying point. It was a rallying point in the day of battle. The apostle Paul refers to it as a disaster when the standard bearer fainting.

Lift up a standard for the people, says the 62nd of I God.

Cast up, cast up the highway, gather out the stones, lift up a standard for the people. Something for them to rally round.

And how wonderfully the Lord has done this. And what do we want the standard for? Where is the enemy? Who is it? Is it outside this building?

Or inside? Is it outside your home? Or inside? Where is the enemy? Where is the greatest force that we have to fear?

[9 : 35] We may not be able to answer that question. The answer is that the greatest force we have to fear is ourselves, our own fallen nation.

and when the Lord suffers this enemy to rise and come in like a flood, we need a standard raised against it.

After there are, of course, so many other enemies against the truth of God, and they are ever busy, and they are enemies whose design is known of God, therefore preparation can be made, and is made, and has been made, and the death, and the resurrection, and the ascension of the Lord Jesus is that blessed preparation which God has made for the recovery of the Lord God.

Truly, the enemy came in like a flood into the Garden of Eden, and truly success was permitted to him, but not complete success.

And in the mysterious purposes of God, Abraham was raised up, eventually to become a standard bearer, for in thee, in thy seed, and all the nations of the earth be blessed.

[11 : 21] And it is under this standard that we gather today, and that standard is the standard of divine truth concerning ourselves.

This is where the church of God finds a rallying point, a communion of spirit, a fellowship of spirit, oneness apart.

This is where sinners meet. This is where the unworthy come together and are able to agree and stand together under this gracious standard.

This truth that is revealed. As much as they hated it at one time, they now through grace love him because they have had some experience of the enemy and know what he can do and where they would have finished had he not interposed in their life, that is, had not God interposed in their life.

Arm up for free and sovereign grace, says one of our hymns, I still have lived as strange from God to have and be the destined place of my deserve but dread of hope.

[12 : 51] So that they have a common interest, black and unsightly as it is. They know the enemy to be the man of their own hearts.

And this is where real religion comes and leads them into valuable commentary and experiences that are set out in the word of God.

It's a strange thing that you might have a fool of godliness and not know the plague of your own heart.

And not know such a chapter as the seventh of Rome. Not long ago I was talking to what you would call a sincere young man and I pointed out the two eyes in the seventh of Rome.

The common eye of the apostle called when eye would do good and good eye. And he said he never read it.

[14 : 19] ever looked at him. It's an astonishing thing that this vital secret is hidden away from the wise and the proved.

They know not the enemy within the camp and that which works in their own heart causing them to need a standard.

So that we have a great cause to be exceedingly thankful for the seventh of Rome. To see there how the apostle frankly admits that there were two natures within him the flesh lusting against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh.

and further telling us elsewhere that there cannot be reconciled. There's no possibility of peace between our carnal and spiritual nature.

No alliance whatsoever can be made. that this enemy man of our own power is as the promise says sin shall not have dominion over you for you are not under the law but under grace.

[16 : 02] sin and if sin did have dominion over us we shouldn't be here today I shouldn't if what is in my heart by nature were to be given its head and unrestrained and let free I shouldn't be here or couldn't be.

sin soon would reduce us to utter despair. Now don't take me stretching a point will you when you read this 59 of Isaiah because it's all contained in this chapter and the fact in the opening verse that our iniquities have separated between us and our God is only too clear and sin is a separating thing as we all prove who know anything of the two nations and it's devastating in its work so that Jeremiah and Isaiah and Ezekiel take the place of those noble prophets that we were speaking of this morning

Elijah and Elijah but what is so marked is this that as heavy as their task was they had to deal with another form of sin and that was idolatry it is true that these later prophets dealt with idolatry but the particular work of both Elijah and Elijah was to deal with that which was visible namely the worship of idol an idol and that stemmed very very largely from the time when Solomon died and they in this very battle that is mentioned in the chapter we read this morning there was an idol set up by

King Jeroboam you got the school of the prophets and the golden idols the cart set up there for the people to go to worship so they shouldn't go to Jerusalem so what sort of a place little Bethel must have been in that day if we are only able to survive that there were the prophets of God and the prophets of the evil ones all working together as they are today and this enemy in that day was idolized now this comes in like a flood and the Lord foresaw that it would be and wherever you look in the scripture you will find idolatry but it's old or new if you look at

Corinth or Ephesus you will find idolatry you will hear the cry from Ephesus great is Diana of the Ephesians you will hear the cry from the children of Israel after Balaam had failed in his endeavor to curse Israel that they must marry the wives of the people around them and in this was their great fall mixing with the ungodly worshipping their idols copying them the weaker pervading over the stronger and how cleverly the enemy came in in those days like a flood this is what the Lord complains of them under the figure of adultery and of an adulterous wife

