

"Now the Egyptians are men, and not God; and their horses flesh, and not spirit."

- Isaiah xxxi,3

Isaiah xxxi

Luke vi,27-end

Psalm 80

New Book of Worship, Psalm 80, p.64

Our recent history has been a history of wars. After each it has been hoped that peace would follow, that the world would see the folly of war, its inability to bring security, and that mankind would begin to seek that concord and peace without which there can be neither happiness, friendship, nor any reward of toil or of thought in the world. Instead there have been years of tension, dissatisfaction, and increasing armaments, and now there are small conflicts in one part of the world or another, which may spread to the larger nations. Fires spread and sometimes get out of control. It is likewise with war, if it is not checked and put out.

It is easy to blame one nation, and perhaps still easier to blame one person, and as futile as it is easy. There are indeed the external aspects of war, the overt acts leading to armed conflict. But it is the inner causes that we most need to discover and to deal with. There is a great conflict going on in the world - a spiritual conflict - and the physical conflicts are but the surface disturbance which point to causes within.

War is the supreme folly of mankind. Isaiah lived in the time of Judah's decline. Israel had already been taken away captive. Judah was soon to suffer the same misfortune. The inhabitants of Judah were surrounded by enemies, but they were not looking for security to the Lord, who had led them out of bondage, established them in the Holy Land, and brought their kingdom to its great glory under Solomon.

Imagine ourselves to be the Jews in Palestine in the year 700 B.C. What are the questions in which we would be most interested? They would not be questions of theology or of ritual. They would be questions of policy. With others we should be wondering why it was that, notwithstanding God had bestowed such favors upon His people, they were no longer a great and powerful nation. We should be saying, "Why is it that a heathen power like the Assyrians in the north or Egypt in the south should be so much stronger than we, so that at any time they may come up against us and swallow us up?" We should be saying, "It is actually rumored that the armies of Sennacherib will soon be thundering at our gates. What chance have we against these trained horsemen and archers of Assyria?" We should be advised by the leading men that the most advantageous thing to do would be to make an alliance with Egypt, and thus meet force with force. It would be urged that such a course would be progressive, that new patterns and new opportunities were before us, and that unless we met them in a practical way, and employed new methods, we should make no advance but remain an obscure and down-trodden people.

Against these worldly policies and reasonings the prophet Isaiah thundered, "No. It is weakness, it is apostasy thus to turn to Egypt because her horses and chariots are many and her horsemen very strong, instead of continuing steadfast to Jehovah who brought our fathers out of Egypt, out of bondage." But the answer to this might be, "Conditions have changed. The world is expanding and its forces are gathering strength. Instead of the religion of our fathers increasing in might and the pretensions of

Egypt and Assyria being humbled, it seems to be the other way. They seem to be alert, they seem to be full of enterprise, whilst we seem to be standing still."

Now there is something wonderfully modern about all this the moment we see its spiritual significance. And this we should do readily. In the Scriptures Israel stands for the spiritual, the presence and power of the living God. Egypt stands for the world of practical knowledge and achievement, especially as expressed by the various sciences. Assyria stands for the spirit of rationalism and self-confident power, for the belief that man's reason has power to solve life's secrets without recourse to churches, to the Scriptures, to a spiritual world, or to God.

The Lord is speaking to us today through the prophet Isaiah:

"Woe to them that go down to Egypt for help; and stay on horses, and trust in chariots, because they are many; and in horsemen, because they are very strong; but they look not unto the Holy One of Israel, neither seek the Lord!...

"Now the Egyptians are men, and not God; and their horses flesh, and not spirit...

"Turn ye unto him from whom the children of Israel have deeply revolted."

The world, yes, the Christian Church of today seems to be losing its faith in the spiritual, losing its faith and belief in the Lord Jesus Christ, and putting its reliance upon natural powers and resources. But it is always because man puts his trust in material things, in natural facts, in the principles of science, in the formulation of moral maxims and civil laws, not looking to the Lord and His Word and depending upon the revelation of spiritual facts from the mind of God to illumine his soul and give him power, that he is in trouble.

