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SERMON

DELIVERED AT IPSWICH, (Mass.)

ON THE DAY OF THE

ANNUAL THANKSGIVING

NOVEMBER 23, 1820.

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PUBLISHED BY REQUEST

NEWBURYPORT:
PRINTED BY EPHRAIM W. ALLEN.
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1820.

A SERMON, &c.

*Psalm 50. 23. WHOSO OFFERETH PRAISE GLORIFIETH ME; AND
TO HIM THAT ORDERETH HIS CONVERSATION ARIGHT WILL I
SHEW THE SALVATION OF GOD.*

THE words, in a general view, hold up a most weighty argument for the pious discharge of this day's duty; and point us to a concomitant of thanksgiving, or rather to a finishing; of which it is of great moment that we should never lose sight; and which the Most High will not fail to crown with blessings in time to come.

But there is a particular emphatic force of this sentence, which can be perceived only by observing the context; which brings into view some, who rested in the formalities of sacrificing, while they neglected the soul and substance of true worship, and were even immoral in their lives. "Will I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats?" No; "offer unto God thanksgiving;" that is, *real gratitude*, expressed in every suitable manner, "and pay thy vows unto the Most High;" that is, fulfil the engagements thou hast entered into, in times of trouble, or at other seasons.

Again, the Lord remonstrates, in v. 16, 17,—“what hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or that thou shouldst take my covenant into thy mouth? seeing thou hatest instruction, and castest my words behind thee.”

Thus the solemn reproof proceeds through several verses, and this is the close :—" whose offereth praise glorifieth me." &c. As if he had said, depend not upon good words, upon fair professions, or splendid oblations. It is he who offers praise, substantial praise,—it is he, whose *life* is right,—that glorifies his Maker, and shall be gladdened with his salvation.

We are led then to consider, what it is to offer praise ; and how it glorifies God : what a well ordered conversation is ; how essential an attendant upon other praise ; and what a promise is annexed to it.

Praise to God is that honorary acknowledgement, which his nature and works demand. The field is immense : for every thing in his nature, every portion of his works, in all their endless variety ; every thing in his whole government, without exception, furnish matter for exalted praise. Even those terrible things in providence, with which individuals or nations, are visited, display his wisdom, rectitude, faithfulness ; and his *wrath*, so dreadful to the subject, what is it, but a blaze of glory, a just and venerable indignation at moral evil, the result of immaculate purity and perfection !

Accordingly, all parts of ~~religious~~ exercise may be considered as offering praise to God. We praise, when we rejoice and confide in him ; when we give him our best love, and bow with humble reverence before him. We reflect his praise, when we confess our sins with deep repentance and sorrow at his feet.— " My son," said Joshua, " give, I pray thee, *glory* to the Lord God of Israel, and make confessions to him." We give praise and glory to our Maker by pious contentment, and cheerfulness under his government, and by every act of cordial obedience and submission.

We praise God in particular, when we render in due manner the honor and thanks which his many and great mercies demand from us. This the context specifies, and to this the present occasion specially calls us to attend. Offer unto God thanksgiving, v. 14.

That in this we may offer praise in the most proper sense many things are necessary.

1. The *heart* must be truly affected with the divine mercy; there is scarce need to observe that if the acknowledgements we make upon such an occasion are unmeaning; if they are not dictated by a sense of duty or a sense of propriety,—the essence of praise must be wanting. But that is not all. Suppose a conscience of *duty* to have some influence, praise, which does not come from the heart, from a heart suitably affected,—is rather *extorted* than *offered*.

2. Praising God for his *mercy* supposes that the true glory of that mercy is apprehended, and makes some suitable impression upon us; and that proper regard is had to those *circumstances*, which manifest its wonderful nature. We recognize, with suitable emotions, the great *condescension* which marks every part of it. “Lord what is man, that thou art mindful of him!” We celebrate the *free grace*, the forbearance and long suffering, which the divine mercy toward us implies. How necessary to this purpose is a just sense of our ill deservings!