[21 : 01] God again and again uses this very very potent term to express what he felt with regard to the idolatry of his people and although it may on the surface look as if it preferred literally it has nothing of the kind and this idolatry was something hateful to God but they became fooled in the desert even and forget God they turned away from him until he smote them and then they turned to him so who among us can claim to be free from a propensity and leaning to idolatry look at the subtle entwining nature of an idol that's been preached against through all generations warnings have been issued from the beginning of gospel days the apostles saw it warned against it it has crept into the professing church it has run its course and it's still running its course this great evil that now today we see brings

Jehovah down to the level of man and we have grown worse instead of better and this idolatry takes the form of religious self so pleasant a picture is painted of the ability of man to save himself and it makes such pleasant hearing as to sow pillows to armholes and save peace peace where there is no peace that it is a delightful thing and as to the awful nature of it eyes are not open to see it any more than the parishes were able to see the utter blindness with which they approached the Lord

Jesus so that the neighbours of these two generations of prophets were vastly different but now we have others in the New Testament who are engaged or were in their day upon the same subject and they say such things as this that we are to beware of idolatry and its damaging effect we are told that the love of money is the root of all evil the love of it and how true this is today our nation is being gradually washed away as regards underlying principles by this evil and it is so effective the enemy is coming in indeed like a flood and what lies before us as regards the threat we know not nor do we want to know that God's word will stand unshaken so that we are brought to the great question what is this tantrum what is it to recognize it to rally underneath it you remember

I was speaking on Wednesday about David in the hour of his distress when he encouraged himself in the Lord his God the time when he was at his lower point and when his faithful followers spoke of Zion and I said then that I believed that what David found with encouragement was God's faithfulness that he remained unchanged in spite of the awful change that had taken place in his servant David David was a traitor a complete turncoat a detestable position even men hate turncoats don't they

Judas though he was a man and some repute as left behind him a record of being the worst of all characters a traitor a detestable person as a traitor so was David traitor to his cause to his country but what was more he was anointed as king and bear that anointing so that he was in a disgraceful and utterly ruined condition of himself and yet he encouraged himself in the Lord his God to marvelously but no more marvelous than every believer is brought to see by faith in the standard that is set up and that is an unchanging

[27 : 47] God revealed in an unchanging and an unchangeable covenant that is what I believe this is as it says in the 21st verse as for me this is my covenant said the Lord this is the standard the covenant of grace now do we recognize the standard have we ever had a glimpse of faithfulness to us in our unworthy condition those of us that have are humbled under the knowledge and realization of it for sin shall not have the opinion over you you have come under the law but under grace and on the early teaching of divine grace

God's covenant comes among other things to the believer's knowledge he swore but once the deed was done by two immutable things it was impossible for God to love we might have strong consolation who have pledged refuge till they hold upon the hope set before us in the gospel now in this great covenant and under it there is a rallying another point in David's life comes to mind and that is he rallied round him those that were discontented and bankrupt a great company of malcontents and yet there they were and these gathered round him as you know in the cave of

Dunham and they've often been likened to the Lord's people gathering round the Lord Jesus just how right that is I'm not quite sure undoubtedly in the gospel covenant of malcontent unworthy guilty bankrupt poverty stripping sinners gather round the covenant of grace and gather underneath it the banner that is to be displayed because of truth now what is the purpose of this covenant therefore and who is the one to lift it up any human hand or is it in the hand of the spirit spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against you man it is therefore the work of this vetted spirit to do exactly what

Jesus said he would do that is to take of the things of Jesus and show them unto us and this is his office and what more suitable to a sin stricken sinner convicted and felt bankrupt poverty stricken in his own soul and for the Holy Spirit to show and reveal clearly to him the only way of salvation through the merits blood and righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ there is a sense of security there is a rallying point now does this father affect them indeed it's devastating as I said this morning and if it were uncontrolled and the floodgates were let open there would be a complete disaster so often indeed the church has gone through very dark times when it has appeared that the sandals would go out and it is to be feared that today is a day of small things and I have to say a condition of a cold indifference neither hot nor cold a lack of earnestness and zeal the name and cause of the

Lord Jesus his ordinances despised and put off on side his house his word his truth unloved and not by the worldling but those who profess to love it the Lord asked a question by Jeremiah with regard to this and speaking of his people loving to have it so he says to them and what will he do in the end thereof and what will be the end of these things if God does not lift up the standard and stay the flood in the heart where would it end but in a manifestation of utter hypocrisy the whole come out into the broad line of the day of judgment and stand before us clearly revealed those strong words of

[34 : 16] Jesus as foretold already that day I will profess I knew you not though you say thou hast prophesied in our truth and in thy name have done many wonderful work yet but I prophesy unto you I never knew you depart from me ye workers of iniquity if God restrain not this awful flood gate of a destruction where shall we stand in the day of judgment if our hearts and natures be not controlled by divine grace what hope have we for every other hope is but than any he that trusts in his own mouth acts of raw and foolish time but the spirit of the

