Voices in the Storm

Sermons from Little Wild Street

Collected authors

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Voices in the Storm
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SERMON 1

A Sermon

Preached

The 27th of *November,* 1713.

In Commemoration of

The Great and Dreadful Storm

In November, 1703.

In which some account is given of the damages sustained; and the advantages of calling it again to remembrance.

Published at the desire of several gentlemen who annually observe that day.

By Benjamin Stinton

A Sermon, November 27, 1713

Jeremiah 51:15–16

He hath made the earth by his power, he hath established the world by his wisdom, and hath stretched out the heavens by his understanding.

When he uttereth his voice, there is a multitude of waters in the heavens, and he causeth the vapors to ascend from the end of the earth; he maketh lightnings with rain, and bringeth forth the wind out of his treasures.

The Jews, who were God's peculiar people, and had the true religion established amongst them, were more careful than any other nation to preserve the memory of such things as were remarkable and extraordinary; not only those that were great and common blessings, but also those that were dreadful calamities and heavy judgments upon them.

The usual course they took for this, was, either to enter them in such public records, as might transmit the accounts thereof to succeeding generations; to erect lasting monuments, aptly describing such wonderful and uncommon events; or to set apart certain days, in which to commemorate those remarkable instances of God's mercy or displeasure.

Their being so wonderfully preserved from the plagues of Egypt[1], and delivered out of their bondage in that country, was, by divine appointment, to be annually commemorated by the Feast of Passover, throughout all their generations.

Their miraculous preservation from famine in the wilderness, when God rained bread out of Heaven for them, was to be kept in perpetual remembrance, by laying up a pot of manna[2] in the Ark of the Lord.

The dividing of the waters of Jordan, after such a supernatural manner, when they stood up in heaps, to make way for the twelve tribes to pass over into the land of Canaan[3], was to be perpetuated, by the setting up of twelve stones upon that part of the happy shore where they first encamped.

And as they took care to keep memorials of these great mercies, for the honor of their God, who had appeared so wonderfully in their favor, and to excite themselves to gratitude and thankfulness, who had received such uncommon benefits; so they did as carefully preserve the memory of those great and dreadful judgments which had fallen upon them, and kept days annually on that account, wherein to humble themselves under the mighty hand of God, and deprecate the like instances of his anger for the future.

A day was kept every year, in remembrance of the besieging of Jerusalem by the Chaldeans, which proved so fatal in the end to the Jewish nation. Another day was observed in memory of the Great Famine in Jerusalem, when their enemies lay encamped before it. A third was

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[1]Exod. 13:8-10
[2]Exod. 16:33
[3]Josh. 4:5-7

observed, for commemorating the destruction of that Holy City, and the Temple of God in it. And the like was done in memory of the slaying of Gedaliah, on whose death followed the Dispersion of the Jews[4].

All these fasts were observed for seventy years successively, upon the very months, and probably days, in which these events happened. We don't find indeed, that the observation of these was by any special command from God, but flowed from their deep sense of his great judgments upon them for their sins; and in conformity to that general rule which they had received, to *remember the marvelous works which God had done, the wonders, and the judgments of his mouth.*[5] And after their deliverance out of this seventy years captivity, God does not blame them for keeping those days so long in commemoration of his judgments, but for not observing them after that religious manner which they ought to have done: *When ye fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh month, even those seventy years, did ye at all fast unto me, even unto me?*

From all which we may plainly see, that as the custom of commemorating past mercies or judgments is agreeable to the dictates of nature, and what has been the common practice of all civilized nations in the world; so likewise it is approved of by divine revelation, and greatly promoted wherever that obtains.

It is in compliance with this laudable custom, that we are called together at this time, to be put in remembrance of that great and terrible judgment, with which it pleased God to visit these northern nations but a few years since.

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[4]Zechariah 8:18-19

[5]1 Chron. 16:12

I mean, that great and violent storm of wind, which happened on this day ten years: a calamity so uncommon in these parts of the world, and so very severe upon this kingdom in particular, that it ought not quickly to be worn out of our minds, at least till we have reason to hope it has brought about such a national repentance and reformation, as may prevent the like, or greater judgments from falling upon us.

As this is the pious design of our coming together, so the words which I first read, were recommended to me as a proper subject on this occasion, in which the prophet gives us a particular account of the wonderful works of God.

He hath made the earth by his power, he hath established the world by his wisdom, and hath stretched out the heavens by his understanding.

When he uttereth his voice, there is a multitude of waters in the heavens, and he causeth the vapors to ascend from the end of the earth; he maketh lightnings with rain, and bringeth forth the wind out of his treasures.