3. We must be affected with the *riches* of the Divine beneficence toward such offending subjects; how liberally we are maintained; how much is bestowed for our necessities, our comfort, our *pleasure*; and how *great* things have been done for us. If we would praise God, must not THE MERCY OF ALL MERCIES be remembered,—the gift of a Saviour,—the great salvation thereby opened to us,—and the preciousness

thence derived, to every common mercy? Let us pray then for a sense of the transcendent worth of a Saviour.

4. We are to praise God for *public* as well as *private* blessings,—and how should we be struck with the riches of his goodness, forbearance and long suffering; contemplating the millions of undeserving subjects who, *with us*, depend upon the same gracious Helper, and are so wonderfully remembered! One thing more let me add under this head—To praise God as we ought; the *venerable* nature of his goodness must be kept in view. For this purpose let the *medium* through which it displays itself be ever remembered: and the declared *intention* of all its displays upon *us*. “The goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance.”

Never let it be thought, that it is because sin is *not* infinitely offensive, that such favor is shewn to us sinners. Never let that favour be construed into an indulgence to careless living; for surely to celebrate it with such conceptions, is to offer *reproach* rather than *praise*.

Other particulars on the nature of praising God, let every one's contemplations supply. The argument, here brought to enforce it, is weighty indeed. *It glorifies* God: not surely in a sense which implies conferring a benefit. But as far as it goes, it pays a just tribute of honor; and reflects back the rays of Divine glory, which are evermore striking upon us. And then, by these religious acknowledgements we *show forth* the glory of God to the view of *others*, and contribute to keep up and diffuse just ideas of the Infinite Being, and of the honor due to Him. These are objects to which a good mind *will* have regard. Nothing is more reasonable than rendering honor, where honor is *due*; and the highest of all honors, where *that* is due. Nothing is more obviously proper than paying acknowledgements to a great benefactor. How cordially should

these be paid then, to the greatest of all benefactors? **Nay**, we take *delight*, in *shewing forth* the praise of great and good men; with how much greater joy should *His* be shewn forth, who is so transcendent? Especially when it so infinitely concerns others, as well as ourselves, to know what a Being God is, and to regard him accordingly.

We come now to consider what is that well ordered conversation, which according to the text should attend upon all other praise. Conversation, in this place, seems to have its largest sense, including the whole manner of *living* or being conversant in the world.

Ordering the conversation supposes some fixed rule, by which we govern ourselves. And, if we do this aright, what other rule can we so properly set before us, as the word of God? We are to worship and seek the Lord then, and give honor to a Savior and Sanctifier, according to Divine appointment. We are to keep the *Sabbath* from polluting it, and keep sacred all gospel institutions. We are to be habitually prayerful, thankful, contented and submissive in every condition. We are to remember the duties of the second table; and what we would that men should do to us, do the same to them. We must be just, kind, merciful; and study to fulfil the offices of each relation, public or private, with good fidelity, in the fear of God. And we must have *all* that self-government and self-denial, which doing our duty to God and man implies, or requires.

In fine, to order our conversation aright, is to be sincere Christians; it is to follow our Divine Master, Jesus Christ; it is to have our *conversation in heaven*.—How indispensable this is, the case speaks for itself, God has enjoined it; and who can be right, and not comply? All that God is, and all that he hath ever

done for *us*, enforces it. And, if there be any pretence of giving honor or thanks to Him in *that* view, it is indispensable ; for how empty are all forms of praise to God, if the general tenor of our lives dishonor him ? Or what is there of real *thankfulness*, if we do not *live* thankful, and act the grateful part ?