Lord and blessed holy holy ghost is appointed in this matter not only of personal sin and unworthiness not only of idolatry and following after cunningly devised tables but also in the matter of our profession how good it is to tread warily in a profession and into a profession and once that profession is made and the name of the Lord Jesus Christ is given and professed publicly what an owner and responsibility rests upon the believer and yet is not this part of that divine covenant it says so my spirit that is upon thee in my word which I have put in thy mouth shall not depart out of thy mouth that's God speaking to

Jeremiah and out of the mouth of thy seed and out of the mouth of thy seed seed forever and accept the Lord we are therefore privileged to see and understand that this work of the Holy Ghost will be carried on until the end and it is therefore a blessed rallying point and what happens to the enemy then what does he do is he courageous enough to stand against this standard this covenant what are the terms of this covenant we were speaking only recently weren't we of the brand plucked out of the fire from the prophecy of

Zachariah is not this a brand plucked out of the burden is not this a matter that is so blessed in the gospel that whom once he loved he never leaves he that hath begun of good work in you will carry it on is not this emblazoned on the covenant banner of God's everlasting love is not this to be proclaimed from the rising of the sun they shall fear thy name the west and his glory from the rising of the sun why this has been an ever much place where the church of God finds her enemy defeated however much he may seek to destroy her hope bring her down however much she may be left to herself to take some of the bitter hope of her own nature with all this spirit of the lord shall lift up a standard and that standard shall point to one only and that is the lord Jesus Christ and all that he is all that he has it is therefore a matter so well known this covenant is the glory of the new testament prophets Peter speaks of this lamb having been slain from before the foundation of the world I think I mentioned this last sabbath the most remarkable thing for an ordinary man to say that he wasn't an ordinary man divine father and revelation have revealed to him that in the covenant purposes of God the lamb of God had been revealed before the foundation of the world and this covenant still stood and indeed it was what he had to declare and upon this they stood and declared it without fear or favour and this is the rallying point therefore today now it is the duty of the substandard bearers to lift this standard up to lift it up in its reality its truthfulness its veracity not to amend it and just it or alter it the feelings of men or women without fear or favour to set forth the excellencies of God's covenant of grace as it is made known in the salvation of sinners to encourage them to exhort them that they who feel swept off their feet by the

iniquities their own heart or the arrows that are around who have to combat in conversation very often those who hate Christ will have nothing to do with his sovereign grace and as to his eternal purposes never and when the enemy comes in dust some of us have felt well I swept up happy I know I have especially in my earlier days and I don't think it did me any harm come into contact with those who had excellent answers seemingly to the meritorious work of Christ and the nothingness of the sin the bankruptcy of the soul and the complete ruin of human nature but when these things are proven in the days of maturity and one comes to the valley of the shadow of death there we find the eternal blessedness of this unchangeable covenant one hymn writer says whate'er we found him at our best he's at our worst to say this is no encouragement to live as you like and an essential life and to say well if

[43 : 40] I'm going to be saved I shall be indeed not the deep indebtedness that this blessed covenant engenders in the heart is a preventative against all that as you well know you cannot sin cheaply who fear God you cannot sin that Christ might abound and present yourself before the throne of grace at night or in the sanctuary or anywhere else and under back half of it no it is lifted up by the holy spirit of truth it's lifted up in two ways it is lifted up in the reading the word of God this is the message that we have received from him says Paul John I mean in his general epistle this then is the message that if we confess our sin he is faithful and just to forgive us our sin and to cleanse us from all iniquity this then is the message it goes on as you know to say that if we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us we're devoid of it that's one way the reading of the word of

God that's how the standard is lifted up and blessed moments are they when in your reading and prayer for consideration of the word of God you catch a glimpse of this standard towering above your head as an unworthy warrior in the ranks of Christ willing to defend his cause willing to stand keep by go with those who do and yet feeling your whole dependence fixed upon him the other way is the preaching of him and this is accompanied with a marked suitability the Lord knows when to encourage to lift up the standard in the personal life that we individually have to walk out there are those who can testify of the timely warning and the timely appearance of the

Lord in sending to them the word of his truth in the days of their youth their growing years their mature years their older years and in their dying years and every hope has been centred upon this sacred covenant that it is ordered in all things and sure and that it contains divine strength divine promise to joy and amen in Christ Jesus and therefore just suited to their tail their hands are empty their hearts are faint but it says lift up the hands that hang out and confirm the feeble need say unto them that are of a fearful heart peace from fear not and thus it is that the promise here before us is ratified again and again and now look back to those talents when the enemy did come in like a flood how they make you tremble don't they when I look back to those times in my life they make me tremble tremble on the brink but had the

Lord not held you fast you would have been precipitated over the edge to eternal tradition but no the covenant is this once in heaven in him forever thus the eternal covenant stands you prove may you prove may I prove that we begin to go on into a new year the fullness and the suitability of this promise that when the enemy shall come in like a flood the spirit of the Lord shall lift up and stand against him amen from well we