If man insists on going down to Egypt for help, he will find, as the prophet says, horses and chariots and horsemen which are very strong, but he will be disappointed. He will find natural facts, physiological and psychological laws and principles, and experts to explain them, but he will find out this also: "Now the Egyptians are men, and not God; and their horses flesh, and not spirit." Human resources may be multiplied indefinitely, but they are never final, never infallible. At their best they are limited to the natural plane of life. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh." Only "that which is born of the spirit is spirit." Does any one of us feel that if he had all the worldly knowledge of our day, it would suffice? The horses and chariots of Egypt are many and their horsemen very strong, but "The Egyptians are men, and not God."

From the Lord through the Word is the power that enables us to go through life understandingly and safely. The Lord Jesus Christ, who is the Word made flesh, is the Redeemer and Savior of mankind. Of Him it is written: "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is none else." Why should we forsake the Lord and go down to Egypt? Do we not trust our Redeemer? Do we not believe in His promises?

Faithlessness to the Lord is the cause of wars. And the fault does not lie only with the nations engaged in open conflict. Year by year the love of wealth, the love of power, greed, lust for bodily comforts and pleasures and indulgences have been growing. We have been serving Mammon until it has become as real a cult as the Baal worship which led to the downfall of Israel and Judah. But most fatal of all has been

the growing spirit of pride in our own knowledge and trust in our own powers, so that religion has become to a great extent unreal, a mere outward form, and even that less and less observed, with little study and teaching of God's Word, our system of education, even in the churches, becoming more and more godless, with the inevitable result of the loss of the feeling of dependence upon God, and the development of a sense of self-importance and reliance upon the things of the world.

So today more and more of our national resources and money is spent for devising and producing new and more powerful instruments of war. But we should know that the Lord does not accomplish his eternal purposes for us by means of guns and bombs and torpedos which blow men's bodies to pieces. Peace cannot come in any other way than through a rational acceptance of the principles which lead men to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with their God. An armed peace settles nothing. It merely means that the militarily strongest temporarily rule.

"Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you; not as the world giveth, give I unto you." Peace does not come from the world, but from the Lord, who is the Prince of Peace. The real trouble is that people do not trust in the Lord. They do not believe in Him. They do not put His promises to the test. They think that His teachings are too spiritual. Today they say, "You can't really live by the Golden Rule."

The churches have in large part denied the Deity of the Lord, and are temporizing. Scholastic criticism has undermined their faith in the Bible and driven them from the strongholds of their faith. And surrendering them, they have fallen back more and more upon external devices for holding and recruiting their membership. Something has caused them to take a patronizing attitude toward the Christian religion. They only half believe in it. But its fundamental truth, the truth that originated it, namely, that the Lord Jesus Christ is not only our Exemplar but our Redeemer and Savior, our only God, and that from Him in His glorified Humanity power goes forth to illumine, strengthen, and bless - this they reject. When it comes to a real faith in the Lord, they turn away. They had rather trust in themselves, in the power of industry, natural science, and the modern arts and crafts. It is this self-trust that leads to conflicting interests, to distrust, and to war.

It is not the roar of guns nor the clatter of arms that constitutes war; and when these are silent, war may go on even more fiercely than before, the inner war, the spiritual war that is the source of outward conflict. This war is going on today, conducted by the selfish interests within every nation. It is carried on in our newspapers, periodicals, theaters, and books, an almost inexhaustible arsenal of hatred, jealousy, covetousness, ambition, calumny, misrepresentation, intrigue, corruption, and conspiracy at home and abroad. This is the titanic struggle in which our world is engaged. Until its cause is removed war will continue to torment the world.

The Lord is the only source of peace. So let us each look to Him for light and strength, reminding ourselves each morning, as we face the new day, of His direct and unqualified command:

"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind... and thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."

Amen