

H. S. 6719

19  
DEP. OBG.

**The Sermon**

Preached at the

**WAR INTERCESSION SERVICE**



H.S.  
6719

19

# The Sermon

Preached at the

# WAR INTERCESSION SERVICE

---

S.<sup>T</sup> GEORGES CHURCH

LISBON

---

January 6<sup>th</sup> 1918

---

63142



LISBOA

TYP. DO ANUARIO COMMERCIAL

Praça dos Restauradores, 24

---

1918



## War intercession service

---

Jan. 6-1918.

For thus saith the Lord God, the Holy one of Israel, In returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and confidence shall be your strength. Isaiah 30.15.

This passage translated into more modern language would run, Thus saith the Lord God, the Holy one of Israel «In turning to me and in refraining from all intrigue you shall be saved; in quiet and confident trust in me is your strength», and we shall better understand the meaning of this passage and the whole prophecy in this chapter, if we consider a little more closely the political circumstances of the times, because all prophecies were written for the help and guidance of the people of that time in the first instance, and not simply to foretell some future event. The propheta were not so much *fore* tellers as *forth* tellers, men who declared the will of God and upheld the eternal moral law of truth and justice.

The power of Egypt was on the wane, while that of Assyria after a short eclipse was again emerging to become the greatest world power of the day. Assyria had already des-

troyed the principalities of Northern Syria. Damascus had fallen and Israel had gone into Captivity, leaving Judah exposed to the army of Assyria. For some years Judah had been a vassal of Assyria, but when Sennacherib came to the throne, the nation of Northern Syria instigated by Egypt determined to rebel. There were two political parties in Judah: one anxious to remain in alliance with Assyria; and another which wanted to join the rebellion against Assyria and call in the aid of Egypt. This latter party had succeeded in persuading Hezekiah to send an embassy with presents to Egypt, and Judah took up a rebellious attitude to Assyria and it is against this Egyptian alliance that this prophecy is directed. Isaiah regarded it as quite wrong not only because he was convinced that Assyria was a stronger power than Egypt but because their word and faith were already pledged to Assyria. He felt that however wise and cunning the politicians might think themselves to be, no good could possibly come of treating a solemn compact as «a scrap of paper».

At the beginning of his career Isaiah had opposed the Assyrian alliance, but when once it had been made, he loyally accepted it, and now the other political party charged him with inconsistency, with defending now what he had vigorously opposed some years before. But what underlay all Isaiah's political activity was the firm conviction that whatever Judah's political relations might be, Jehovah was able of



himself to preserve them without Egyptian help, if only they were true to God and the right, and he was convinced that whatever Hezekiah and the Jews might do, if they left God and the moral law out of their plans, it would only end in disgrace and ruin, therefore he tells them this Egyptian alliance could only bring shame and reproach. (30<sup>5</sup>). In other prophecies Isaiah points out where the greatest danger of Judah lies, not abroad but in the lack of morality in public and private life at home. The people were not deliberately opposing Jehovah, on the contrary they were very active in this worship—burnt offering of rams and fat of fed beasts ascended up from the Temple altars in constant clouds of smoke, the Temple courts were thronged with crowds of worshippers, but this worship was unacceptable because their social life was full of vice and corruption—the administration of justice was corrupt, the cause of the widow and fatherless remained unheard; the rich oppressed the poor, and the land was gradually falling into the hands of a few, who were forming big estates, which they kept to themselves. Isaiah tells us God looked for justice but behold oppression; for righteous dealing, but there was only the piteous cry of the oppressed. «Woe to them that join house to house and field to field until there is no room (for the poor) and ye be made to dwell alone in the midst of the land» (Is. 5. <sup>7,8</sup>).

This social oppression and greed formed the

greatest danger for Judah and threatened to bring the scourge of the Assyrian into the land. Isaiah had a strong conviction that evil and wrong doing would be punished just because God is a moral ruler, loving justice and punishing iniquity and in the advance and growth of the Assyrian power he saw the God Jehovah, which was to scourge them for their sins. Isaiah did not believe that God was only on the side of the strongest battalions.

Perhaps you wonder what all the political intrigue of the 7th. Cent, B.C. has to do with us here to-day. Probably more than at first sight we should feel inclined to allow, for it shows us moral principles at work in human history. The disaster which Isaiah foretold came to pass, as shortly after the country was overrun by the Assyrians and 46 walled towns suffered the horrors of sack and siege and a large proportion of the inhabitants of the land were carried into slavery. These old records have a lesson and a warning for us in this year of our Lord 1918: a lesson which the prophets sums up in ver. 18 of the 30th. chap. «And therefore will the Lord wait that he may be gracious unto you: and therefore will he be *exalted* that he may have mercy upon you: for the Lord is a *God of judgment*: blessed are all they that wait upon him».

There has been much to try patience and to test our faith in God and the right during the past 3  $\frac{1}{2}$  years, and some have found their faith unable to stand the test. We have had



many failures and some costly blunders in the past 3 1/2 years to atone for; and we are opposed by an enemy, who is still strong and who has gained from a military point of view much which he set out to accomplish and people say «If God is a God of judgment, as Isaiah says He is, why are all the powers of evil let loose to work so much sorrow and suffering in the world?» God cannot be a moral Being, a God of judgment, to act in this way!