In speaking to these words, I shall endeavor,

First, to give a brief explication of the several instances here mentioned of the divine power and wisdom.

Secondly, to show what was the scope and design of the prophet, in making such a large enumeration of the wonderful works of God.

Thirdly, I shall more particularly explain and improve to our present purpose the last-mentioned instance of God's power; namely, that he *bringeth forth the wind out of his treasures.*

First, let us take a short view of the several instances of the wisdom and power of God here given.

And as we find the style in which the prophet speaks to be very lofty and noble, the works of God, which he mentions, to be exceeding great and wonderful; so the method in which they are laid down is very just and natural. He begins, first, with the making of the earth; then proceeds to the establishing of it in its place and order; and after this, to the stretching out of the heavens round about it. From the works of creation, he goes on to shew how the same God governs all natural causes; and by a wise providence orders and disposes all the accidents of those things which he hath made: asserting, that the thunder and the lightning, the rain and the dew, together with the wind, are but the treasures of his magazine, and are brought forth by his direction.

So that we have here a very elegant description of God, both as the creator and sovereign of all things: 'tis he that first gave being to this visible world, and all the ornaments and beauties in it; and 'tis he that governs and rules the same; directing by his power and wisdom the most secret causes and wonderful events of natural things.

But a more particular consideration of these things will be very useful, both to impress upon our minds an awful sense of the very Divine Majesty, and raise in us a just admiration of his wonderful works.

And the first thing which the prophet asserts of God, is, that he hath made the earth by his power; by which he does not only ascribe the creation of the earth to God, but declares that his making of it is a great instance of his almighty power and omnipotent arm.

And that it is so, will appear, if we consider that he had no pre-existent matter to work upon, but drew such a vast and solid body, enriched with so many useful quali-

ties, and adorned with so many beauties, out of nothing. The greatest and wisest artificer amongst men must have something to work upon, or his skill signifies nothing: though he may be able to produce admirable pieces of workmanship, mean and little things, yet still it must be from matter created to his hands: for though he may give matter a new figure, and turn it to variety of forms and uses; yet he cannot produce the least mite or atom that was not in being before. But such is the almighty power of God, that he made all out of nothing.

If we consider again, that he had no instruments to work with, nor any assistants to help him in this great performance, but did it all by his own agency; this still displays his infinite power. *I am he* (saith God) *that maketh all things, that stretched forth the heavens alone, and spread abroad the earth by myself.*[6] And as he was the sole agent in this work, so he did it with the greatest facility and ease imaginable. The productions of men, especially those that are most rare and excellent, are commonly brought forth with great labor and toil. They must rack their brains, and spend their strength before they can make things answer their design, and accomplish what they undertake. But this stately fabric of the world, with all the necessaries and ornaments of it, with all the treasures and inhabitants upon it, were made by the single word of God, or the pure act of his will. He said, let there be light, and there was light. He said, *Let there be a firmament, and let the waters be gathered together into one place, and it was so.* He said, *Let the earth bring forth grass, and herb yielding seed, and the fruit-tree yielding fruit after his kind, and it was so.*[7] *He spake* (saith

[6]Isa. 44:24

[7]Genesis 1:3,6,9

the Psalmist) *and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast.*[8]

Nor did he require a long succession of days and years to bring forth and finish such a glorious piece of workmanship: for the heavens and the earth were by his power instantly brought into being; and upon his giving forth the command, whatever he said was immediately so: and though six days are said to be taken in the formation and disposing of all things; yet ʿtis reasonable to conclude, and seems probable from the account Moses gives of it, that in each day, upon the very instant that the divine word went forth, the works of that day were done.

How great then is our God in power, and how wonderful is he in working!

Secondly, the next thing that followed the creation of the earth, is the establishing of it in its place, and fixing the several orders and uses of those things in it: and this is the second thing taken notice of by the Prophet. As he made the earth by his power, so he hath established the world by his wisdom.

By which I understand either his fixing this terrestrial globe in its present center, or his settling that necessary and wise order which appears in all natural things.

He hath established the world by his wisdom; *i.e.* after he had by his Almighty Power created this vast globe of earth, he wisely fixed it in its center; or, to use the Scripture phrase, *hath founded it upon its base.*[9]

And this has always been mentioned, both by sacred and profane writers, as one of the great and most wonderful works of the Creator; to fix such a great and

[8]Psal. 33:9
[9]Psal. 104:5

ponderous body of earth and water, as that under us, in such an empty space, and without any visible support, being surrounded with nothing but the thin and pliant air. Job makes mention of it with admiration, saying, *He stretcheth out the North over the empty place, and hangeth the earth upon nothing.*[10]

We should count him a very great artist, that could cause but a small weight to hang in the air without anything to sustain it. But how great is the wisdom and power of this Divine Agent, who causes such a vast globe of heavy earth and waters to hang as a ball in the midst of the air, which is so thin and weak of itself as not to support the lightest feather?

