

Ebenezer Parkman's Sermon on the Execution of Bathsheba Spooner
July 5, 1778

Source: Sermon 1932, Parkman Family Papers (American Antiquarian Society), Box 1, Folder 7.

No. 1932. Westb. July 5. a.m. 1778. Occasioned by
the Execution of Bathsheba Spooner
for the murder of her Husband

Prov. VI. 26. those words
The Adulteress will hunt
for the previous Life.

The infinitely glorious Author of our Being is So Good, Kind, & Benevolent that He would fain have the whole World full of Happiness and Joy, that He might take Delight and Pleasure herein. And inasmuch as Innocence and due Observance of the Law of God is the truest and only way of promoting our highest Happiness, therefore God was pleased to create Man innocent and upright.

The many Evils which have burst in upon mankind and filled the world with Woes and Miseries, have arisen from our resisting the righteous Laws and Commands of the Great Supreme, who has sovereign Right to us and all that we can do to promote His Honour and Glory. There are such ungoverned passions and vicious Dispositions in Men, which reigning and prevailing in the Hearts of Men, are the Sad Source of Heaven-provoking Offences. Pride, Malice, Lust and Covetousness or inordinate Craving of Money, are many time the unhappy Causes of enormous Transgressions. The sad Effects of these Vices have been Sorrowfully Seen and felt in the Course of the Past Week: and my Text has been most evidently and painfully verify'd. "The

[2] Adulteress will hunt for the precious Life.” What horrendous Scenes have been opened! What tragical Executions have ensued! The Horrors of bloody and cruel Murder have issued in public, infamous Strangling and Death: and such cruel, unnatural Murder has been preceded by loathsome, detestible uncleanness, by repeated, if I say not multiplied acts of unfaithfulness to the conjugal Bonds, and defiling the Marriage Bed. These Atrocious Acts accompanied with many Other, of Profaneness and Iniquity. But what has this Course of Wickedness produced? What Fruit does this balefull Tree bear? Were the Question put to those persons who have the most experience, (ah what Sorrowful Experience!) what must the Reply be from them but mournful and Sad! Rom. 6.21. “What Fruit had ye then in those things, whereof ye are now ashamed, the End of which Things is Death.” And how often does the divine word point out to us both the folly and madness, and the destructiveness of those proceedings! For tho the Lord knoweth the way of the Righteous so as to approve and Smile upon it, and will grant the highest Rewards to Such, yet the Way of the ungodly Shall perish.” “It will be Bitterness in the latter End.”

I would remark to you that one End of the Law for inflicting Punishments on Criminals, and So therefore of the providence of God in permitting and ordering these terrible Things is (as it is written in Deut. 13.11.) “And

[3] all Israel Shall hear and fear, and shall do no more any Such Wickedness as this is among you.” Now therefore that this Benefit of the late Execution, So very remarkable as it was, may be by the assistance of God obtained, I would Mention a few Things which may open Some of the more principal subjects which our Minds may be Supposed to be taken up with on this affecting Occasion.

- I. First, I would say a little about that very horrid Crime of Murder, which if it were properly understood and duely considered we might have a more striking apprehension of the Strictness of that divine Prohibition “Thou Shall not kill.” Exod. 20.13. Thou shalt do no Murder. Mat. 19.18. [Marginal notation: and in the Enjoyment both of the Bounties of Providence and the Day of Grace and Salvation.]

The heinousness of this Crime will at once appear by considering the Unnaturalness of it, and that it must be a sort of, nay the very committing Violence on our Selves. For if murder be twofold, the taking away of our own Life or the Life of our Neighbour unjustly – it is Surely very contrary to Nature to fall upon ourself for God hath assuredly implanted in us the powerful principle of Self-Preservation and this stimulates to take Care of, and do all we can to uphold our Lives; and to promote our own Happiness – the Health and Wellfare of both Soul and Body; to preserve and Strengthen that Vital Tye which continues all of us in this present manner of Existing, termed in the words before us, the Precious Life.

