

MAN'S DEPENDENCE, AND GOD'S GOODNESS.

A

**SERMON,**

DELIVERED AT SHREWSBURY,

ON THE DAY

OF

**ANNUAL THANKSGIVING.**

NOVEMBER 24, 1825.

**BY JACOB WOOD.**

PASTOR OF THE FIRST RESTORATION CHURCH AND SOCIETY IN SAID TOWN.

PUBLISHED BY REQUEST.

WORCESTER:

ROGERS & GRIFFIN.....PRINTERS.

1825.

# SERMON

PSALMS, CXLV. 15, 16.

## PREFACE

THE Author of the following Sermon would apprise the reader, that it was composed in haste, and without any expectation of its appearing from the press; and he now submits it from the judgment and desire of his friends.

He has not followed the usual and frequented path on Thanksgiving occasions of contrasting the blessings and privileges we enjoy with the miseries and privations of others, but taken the more full ground of showing the goodness of God in general. On this account, by some it may not be considered appropriate to the occasion, while, by others, it will be read with more interest.

The author is not insensible of the imperfections which may be discovered by the eye of fastidious scrutiny, but, if it shall escape the censure of the candid, and be edifying, at least, to some, especially those who requested the copy, his labor will be rewarded.

“THE EYES OF ALL WAIT UPON THEE, AND THOU GIVEST THEM THEIR MEAT IN DUE SEASON. THOU OPENEST THINE HAND, AND SATISFIEST THE DESIRE OF EVERY LIVING THING.”

ASSEMBLED as we are, at the altar of devotion, at the close of a bountiful harvest, and under the smiles of a beneficent Providence, it becomes us, as rational beings, to pour forth the most sincere and ardent gratitude to a kind and merciful God. To discharge the obligation of gratitude is one of the most pleasing and dignified duties of man. It calls forth some of the best feelings and most noble sentiments of our minds. It is a task, or rather I had said, a *delightful privilege*, in which every sensible mind feels the sublimest pleasure. To feel and know that we are constant recipients of infinite goodness, daily feed on his bounty, and have hope of his future grace, is a most happy and joyous state of mind. And to exhibit these sentiments and feelings before the world, in public and private acts of homage and devotion, is one of the greatest excellencies and ornaments of the human character. Nothing can be more amiable or worthy in the character of man, than to see him move in the sphere to which he belongs; and, as he is a dependent being, that he should ever feel and acknowledge his dependence on God. To evince this disposition and conduct, our acts of homage, both

of prayer and thankfulness, must be visible and sensible. For it is in vain for a man to pretend his devotion to God, while his actions show coldness, stupidity and neglect. It is hence that both the dispensations of Moses and Christ require regular and visible seasons of worship, as the test of a real servant of God. No sincere worshipper of Deity will deny the propriety of this test, or feel a reluctance to comply with its obligation.

Civil governments, based on the great principles of the Christian religion, and realizing their accountability to God, have felt it their prerogative and duty to call the people to a solemn recognition of the providence of Deity, and a grateful acknowledgment of his infinite goodness. This is at once the dictate of reason and propriety, and will secure the consent of every well informed mind.

The government of this Commonwealth, whether so much from the sense of propriety or an attachment to ancient usage, has adopted this procedure. And on this day we are called by the executive authority, to the discharge of a public act of homage and praise to Almighty God, in consideration of his protection and kindness the year past.

In obedience to that precept of inspiration, which requires us to "submit to every ordinance of man," and especially from a just sense of our moral obligation, we are now assembled to contemplate the numberless acts of Divine goodness, and join our hearts in cheerful praise and Thanksgiving.