Of such a prodigious bulk is this terrestrial globe, that it is computed by mathematicians[11] to contain above two hundred and sixty thousand millions of miles solid content: Now every yard square of this contains several hundred weight. Who then can compute the vast weight of the whole globe, or conceive how it should hang for so many ages in the empty space? What less than an infinite power could erect such a vast and stately fabric out of nothing; and what but an Almighty Arm can uphold such a prodigious weight in the airy region?

If it has either a spherical or globular motion, or both, as it now generally supposed; yet for near six thousand years it has never fallen from that center in which the Almighty Maker at first fixed it, nor made one irregular slip, either in its diurnal or annual motions: so equally is this globe poised on every side, and so wisely is everything *ordered in number, weight, and measure*[12].

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[10]Job 26:7

[11]Derham's Physico-Theology, Book 2, Chap. 2

[12]Wisd. Chap. 11:20

And this situation of the earth is not only an evidence of the Almighty power of him that established it; but also an instance of his unsearchable wisdom and goodness: nor is it more wonderful to see so vast a globe hang upon nothing, than it is beneficial and necessary to the inhabitants that live upon it.

For by this means the several parts of it lie open to the heavenly orbs that are round about it, and equally receive the benefits of light and heat from them; without which the earth could not be fruitful, nor its inhabitants enjoy either health or life.

And by the hanging of the earth in this empty space, and at such a due distance from all other solid globes, there is a free and constant motion of the air round about it, to keep it clean and pure, to purge away the noxious vapors that arise from the earth, to nourish the fruits of the ground, and to render the air fit for perspiration, without which neither man nor beasts could live in it. Justly therefore does the Prophet say, he *hath established the world by his wisdom.*

But then by establishing the world may also be signified that regular order in which all natural things are fixed, and that powerful instinct which God hath placed in them, by which they are both fitted and inclined to the several purposes for which they were made. How has the wise Creator made one thing subservient to another, and established an admirable order throughout the whole?

The dividing of the waters from the dry land, and fixing just bounds and limits to both, appears to be the work of a great and wise agent; for who else could make such a handsome and useful distribution of earth and water, and so justly poise both? Who but the Almighty could *set bars and doors* to the great ocean, and say,

Hitherto shalt thou come, but no farther; and here shall thy proud waves be stayed[13].

The unevenness of the ground, which to some may seem a defect, is wisely ordered by Him that at first disposed all things, either for ornament or profit; either for the beauty or convenience of the universe: the hills arise, and the valleys descend to the places the Lord hath appointed for them, and *the mountains are set fast by his power*[14].

Some parts of the earth do, by the law of natural instinct, engender rich and useful minerals; others bear trees for fruit or timber; and other places send forth the green herb and tender grass: some parts of it are hard and rocky, to afford us materials for building; others are more soft and open, that they may be cultivated to bring forth fruit for man and beast.

From all which it must be inferred, that this excellent order, and these regular productions, were at first established by some agent infinitely wise. *How manifold are thy works, O Lord! in wisdom hast thou made them all: the earth is full of thy riches*[15].

Thirdly, The prophet having asserted the power of God in making the earth, and his wisdom in establishing the world, proceeds next to declare his understanding in stretching out the heavens round about it. From observing the power and wisdom of God that appears in the earthly globe under our feet, we are directed to turn out eyes upward, and behold that vast and magnificent arch that is spread over our heads; and from the richness of its furniture, and the variety of admirable objects that

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[13]Job 38:10-11
[14]Psal. 65:6
[15]Psal. 104:24

appear in it, we must needs conclude, that it was reared by an omnipotent arm, and framed by a being of infinite understanding.

Those two great luminaries that interchangeably govern the night and the day, do, by the magnitude of their bodys, their constant and regular motions, their kind and useful influences, loudly proclaim the wisdom of their Maker.

And not only the regularity of their motions, but their due distances from this terrestrial globe, bespeak them to have been placed where they are by an infinite understanding. If the sun, in its present magnitude, were to come as near us as the moon, it would soon set the world on fire, and turn the earth, with all its inhabitants, into ashes: or if the moon, which supplies us with a faint and borrowed light in the other's absence, had been fixed at such a vast distance as the sun is, it could have been of no service to us. But their wise Creator has given them their proper magnitude, and placed them at such convenient distances, as to prevent their hurtful aspect; and yet so near, as to render them both pleasant and profitable to us.