[4] As, what is there, of outward kind, which can be esteemed more precious to us than this? I know not of any Pretence whatever that justifies Suicide. It is Treason and Rebellion against Heaven and Snatches the Government out of the Hand of God. It exposes to the utmost Danger of Eternal Damnation. And as our own Lives are precious to us, equally So are the Lives of others to them. The Sovereign God alone is the great Proprietor of all: and We are not allowed by Him to touch the Blood, that is, the Life of another. The almighty Author and Giver of Life has challenged and reserved this high Prerogative in His own Hands. Job 12.10. "In whose Hands is the Soul of every living Thing, and the Breath of all mankind." For, as we are taught by the holy and unerring Word, He made us and not we ourselves. He gives to All Life and Breath and all Things. Therefore our Times are in his Hands, and all the Events of them. It is true all Killing or slaying is not murder. Therefore our Catechism has this Limitation unjustly – For in Some Instances in some Circumstances it is lawful nay it becomes our Duty. As in the Case of necessary self-Defence. Whether it be of Private Persons, when in unavoidable Hazzard of our Lives: Or if it be of the Publick in a just War. Also in the Case of the ~~word crossed out~~ Majestrate in justly executing the Penalty of the Law upon Capital Offenders. There is another Respect also, in which there may be a taking away of Life without imputation of Crime or contracting of Guilt. Viz When it is Involuntary, undesigned, and Accidental, or by the unforeseen, unknown Providence of God. – But that is the horrid Crime of Murder, when from

[5] Malice forethought, Life is taken away. This horrid Crime is not only abhorred by God and Man, when in its own Atrociousness, by Reason of its Inhumanity and barbarousness, its exposing the Guilty to just Indignation and punishment from Man, but to the righteous Judgment and Vengeance of the Almighty, especially. But in Some Circumstances more peculiarly it becomes astonishingly enormous.

As, for Instance, the Nearer the Relation, the closer and more intimate the Connection, which the Perpetrators, or any of them may be under renders the Commission of it the more Shocking: when the Sacredest Tyes and Bonds which call for most endearing Love and inviolable Fidelity are Violated, are burst asunder – how much more intolerable! – nay, but how incredible! Were it not that Wofull Fact, and unhappy, deplorable Experience, with blazing Evidence has demonstrated it. Thus Says the inspired Solomon, “The Adulteress will hunt for the precious Life.” The Adulteress! How can we conceive of one who Shall be so metamorphosed, or changed into Such a Monster! Adultery is contrary to Nature; and in the very Face of the express Law of God most High. It is contrary to Nature, for what was the original Design of Woman? Was not the very End of her Formation (under God) for the Man? And One only, for One only – for the strictest Union. And the Original Formation denoting it – that is She was made of a part of his very Body, that they two, when brought together by God their Author, that is, by His Ordinance might be One – So that they are no more two but One. The Man shall esteem his Wife himself and love and cherish her as his own Body. Eph. 5.28. “So ought men to love their wives, as their own Bodys. He

[6] that loveth his Wife loveth himself.” And this Law is reciprocal. The Wife is to love her Husband, that is, with a peculiar Affection. Titus is required to teach women thus. As Ch. 2.4. and being under the Sacred conjugal Bonds and Obligations must Shew all good Fidelity: they must not break this Solemn Engagement which must be supposed to be entered into with seriousness, with due Consideration and in the Fear and Name of God. It is from hence supposed and taken for granted that when they have given their Hand and Plighted their Faith, to the Person whom they have seen meet heartily and sincerely in the Fear of God and for right Ends, to choose out of all mankind (and persons ought not to marry otherwise) then they ought to place their Love and Affections on, and have (under god) their Delight and Satisfaction in Such. This ardent Love of a faithful Wife is Spoke of as a Standard, or as a Proverb, in 2 Sam. 1.26 when David would illustrate Jonathan to him, Says he it was wonderful passing the Love of Women.” And our Lord has made use of this Resemblance when he celebrates the Love of the Church to Himself both in the Song of Loves, and in other parts of the divine Scriptures. As Ps. 45. Eph. 6 and Rev. From whence we may obviously gather and conclude that a Woman who, notwithstanding all this which her Husband and all the world so justly expect from her, Violates these solemnities, cools in her Esteem and Regard for her Husband, and suffers her Mind and Heart to rove from him, to pollute and defile the marriage Bed, turn against him whom she ought upon her solemn Oath, and Choice fervently Sincerely and constantly to love: not only hates him, but allows her loose imaginations to range ~~<word crossed out>~~ and wander after Others Nay not a few; and instigate by both her own wanton, salacious Desires, and by the Wily Arte of the Devil, indulges lewd and