To lead the theme of the present occasion, and to lay a just foundation for ample reflection, we have thought that the devout address to the Deity by the

Psalmist in the text, was exceedingly appropriate—

*"The eyes of all wait upon thee, and thou givest them their meat in due season. Thou openest thine hand and satisfiest the desire of every living thing."*

In this beautiful and sentimental address is brought to view, the dependent state of all animal and intelligent beings, and the ample goodness of God in supplying all their wants. These are subjects well adapted to the present occasion. For, in order to realise and express our gratitude to God, we must know *our own dependence* and *his goodness*. The text and the occasion therefore, call us to contemplate,

1. The dependent state of all sensitive and intelligent creatures.
2. The ample provision of God's goodness in satisfying all their wants.

The occasion requires precision and brevity upon each of these branches; but we shall aim at comprehensiveness and perspicuity.

*First*, we are to consider our state of total dependence.

*"The eyes of all wait upon thee."* This language is expressive of intire dependence. It literally imports, that all beings look to the Deity for support; and, of course, they must all be dependent. The figure here employed is very striking and emphatic. *"The eyes of all wait upon thee."* The eyes of a servant who is anxious to know the will and disposition of his master, are intensely fixed upon him, to observe all his gestures and actions that he may learn his pleasure. A beast who is wont to be fed by his owner, while his food is preparing, and being eager with hunger. will watch all the motions

of his owner, and follow him with his eyes every step he takes. A person who is in a state of starvation, will closely observe another who is refreshing by his side. As he begs for a morsel to relieve the rage of his hunger, how will he narrowly watch every motion with his longing eyes, to see if his request is to be answered. Such is the condition of mankind, and of all sensitive creatures, as represented by the figure employed in the text; “the eyes of all wait upon thee.”

Mankind are here represented as earnestly and wishfully looking up to the Deity for a supply of all their various wants. This supposes absolute dependence; for a being who looks to another for all his supplies, must be intirely dependent. This is the state of man as described in the text.

And is it a truth, that all look to God for protection and support? The declaration is undoubtedly true; but we must know in *what sense* it is true. It is very certain that the brutal, or irrational creation, do not sensibly regard the Deity as their only supporter and benefactor, nor do they consciously petition him for their sensual wants. And it is equally certain, that this is not the case with those of *mankind* who are “without hope and without God in the world,” those who have no faith in the existence of such a being, or in his providence over men. And here I may also add, that, if we may judge from the conduct of men, it is likewise evident, that a great proportion of those who acknowledge the existence of a God, are nevertheless, almost as unmindful of him as those who may openly deny him. Their eyes do not wait upon him; they do not sensibly and

consciously look to him for all their blessings and enjoyments. They may coldly and unmoved reply, when they are asked, that there is a God; but their thoughts are drowned in the concerns of this world, and they never sensibly realise that God is the author and giver of all they enjoy. Like the foolish and proud Assyrian conqueror, they say in their hearts, “by the strength of my hand I have done it, and by my wisdom, for I am prudent.” They imagine that all their wealth and enjoyments come, not as the gift of heaven, but by their own meritorious exertions. Little do they think of God as the author and giver of all they possess and enjoy; their thoughts terminate in themselves, that they have merited their wealth and enjoyments by their own wisdom and strength. Never do they spare themselves time to think and realise, that it was God who preserved their lives, gave them health and strength, and crowned their labors with success. Their eyes never wait on him, they ask not his blessing, nor do they feel it when they enjoy it.

This being the condition, not only of all the irrational creation, but of a great proportion of the human kind, how are we to understand the declaration of the Psalmist, that “the eyes of all wait upon God?” Certainly *all* creatures, irrational as well as rational, do not *wait, anxiously look to God* for a supply of all their needs. For some know not, some believe not, and others regard not such a Being. But the declaration, *in some sense*, is unquestionably true, and this is what we are to seek for.

The eyes of all wait upon God; How? Not sensibly and in fact, as we have just seen. It must, there-

fore, simply mean, that *all are dependent on God*. The language is not to be taken strictly, but as importing the simple fact, that all *are* dependent upon God whether they are conscious of it, or not. It asserts a plain fact, that all creatures, sensitive and intelligent, are dependent on Deity for all they possess and enjoy.

