

**THE GOD OF OUR FATHERS: AN
HISTORICAL SERMON PREACHED IN
THE COATES' STREET PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH PHILADELPHIA. ON FAST
DAY JANUARY 4, 1861. PP.3-55**

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The God of Our Fathers: An Historical Sermon Preached in the Coates' Street Presbyterian Church Philadelphia. On fast day January 4, 1861. pp.3-55 by George Duffield

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PREACHED IN THE

Coates' Street Presbyterian Church,

PHILADELPHIA,

95

FAST DAY, JANUARY 4, 1861.

BY

GEORGE DUFFIELD, JR.,

PASTOR.

WITH COPIOUS NOTES, AND AN APPENDIX.

*"The longer I live, the more convincing proofs I see of this truth, that God governs
in the affairs of men."*—BENJAMIN FRANKLIN.

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Then I went down to the potter's house, and, behold, he wrought a work on the wheels.

And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hands of the potter: so he made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it.

Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying,

O house of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter? saith the Lord. Behold, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are ye in mine hand, O house of Israel.

At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it:

If that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them.

And at what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it;

If it do evil in my sight, that it obey not my voice, then will I repent of the good, wherewith I said I would benefit them.—*Jeremiah* xviii. 3-10.

P R E F A C E.

THE history of this Sermon is a very simple one. The phrase "National Sins" in the President's Proclamation, suggested an inquiry as to what these sins were? One of the sources of information on this topic, it occurred to us, would be the sermons that had been delivered on other National Fast Days. Many such being just at our hand, we turned them over with no little interest and curiosity. The more we "touched the bones of the prophets," the more we felt that virtue came out of them.

"Faithful men," indeed, were these old Fathers, to whom the Gospel in all its relations, both temporal and eternal, might be most safely entrusted! Though a reward was offered for their heads, they *preached*; though a Tory party in the Church might wish to keep them quiet, still they *preached*; though their brethren not infrequently found vehement fault with them for so doing, yet, the Word of God "burning like a fire in their bones," they could not do otherwise than preach. The Chinese idea which so many have been endeavoring to inculcate of late, that "to speak of politics is to be guilty of death," by such men as Mayhew, Witherspoon, Emmons, &c., would have been laughed to scorn! "Dumb dogs that cannot bark," could not be said of them, any more than of Calvin, and Knox, and the staunch old English Puritans! Thank God that such men lived *on this side of the Atlantic*, as well as the other!

There is no excuse for us if we do not try, at least, to imitate their example. If ever the pulpit is to regain that influence which it has lost in our land, it must be by preaching occasionally such sermons as that of Dr. Langdon,* "*Governments corrupted by vice, and restored by virtue*," May 31st, 1775, from a favorite text in those times, Isaiah i. 26. "And I will restore thy judges as at the first, and thy

* See the "*Pulpit of the American Revolution; or, the Political Sermons of the period of 1776*," by John Wingate Thornton, Boston. 1869.

counsellors as at the beginning." As ministers we must study, and quote, and preach upon that other text as often as they did, viz.: Is. lx. 12. "The Nation that will not serve Thee, shall perish;" further enforced by Jeremiah xviii. 3-10. The hitherto unpublished document of the old Chaplain in the Appendix, will show how far we have drifted, we greatly fear, *in the wrong direction*. Stirring times may be before us, and that very speedily; "wherefore, let us gird up the loins of our mind, be sober, and hope to the end!" Should our humble effort in this discourse be of no further service, it may at least save some valuable ministerial time in the way of reference. The man who would write a good religious history of this Nation, could scarcely do his countrymen a better service. Is it yet too late for our American Wilberforce, Theodore Frelinghuysen, to do it?

G. D., JR.

PHILADELPHIA, *Jan. 5th*, 1861.

P. S. In the delivery of the Sermon, the *details* of the third head, viz.: "Our National Judgments," were omitted for want of time.

THE GOD OF OUR FATHERS.

"FOR THE LORD SPAKE THUS TO ME WITH A STRONG HAND, AND INSTRUCTED ME THAT I SHOULD NOT WALK IN THE WAY OF THIS PEOPLE, SAYING,

SAY YE NOT, A CONFEDERACY, TO ALL THEM TO WHOM THIS PEOPLE SHALL SAY, A CONFEDERACY; NEITHER FEAR YE THEIR FEAR, NOR BE AFRAID.

SANCTIFY THE LORD OF HOSTS HIMSELF; AND LET HIM BE YOUR FEAR, AND LET HIM BE YOUR BREAD.

AND HE SHALL BE FOR A SANCTUARY."—ISAIAH VIII. 11-14.

"*Went to church and fasted all day.*" Such is the record in the private journal of the great "Father of his Country," under date of Wednesday, June 1st, A. D., 1774; a day solemnly appointed by the Assembly of Virginia, on hearing of the passage of the Boston Port Bill, "as a day of fasting, humiliation and prayer, to avert from us the evils of civil war, and to inspire us with firmness in support of our rights."*

A year later, just after the battles of Lexington and

* "No example of such a solemnity had existed since the days of our distresses in the war of '55, since which a new generation had grown up. With the help of Rushworth, whom we rummaged over for the revolutionary precedents and forms of the Puritans of those days, preserved by him, we cooked up a resolution somewhat modernizing the phrases, for appointing the 1st of June, on which the Port Bill was to commence, for a day of fasting." (See Jefferson's Diary.) Does that diary, June 1st, show the same record as Washington's? The minute of the House of Commons reads—"That God would give them one heart and one mind in carrying on the great work of the Lord." Rushworth's *Historical Collections*, Part IV., Vol. 1., pp. 545, 644, as quoted by Wm. B. Reed, Esq., in his Address, Nov. 1st, 1838.

Bunker Hill, the Old Continental Congress appointed a day of *General Fast*.*

On May 17th, 1776, "which was kept as a national fast, George Duffield, the minister of the Third Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia, with John Adams for a listener, drew a parallel between George the First and Pharaoh, and inferred that the same Providence of God which had rescued the Israelites, intended to free the Americans."†

Could it have been in remembrance of this day in Old Pine Street, that "unfashionable as the faith in an overruling Providence" then was, this same John Adams was not ashamed to proclaim another National Fast, May 9th, 1798? Was it an evidence of the value of such a day, that even though hostilities had actually commenced between the United States and France, and a vessel of each nation had suffered capture, that such a body of men as the *French Directory*, so speedily and unexpectedly made overtures of peace, and that of their own accord?

In the fourth year of the second war with Great Britain, the example of John Adams was followed by President Madison, and January 12th, 1815, was recommended by him as a National Fast Day.

Even while the people were yet speaking, He "in whose hand the king's heart is as the rivers of water;

* "Memorable to distant ages should be the 20th of July, 1775, observed throughout the Continent as a day of fasting, humiliation and prayer, and one of the most solemn days she ever saw. When the injured millions of America, prostrate before the throne of the Eternal, poured out their complaint, and sent their cry to him that *judgeth rightly*." Fast Day Sermon of J. M. Mason, D. D., New York, Sept. 20th, 1793. Our National Tacitus makes no mention of it!

† Bancroft, Vol. viii. p. 385.