But there is a *promise* set before us, which is of immense value. For such a person the Lord will *show his salvation*. The promise supposes us to look *forward* ;—and truly, as one observes, *man lives in the future*. Perhaps the most prosperous derive more comfort from the hope of good things *to come*, than from all they now possess. *This* is certain ; we are ever dependent, and it is with God to determine every part of our future condition. Generally, some interesting object, of a private or public nature, holds us in anxious suspense ; and eternity is surely depending, To whom then will the Most High grant help in time of need (as covenant love shall direct) and a blessing with it ? and to whom will he bestow eternal salvation after this life ? The answer is, to such as join a well ordered conversation with all their ascriptions of praise. These, and these only, are the subjects. Important argument ! May it have its due weight with us !

Let it be remembered that the argument applies, with proper distinctions, to states and nations. Such are the *people*, whom the Lord will delight to honor and comfort with public blessings ; and save in the day of trouble. Nay, if they have incurred his just displeasure, a return to their duty shall save them. Hear the important assurance from his own lips : Jer xviii. 7, 8, “ At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up and to pull down, and to destroy it ; if that nation against whom I have pronounced, turn from *their* evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them.”

To bring home now, the hints which have been given. Should not the condescension of the Infinite Being strike and greatly affect us? That any praise or thanks, which men can offer, should be regarded by HIM, who is so exalted above *all* blessing and praise! But how little, on the best supposition, do *we* offer of what the Great Supreme is worthy to receive; or what we *ought* to render! And in what a defective *manner* do we offer that little! Yet it shall not be rejected, if *any degree* of pious sincerity attend it! Nay, what *approbation* is here! "Whoso offereth praise, *glorify* me." Gracious God, what benignity is this! And how inexcusable will it render us, if after all, we have no such sincere and humble offering to bring!

Let us beware of deception upon the subject of praise. We see there is danger; let us look the more carefully that what we bring be *real* praise, inspired by *just* sentiments of the God of glory and of his government; of the venerable nature of his goodness and mercy; of the *riches* of that mercy; of the condescension, free grace, forbearance and long suffering, manifested in the whole of it. Let us see that our *hearts* come forward to this exercise; and that it is something more than constraint, or the mere force of conviction, which impels us to it. And will not the most *careless* remark, in the view of this context, that, if expensive sacrifices upon the *altar* could not be regarded, while real adoration and thankfulness of the heart were wanting, much less can rich preparations for our *own* *entertainment*, with a little of natural gladness, and a mere formality of giving thanks? O, that he who looks on the heart would grant to each of *us* the true spirit of praise and thanksgiving! And let us not forget the indispensable concomitant of all verbal acknowledgments, which the text points out; nor how much de-

pend upon it. Indeed, if we are rightly affected,—if we are truly thankful,—we shall naturally be attentive to the ordering of our conversation. But it is good to consider how reasonable this is *in its own nature*, in subjects so favored as we are, and to whom the God of glory has revealed so much of himself: how necessary, as we would be *consistent*, as we would approve ourselves *truly* thankful, and our praise not an empty thing: For how is it possible to act the *grateful part*, and not live by the rules of God's word? And how is it possible that we really praise him, if our actions, *which speak louder than words*, on the whole reproach him? But how are we to see the *salvation of God*, if this object be neglected? Yet who can think it a hard condition, that those who petition for future blessings in *this life* should be in order, and wait for them in the way of respectful obedience; or that expectants of *heaven* should learn to live properly in *this world*? Let it then be remembered that, if a right conversation be necessary,—the sinner must repent and obey the gospel; he must have another heart, and another spirit; and for this he must enquire of the God of Israel. The heirs of mercy likewise must awake to new diligence, that *due* honor may be rendered to their Father in Heaven; and all suitable returns made for his many and great mercies. With these sentiments, let us contemplate creating goodness; preserving mercy in all past time; with these, the great redemption by the Lord of glory. With these let us contemplate the spiritual advantages, with which we in this favored land have been indulged; and with these, all other distinguishing favors; precious thoughts bestowed, more numerous than the sands on the sea shore. And may these sentiments go into the contemplation of the favors of the past year; for it has most evidently been crowned with uncommon mercy.