That vast, and almost infinite number of stars, which bespangle this heavenly arch, do likewise declare the bounty and magnificence of their Maker.

"He has (says a very polite author[16]) cast them about the skies, as a magnificent prince either scatters money by handfuls, or studs his clothes with precious stones."

If we imagine with some, that these stars (which, considering their vast distance, must be of great magnitude) are so many worlds like the globe we dwell upon; "Then (says the same ingenious author) how potent and

[16] Archbishop of Cambray's Existence of God, Chap. 8

wise must He be, who makes worlds as numberless as the grains of sand that cover the sea-shore; and who, without any trouble, for so many ages governs all these wandering worlds, as a shepherd does a flock of sheep?"

Or if we suppose with others, that these are only as it were so many lighted torches to shine upon us, who dwell on this small globe[17], called the earth: yet the greatness of their number, the regularity of their motions, the beauty of their countenance, and their benign and secret influences, do brightly discover the wisdom and liberality of that Almighty Being who fixed them there.

The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth his handiwork: Day unto Day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge[18]. *God sitteth upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers: He stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in*[19].

When the prophet had given an account of these wonderful works of creation, in the former verse of our text, he proceeds next to declare that the same God governs all natural causes, and does by his infinite power and understanding order and dispose all the accidents of the things he hath created.

He did not leave the works of nature, after he had made and established them, without a director, and suffer them to produce whatever strange effects blind chance might bring about by them; but continues to exercise a wise and powerful providence over the works of his hand.

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[17]Small, if compared with the whole universe, or the greatness and multitude of the other globes.

[18]Psal. 19:1-2

[19]Isa. 40:22

And the first thing of this nature which the prophet asserts, is, that *when he uttereth his voice, there is a multitude of waters in the heavens.*

By the uttering of his voice, may be here meant the going forth of his command: for the clouds which carry such vast quantities of water over our heads, and frequently drop it down to replenish the earth, are but his water-pipes, which come and go at his direction. When there is a clear air, and the refreshing beams of the sun descend upon the earth without interruption, immediately if a command do but go forth from the God of nature, the clouds shall gather together in great heaps over us, and bring a multitude of waters in them: and when they are thus brought together, by the same Divine command they send down those waters upon us; not in great sports, which would be both unprofitable and pernicious to the world; but they admirably break into small drops, which renders their fall both safe and comfortable.

This gathering of the waters together in the heavens, and showering of them down upon the thirsty earth, is very elegantly described by Elihu[20], *Behold, God is great, and we know him not. With clouds he covereth the light, and commandeth it not to shine by the cloud that cometh betwixt. He maketh small the drops of water, they pour down rain according to the vapor thereof; which the clouds do drop, and distil upon man abundantly.*

Or by God's voice here, at the uttering of which there is such a multitude of waters in the heavens, may be intended the thunder, which is commonly accompanied with great rains, and is frequently in Scripture called the voice of God: not only because it is what he hath made, and is obedient to his command; but also because 'tis

[20]Job 36:26-27, etc.

such a visible discovery of his greatness and power, and that whereby he so often speaks terror and amazement to the inhabitants of the world; for *who can thunder with a voice like him?*

When he uttereth this voice, there is usually a great multitude of waters in the heavens. Common observation teacheth everyone, that at such a time the clouds gather thick and black about us; and when the mighty crack is heard, the clouds break asunder, and the waters contained in them are poured down with force, and in great quantities.

The divine philosopher before-mentioned, does, in a very lofty style, describe this wonderful work of God to us also, when he says[21], *Hear attentively the noise of his voice, and the sound that goeth out of his mouth: He directeth it under the whole heavens, and his lightning to the ends of the earth; after it a voice roareth: He thundereth with the voice of his excellency, and will not stay them when his voice is heard. God thundereth marvelously with his voice, great things doth he which we cannot comprehend.*

2. The next instance given in our text, of the greatness and power of God, is, that *he causeth the vapors to ascend from the end of the earth.*

What these vapors are, by what natural influence they are raised from the sea, and moist places; how they are carried aloft in the air, and by what means they are condensed and then scattered upon the earth, either in dews, or misting, or small rain; are philosophical inquiries, not much to our present purpose: 'tis sufficient, that by all this plainly declare the wisdom and goodness of

[21]Job 37:2