And this is verily a truth, a truth which none but an Atheist will deny, that all beings are dependent on Him who is the first and supreme. Hence it is from his liberal hand that we receive all our comforts and enjoyments. It is He who governs the world, directs the course of providence, and orders the destinies of men. We may vainly suppose that we are our own sovereigns, order our own steps, and fix our own destinations. We may imagine that we gain wealth, honors, and pleasures all by our own wisdom and strength. But we forget that great First Cause, "in whom we live, move, and have our being," who is the sole author of life, and all that we have or expect to enjoy. We may cultivate the fields, and produce a crop; but God supports our lives and health, and gives the increase to our labors. And were he to frown upon us, either by depriving us of health or by blasting the fruit of our labor, what are all our efforts? No reflecting mind can view his own weakness, and the sovereignty of God as displayed in his providence, without feeling sensible of the absolute dependence of man, that all his possessions, his health, his honors, and his enjoyments are derived from God. Truly, then, all are dependent, all wait on God, all are supported by his bounty. I might follow this to the bed of sickness and of death, to which we are all

hastening, and there behold how frail a creature is man! Where then can we look for support, but to God? All earthly friends, and all human art are incapable to afford us any assistance. Here our absolute dependence is manifest; God is our only friend and supporter.

I am sensible that these are familiar ideas to all of us; and I am equally sensible that they are seldom realised and understood. Men will talk of their dependence, and acknowledge, in words, that their all is from God; but their conduct speaks a different language. While they will acknowledge that their life and their all, are in the hand of God, and that he can destroy them in a moment, they will fearlessly and without shame blaspheme and sport with his venerable and exalted name! While they will acknowledge that all their strength and earthly possessions are but the gifts of heaven, they will be proud, and boast of them as their own personal rights and merits. Their language is, "See what *I* can do," or "see what *I* have done." No honor to God, no praise for his assistance. All the credit is given to our *mighty selves*.

Nor can I stop here; most shameful to relate, the same self-sufficient, independent, and proud spirit of man has obtruded her hateful presence in the humble walks of religion. Even the professed meek and humble followers of Jesus Christ, though they will acknowledge in their prayers, &c. that all their grace and holiness, if they have any, are all of God, he gives them all, and they have nothing of themselves; still it is not unfrequent that we hear them speaking of their own attainments and good deeds as of person-

al right and merit. It is thus that men forget their dependence upon God, and presume to set themselves in his seat.

Do not wonder then that I labor to show so simple a fact, that man is totally dependent; for it is too often forgotten by the best of men, and disregarded by a great proportion of the world. But let us aim to strengthen our convictions of this all-important truth, by frequent reflections on our own nature and condition, and on the existence and sovereignty of God. Let us learn that our being, preservation, and health; our earthly possessions, honors, and pleasures; our virtuous attainments and hopes in death, are all from God, "in whom we live, move, and have our being." With these reflections, and in this frame of mind, we shall be prepared to realise and rejoice in the goodness of God, from whom we expect our all.

This leads us to consider

*Second*,—The ample provision of God's goodness in satisfying the wants of all his creatures.

In the text this is signified by two forms of expression. "*And thou givest them their meat in due season;*" also, "*Thou openest thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing.*" This language signifies to us, that the Deity grants his creatures all things for their comfort which they really need. It is also general, and applies to all irrational creatures, as well as to man. That is, the Deity supplies the whole brutal creation with food and all things needed, as well as mankind. He satisfieth the desire of *every living thing*.