The instances alone, which the order of the day specifies, carry affecting proof.

“He has eminently distinguished the past season,” says our respected Chief Magistrate, “in prospering the interests of *agriculture*.” A reference seems to be had to the liberal encouragement given to agriculture by the government,—and the respectable associations, and important exertions throughout the commonwealth;—from which it is conceived that much benefit *has* sprung already, and that much more may be hoped for. So may that Divine Providence grant, whose direction, and whose blessing, in *temporal* things, is of inestimable worth.

Distinguishing favor is likewise noted in granting to the labors of the husbandman an abundant harvest. So our civil fathers pronounce, on a view of the whole ground: So *we here*, unitedly echo. And may we do it with a gratitude which such an abundance and *variety* of good things demand, from those, who so often forfeit every *good*; from those, whose returns for past favors of Providence, so much need to be mourned over.

Success given to the *fisheries* is likewise noted.—And let it be acknowledged with grateful hearts in all degrees of it. True gratitude will bring a blessing on the smallest portion.

“While our sympathy has been excited,” says our respected Governor, “by the prevalence of contagious and mortal sickness, among our friends and brethren, in some of the other states, we have had continued to us the blessing of health.” Well may we melt at the mention of this! And the more, when we look nearly to what was for a time the condition of Charleston, South Carolina:—Still more when we remember the deep sufferings at New-Orleans; and the unutterable distress, the extraordinary mortality at Savannah!

Hearts of stone might relent at these things ! And who maketh *us* to differ ? Shall the tear of sympathy not drop more and more ; and importunate prayers ascend, that, when the judgments of a holy God, in such dreadful forms, have been abroad in the earth, not only all survivors in those devoted cities, but all of *us* may fear and tremble, and learn righteousness ? Other calamities, indeed, related from afar, call for similar sensations ; similar acknowledgments to sparing mercy ; and all the genuine fruits of affectionate thanksgiving. Think of the dreadful fires, at Nova-Scotia, at Troy, in New-York state, at New-Haven, and at the forementioned Savannah, that compassionate city ! And what important help to *our thanksgivings* must be derived from such calamities elsewhere, if duly *felt* by us ! What shall we render for sparing mercy !

The proclamation reminds us “that we are still in the enjoyment of our religion, of the rights of conscience, of just laws, and free constitutions of government.” What a cluster of blessings is this ! O, let us ponder it, and think how wretched we should be, were we so left of God, as a people, as to vote away that christianity, for which our venerable ancestors left their native land, and were content to suffer so much ! Or if the *means*, which the wisdom of the Lord Jesus hath appointed, for keeping in remembrance its great realities, and impressing a just sense of them, were in just judgment to be discontinued ! That such a state of things is not yet come, we are to bless the Lord this day ; and when it is considered what proportion of this people have not yet obeyed the gospel, there will be so much the more of wonder at the long suffering of the Lord, mingled with our thank offerings.

And, surely, those individuals, who love, and live, the religion of the gospel, and therefore have *grounds*

for believing that it never will forsake *them* ; they must be thankful for this, if there be any thing they should give thanks for.

To go on. We still enjoy the rights of conscience. For a long time this has been our favored lot. And when it is considered how carefully, and I might have said, delicately, the constitution, we live under, draws a line, which at once maintains that general order, which the welfare and safety of civil society essentially require ; and yet compels no one to do that in religious things, or in any thing, which his conscience forbids ; how strong is the obligation to be very thankful, and to pray that such a *combination* of blessings may never be lost by a guilty forfeiture on our part !

We are in the enjoyment of just laws. Indeed, they carry *conviction*, generally, to the sober sense of the community ; and to this, under a gracious Providence, the good order, and peace of society, is in a great measure to be ascribed. Such laws, indeed, carry much of *instruction* ; and do much to *diffuse the sentiments* of justice.