[7] vile practices – how loathsome are all Such! And how directly Opposite to the Pure and holy Nature, Law and Will of God! Exod. 20.14. contains a plain, Express Prohibition “Thou shalt not commit Adultery. Again, God has shewn His Abhorrence and Indignation at this Crime by that Severe Law against it in Lev. 20.10 which runs thus, “And the man that committeth Adultery with another mans wife, even he that committeth Adultery with his Neighbors Wife (mind the Repetition) the Adulterer, and the Adulteress Shall Surely be put to Death.” And the like is in Deut. 22.22. “They Shall both of them die, both the Man that lay with the Woman, and the Woman: So Shall thou put away Evil from Israel.” We are informed that among the Heathen adultery was punished capitally. As we read in Jer. 29.22.23 – “The Lord make thee like Zedekiah and like Ahab (two lying Prophets) whom the King of Babylon roasted in the Fire, because they have committed Villany in Israel, and have committed Adultery with their Neighbors Wives – even I know, and am a Witness, saith the Lord.” O how ruinous to a man Every way besides! For it is not only destructive to his bodily Life: it is to his Name and Reputation after his Death: it destroys the Soul as well as the Body – And it is Mischievous to a Mans Heirs, for it deprives them of his Estate. Prov. 6.32.33. “But whoso committeth Adultery with a woman, lacketh understanding he that doeth it destroyeth his own soul: a wound and Dishonour shall he get and his Reproach shall not be wiped away.” Job 31.11.12. For this is an heinous Crime – for it is a Fire that consumeth to Destruction. And would root out

[8] all my increase.” And if Men that are thus guilty are so many ways chargeable with Gross Offence, what is the Picture which is drawn by divine Spirit in several parts of the holy Writing, of the Woman that goes under this Character. She is several times termed the Strange woman – a Stranger – for every one but the Conjugate is a Stranger. She is also a Strange Woman for the various Arts, the inexplicable Devices, the enchanting, fascinating Airs, which as King Solomon knew, such are Mistresses of. Read Prov. 5.3. “Her Lips drop as an honey Comb, her Mouth smoother than Oil. X. 6. Her ways are moveable that thou canst not know them.” Ch. 6. He again endeavours by the wisest, Strongest Caveat to guard his son, and antidotes him against her Poison. X. 24. “to keep thee from the Evil woman, from the Flattery of the Tongue of a Strange woman – v. 25. neither let her take thee with her Eye-lids. There are a thousand Dangers, that poor young Wretches are in by reason of the Snares and Traps which are every where laid – read v. 27, 28, 29. <~~Pleasure and Happiness are the~~ [three lines crossed out]>

But we are again to look back upon what became of the Husband of that wicked Woman and The Other Circumstances which enhanced the Crime, the inhuman Murder was So much the more affecting As the Adulteress hunts for the precious Life. So savage is She that She Thirsts for his Hearts Blood – and this puts here upon many Contrivances to compass her cruel purpose. Who, now, can trace her in the many Schemes laid, the plots and Strategems projected, to accomplish the infernal Design!

[**Note:** The following notes seem to have been appended (no pagination), along with the dying words of the Buchanan, Brooks, and Ross.]

N.B. James Buchanan had a Family in Canada.

William Brooks was born in the parish of Wednesbury in the County of Stratford in England.

Ezra Ross born in Ipswich in the Parish of Lyndebrook New England.

In the unhappy Case which we have in View, ~~<three or four words crossed out>~~ how restless, how continual was the laborious Chase! ~~<three or four words crossed out>~~ by the help of how many Persons! and by how various Means! If Poisons in various forms if [Pistoling?] fail – horrid, Impetuous, irrestable invincible Violence, and Outrage Succeeds.

But now An End! Behold an End is come! And O what may be behold?

Pleasure and Happiness were the enticing Lure – but tremendous Ruin is the Issue, the wofull tragical Event!

With respect to the Men (particularly the poor beardless Youth not quite 18) read Prov. 7.22 (omitting latter part of x 26) to the End.

The Conclusion of the dying Declaration of James Buchanan, Ezra Ross and William Brooks Executed at Worcester July 2. 1778 for the Murder of Joshua Spooner.

We Buchanan, Brooks, and Ross are Conscious to ourselves that we are indeed guilty of the above Murder, and that we have hereby forfeited our Lives into the Hands of public Justice and exposed ourselves to have our part in the Lake which burns with Fire and Brimstone. We desire to give Glory to God by a free and full Confession of our heinous Guilt. We trust we have with deep penitence and Contrition of Soul, confessed it to God hoping in his infinite Mercy and Compassion thro the atoning Blood of his son Jesus, that our Scarlet and Crimson Guilt may be done away, that we may be saved from eternal Damnation which we know we justly deserve, and obtain eternal Life and Salvation. We would as dying Men, who have been made to feel what an Evil and bitter thing sin is, earnestly Warn all, especially young people that they would avoid the Vices we have been addicted to, and which prepared the way for our committing the heinous Wickedness for which we are to suffer an immature and ignominious Death: that they would avoid bad Company, excessive Drinking, profane Cursing and Swearing, Shameful Debaucheries, Disobedience to parents, the prophanation of the Lords Day etc. That they would be pious, sober and vertuous, that so they may be in Favour with God and Man.

And now we Commend our departing Souls in the Hands etc. etc