Perhaps the answer is given us in this very verse, where Isaiah tells us «God will be *exalted*, that he may have mercy upon you: for the Lord is a God of judgment.» We have much to be thankful for, much as a people to be proud of, but we have not exalted God as we ought to have done, we have not as a people turned to Him in righteousness, in penitence, and in prayer as we should have done. Nor can we feel that as a nation or as individuals we have earnestly sought to fulfil the conditions, which God, as the righteous judge of the world, demands. Is it not true that God usually overrules our wills rather than work and rule through us and by us? Let each one ask himself in his own conscience what he has done to help on the cause of victory and truth, and how much he has left undone. Let him ask himself whether he has made any *real* sacrifice for this end, whether he has helped by any service possible for him and by his prayers the cause of victory and righteousness. Have you tried to make yourself a better citizen, a *man* worth

fighting for and dying for by those at the front? Have you tried to bring home to yourself that these are men fighting for you, dying in your place and that it is up to you to show that you are worth the sacrifice? Have you done anything beyond talk about the war and add to the general depression when things went wrong? If peace came to morrow would you not be in the same groove with the same habits you had in 1914, without much alteration for the better?

Anxious times are in store for us during the next six months. Times which will test our patience and fortitude, our powers of endurance, and because God is a «God of judgment» we must *exalt* Him. We must root out all that is contrary to His will if we would hasten the coming of victory and peace. By turning to God in repentance for all that is past, in quiet and confident trust in Him, we shall find our strength. We can keep fixed in our minds those striking words of Abraham Lincoln spoken in the darkest hour of the civil war in the States. «Let us have faith that right makes might, and in that faith let us to the end dare to do our duty as we understand it». Let us exalt God as the moral king of the universe, as the moral judge who can override the wills of evil men. If material resources and skilful preparation and the greatest army were the sole essentials of victory the Germans would have been in Paris long ago, for they had the biggest army and the best resources at beginning of the war.

A German writer said recently. «Even in the

fourth year of war moral and intellectual factors retain their superiority over mechanical and numerical factors, that is to say the Entente remains the weaker party in the war». However much we may disagree with this estimate there is no doubt much truths in the statement that «moral and intellectual factors retain their superiority» only we must make quite sure they are on our side. In spite of the vaunted military superiority of German organisation and equipment those immortal seven Divisions with splendid discipline and a courage beyond all praise gathered, as the Prime Minister eloquently said, «the spears of the German legions in their hearts and saved Europe in their perishing. The old army sacrificed itself, it made the retreat from Mons and helped to hurl back the German hordes. When Paris seemed in their grasp it saved the Channel ports in the first battle of Ypres. No sacrifice has ever had greater results. It saved France and it saved civilisation».

On New Year's day 1813 Napoleon stood where Germany stands to day, the Grand Army had overrun Europe, and the nations seemed to be at his feet. But the conquered were not conquered and October of the same year saw the Battle of Leipzig and after a vain attempt to rally the old forces, 1815 brought Waterloo.

A day of Intercession can have little meaning for the man who has no belief in God as a «God of judgment». If there is no God and life has no moral issue — if we are like corks carried helplessly along the stream of time, powerless in

the grip of world forces stronger than ourselves, prayer is superfluous and useless. On the other hand, if there is a supreme moral Spirit, who reigns as the invisible King then to leave God out, to ignore God's will is the most foolish thing a man can be guilty of. It is because our king feels that God has something to say as to the final issue of the war that he has asked us to meet together and in a spirit of humble obedience to God, and the blessing of God upon our efforts for victory and peace. We must commit ourselves, our efforts and our cause to God. Our cause is a just and righteous one, but if we are to bring about the conditions of victory, we must see to it that we ourselves are right with God. If we are going to mend things, that will only come about by the individual efforts of each one of us here at home, working out our own salvation with as much real effort and work as those in the fighting line; for moral factors are just as important as material factors. We must each one do our share and put, forth all our efforts to bring about the desired end, and we cannot do this, if we leave out prayer. We must have a fixed and unaltering faith in God, a firm determination to do all we can to help in the cause of victory, and when we unite prayer and work, we are exalting God and He will have mercy upon us just because He is a God of judgment, a moral being, and «blessed are all they that wait upon Him».

We cannot close without a word of homage to those who have laid down their lives in this



cause. There are many thousands of sorrowing men and women throughout the Empire, whose loved ones have fallen in this gigantic struggle. Their hearts are sad and their loss is great, but they would not recall their valiant dead at the price of their country's dishonour. The example of these brave men must enrich our lives and exalt our purpose, hallowing and cleansing our purposes and ways of living for they have laid down their lives for us, and their memories must remain our sacred treasure for all time. They have passed beyond our touch, beyond our sight, but thank God not beyond our love and prayers. We commit them to the loving mercy of God beseeching Him to grant them pardon and remission of all their sins and a place of refreshment, light, and peace.