We are in the enjoyment of free *constitutions* of government. *Our nobles* (to use the language of Inspiration) are *from ourselves*, and our governors *from the midst of us*, by free election ;— not *set over us* by foreign power. And rare is that government, where order is maintained with so little of restraint upon natural liberty.

Shall we give thanks this day, with a just sense of what is due to an indulgent Providence ? Shall such riches of goodness, forbearance, and long suffering, bring us on our knees, to supplicate forgiveness of past ingratitude, forgiveness of every sin, and recovery to a truly upright and virtuous disposition toward God and man ?

Shall we, from the heavenly benevolence *we* experience, learn to be kind *one to another*, tender hearted, specially to those who are in want? How much is there in the bounties of this year to open our hearts to *this duty*, and to make it easy and pleasant!

Shall we not be the more convinced of the duty of prayer in all future time; of the duty of looking to God in humility and lowly confidence, always depending upon Him for all our prosperity? See a similar resolution, in the view of great mercies, Psalm 116. 2. We are still as dependent upon His mercy as we are unworthy; as helpless as we are unprofitable. And we have some very great things to implore, at this very time.

We are to ask that God will be pleased to regard, with his favor, the interests of this state, as connected with the administration of the several departments of government. This, if granted, will be a great blessing; and may we remember, with true affection, how much we *have* received of Divine favor, in this respect.

We are to ask that the Lord will vouchsafe to "lead us, in all our solemn and interesting discussions of the great principles of the constitution, to such a result as shall ensure *our* peace and happiness, and transmit to our children, to the latest generations, the blessings of a wise and free system of government." Here, my brethren, it is proper to *redouble* our prayers: For all our prosperity, both in civil and religious concerns, greatly depends on a good constitution of government; and one so established in the *public mind*, that it shall not be liable, in its essential parts, to *frequent alterations*; nor in any part, except from clear necessity; or where experience, that surest teacher, shows a palpable inconvenience. Shall the happy result, just mentioned, come from the present revision? It *will*, if our

sins do not prevent it. It will, if humble and importunate prayers be duly offered.—We are to ask the Lord to bless our *nation* in all its interests, guide its counsels, preserve it in peace, exalt it by righteousness. And from His smiles, and merciful direction, all this may be hoped for. But we have seen on several occasions latterly, how the happiness of a nation, which had seemed to be in the full tide of prosperity, hangs by a *thread*, which the Almighty God alone can keep from breaking. We have seen affectingly, how the wisdom of the wise may fail them, *or* be overpowered. Supplicate that Divine power, my dear brethren. There is a gleam of hope, that the lamentable decision of the last winter, on the Missouri question, may yet be reversed, in substance, if not in form; and the load of guilt, which it brought on the nation, in mercy removed. A *gleam* of hope should be enough to put the prayers of every one of us in requisition. AND NO TIME MUST BE LOST. In fine, the smiles of a gracious God are to be implored on the means of education,—on the cause of truth,—on the interests of religion,—on the ministers of the Prince of Peace—(O think how much *they* need your prayers!)—that the pleasure of the Lord may prosper in their hands—that they may be found faithful however, though Israel be not gathered.

Finally. We are to pray Him, who is able, “to cause the light of the gospel to illuminate, reform, and bless the whole family of man,” So to pray, is the bounden duty of us all; whether *we* have, or have not, prized that heavenly light in due manner. The greatest neglecter of this gospel should know that he ought long since to have been on his knees, night and day, for this greatest of mercies upon himself, and upon the world of mankind. But, surely, if *we* love and obey the gospel, we cannot cease wishing that all our breth-

ren of the human race may experience its blessings, through the grace of a Divine Spirit. Who can give thanks enough for such a liberty, and such encouragement, to ask such inestimable blessings! The Lord in great mercy teach us how to thank him; how to pray; how to order our conversation;—and hear in heaven his dwelling place, through a blessed Mediator.

AMEN