

Appendix 2

Spurgeon on the Passage

The following extract comes from a Spurgeon sermon published for reading in 1906, but preached in 1875. I am sure that Spurgeon had the Tractarian movement in mind, at least in part.¹ Even so, his words are relevant to what I have been saying throughout this book.

Spurgeon:

This message [in Isaiah 30] related to the invasion of the land of Judah by Sennacherib. The approach of the enormous hosts of the Assyrian king put almost the whole nation into a state of great alarm. They wanted to make an immediate alliance with the king of Egypt, and to ask that mighty monarch to send his forces to drive back the army of Sennacherib. But Isaiah the prophet was sent to warn them of the folly and sin of such an alliance, and to tell them that their strength was to sit still. They were to confide alone in the Most High, and not to look for any other helper, but to cast themselves upon the faithfulness of the God who had never failed them. If they did so, they would suffer no harm, but just in proportion as they turned away from the unseen Jehovah, and began to rely upon an arm of flesh, they would be sure to find trouble.

We might have supposed that these people would have gladly accepted the very cheering message. Surely it was a good thing for them not to have to go to war with the Assyrians, and not to need to despoil themselves and their temple in order to send gold to the king of Egypt, but simply to rest in God who had promised to be a wall of fire round about them and the glory in the midst of them? But, brothers and sisters, faith is an exotic [that is, a tender

¹ John Henry Newman and Edward Bouverie Pusey were among its leading advocates. Although the Tracts were written between 1833-1841, the Tractarian Movement cast a long and lasting shadow over the Church of England, and wider. The rise and spread of Anglo-Catholicism has been one of its lasting legacies (curses).

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plant] in any heart where it is made to flourish; it does not grow there by nature; it must be planted by grace. We are, all of us, idolaters by nature. We [feel we] need something to look at in our worship even though God has forbidden it to us in the strongest terms.

Let me break in. Spurgeon's point can be generalised. It is not just eye-gate. Sensuality can take many forms. For some it is music, a swelling organ, incense, robes (vestments), candles, stained glass in a dank, crumbling mausoleum, musty with age. For others, it is fast food, coffee, sentimental, repetitive mantras set to music, entertainment, fleshly inventions of idolatry and carnality – the list is virtually endless. Whatever it is, whether the tangible, the edible, the visible, the audible innovations are regarded as necessary, necessary to 'assist' our worship, and attract pagans into long-term attendance at the services and activities of the church. All such come under God's rebuke through the prophet.

Spurgeon continued:

And as to our life, we are always pining for the arm of flesh, needing to rely upon something tangible and visible [and to satisfy, as above, other senses, too]. We cannot, except as God's grace enables us to do so, cast ourselves absolutely upon the unseen, and trust ourselves to a God whose way we cannot trace! Yet, when his gracious Spirit teaches us this sacred art, it is well with us. The soul is elevated above gross materialism, above selfishness and self-confidence, above fear, alarm and trepidation, and brought into a condition of strength, power and peace. This is what the text [Isaiah 30:15] tells us – that in returning and rest we shall be saved, and in quietness and confidence shall be our strength! As it was with God's ancient people in the days of Sennacherib, so is it with us. This principle holds good all along: the faith that relies upon God will bring to us both salvation and strength.²

Spurgeon, in another sermon on Isaiah 30:

² Spurgeon sermon 2985.

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The people were in a great hurry to be delivered from their enemies. The Assyrians had come up in great force and were covering the land with their armies. They had already devastated the neighbouring kingdom of Israel and, therefore, the men of Judah were afraid that they would be swallowed up quickly, even as dry stubble is devoured by fire. The prophet bade the inhabitants of Jerusalem remain where they were, adding: 'For thus says the Lord GOD, the Holy One of Israel: In returning and rest shall you be saved; in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength'. But they would not listen to the counsel of wisdom – they preferred to follow the suggestion of their fears and go down into Egypt for shelter.

They were impatient because they were unbelieving. They were slow to obey, but they were swift to rebel and, therefore, the Lord cries to them by his prophet: 'Woe to the rebellious children that take counsel, but not of me'. They sent their princes as ambassadors to Zoan to entreat aid from the Egyptian king! Yes, they sent a great treasure upon camels as a bribe to Pharaoh to espouse their cause against Assyria. They would not rely upon their God and so they looked to the land of the viper and the fiery flying serpent [that is, Egypt] – and were stung with bitter disappointment – for vapour and emptiness were the help of Egypt.

It seemed as if the motto of the people then was: 'We will flee upon horses; we will ride upon the swift'. Again and again Isaiah urged them to be quiet, saying: 'Your strength is to sit still', but they would not learn that rash haste is but ill-speed. They could not be quiet by reason of their fear and folly. But the Lord waited and turned not from his long-enduring patience. In the words of our text, he showed that if mortals could not wait, yet their Maker could – 'Therefore will the LORD wait, that he may be gracious unto you' – and he assured them, yet again, that if they would learn to wait, they would find it their wisdom and happiness, for: 'Blessed are all they that wait for him'...

Certain of God's people are in trouble and distress and they are eager for immediate rescue. They cannot wait on God's time, nor exercise submission to his will. He will surely deliver them in due season, but they cannot tarry till the hour comes. Like children, they snatch at unripe fruit. 'To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose

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under the heaven', but their one season is the present – they cannot, they will not, wait. They must have their desire instantaneously fulfilled or else they are ready to take wrong means of attaining it... They would sooner rush under the guidance of Satan into some questionable policy than, in childlike simplicity, trust in the Lord and do good. It must not be so with you, my brothers and sisters – you must learn a better way. I hope that the sermon of this morning may go some way, by God's Spirit, towards instructing you in the holy art of waiting for the Lord. 'Those that wait upon the LORD, they shall inherit the earth'. The text divides itself into two parts: *First*, it introduces us to a waiting God. And, *secondly*, it speaks of a waiting people.³

³ Spurgeon sermon 1766. See Spurgeon sermon 1419 for the way in which he dealt with the passage from the individual believer's point of view.