By this, I think, we are to understand, not that the Almighty satisfies every transient and often im-

proper desire of his creatures, but that he satisfies the principal and predominant desire of their natures. Men often have very improper desires, those which are injurious to themselves and to others. These the Deity has never engaged to satisfy; it would be absurd to expect it. But he satisfies the main, leading desire of all his creatures. The text does not assert or imply, that he satisfies *every* desire of all his creatures, only that he satisfies their *desire*. This seems to allude to the predominant, leading, or general desire of their natures. This desire is virtually one in all sensitive and intelligent beings, in brutes and men; it is *happiness*. All beings desire to be happy; that is, to enjoy that which is congenial to their nature. Brutes desire that which is agreeable to their nature, and this to them is happiness. So of the human kind; what is agreeable to our nature is happiness. But the nature in man and brute, in various respects, is different, especially as it regards the intellectual powers. To render us happy, therefore, something more and different is required than is necessary for the brute creation. But according to the declaration of the Psalmist, the leading, principal desire of both is and shall be satisfied. Have we evidence that this is a fact? As it respects the brutal, or irrational creation, we have reason to believe that it is a fact. Their main desire is wholly of a sensual nature, and with a gratification of this they seem to be satisfied. We see in them no signs of a desire for intellectual improvement, for moral taste, refinement, and happiness. All is to gratify the cravings of sensual appetite; and when this is done, they are at rest, all is satisfied. Now, all this

they generally have. I say *generally*, for although they may not enjoy it at all times, or without interruption, yet through life, as one whole, they are satisfied. And it is to be observed, that the Psalmist does not signify, that all creatures have their supply of what they desire at all times, every moment. He says, that God gives them their meat *in due season*; that is, when it is his pleasure, is for their good, and is according to the design of their being. And this is all we can say of *man*; for *we* are not without our privations. The brutal creation, therefore, have all the enjoyment which is consistent with the wisdom of God, with their own capacity, and the design of their being. What they actually do receive, considering their capacity, doubtless, in every instance, renders their existence, on the whole, a blessing; that is, a life of more pleasure than pain. Such an existence must be pronounced a blessing, and worthy of a God of infinite goodness to bestow. Thus far, then, we have seen that God satisfies the desire of every living thing, even though the brutal creation have no capacity for, or hope of a future state of being.

But how stands the fact in relation to the *human kind*? Is the main, leading desire of *man* satisfied? If he had no moral, but a mere animal nature, like the brute, he doubtless would be as well satisfied as he. But the truth is, man has an essentially different intellectual nature from the whole brutal creation. He possesses a more enlarged power of perception, capable of taking into view, in a more comprehensive manner, the past and the future. And consequently he looks forward to something still

greater and more exalted than we realize here.— Hence that saying of Pope:—

“Hope springs eternal in the human breast,  
“Man never is, but always *to be*, blest.”

After all the sensual gratifications of our nature, we still desire something more, more refined, more improved, more lasting. It is nothing short of immortal existence and happiness. Whatever men may think or say, during their healthful and prosperous days, the sincere, calm reflections of a bed of death will lead us to utter our *feel* this hope. This then is the native, principal desire of man. But it is to be carefully observed, that no man wishes an existence which is to be perpetual suffering. Every sane person would prefer absolute annihilation to a state of endless misery. Our desire, therefore, of a future existence, is necessarily connected with eventual and eternal felicity. This is the desire, the native, permanent desire of man, to be made immortally happy. Shall this desire be satisfied? The text furnishes an answer: “Thou openest thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing.” We ask no more than the words of inspiration; we believe it will be accomplished.

But our faith in this glorious and interesting fact rests not on this solitary promise; assurances of the same import are found in all parts of the sacred Scriptures. Under the Old Testament dispensation it was revealed to Abraham, David, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Daniel.\* And under the New, Christ and his apostles bore testimony to the same glorious

\* Gen. xii. 3; xviii. 18. Psal. xxii. 27; xlv. 9. Isa. xxv. 6, 7, 8. Lam. iii. 31, 32, 33. Dan. vii. 13, 14.

truth.\* This is the imperishable hope of man, which God has promised to satisfy, to render all his intelligent offspring finally and immortally happy. This is the great ultimatum of the whole scheme of revelation. Here we see the promise to Abraham fulfilled; all nations, kindreds, and families of the earth are blessed in Christ. Here we see tears wiped from all faces, and death swallowed up in victory. Here we see all men drawn to Christ, and righteousness and eternal life triumph over sin and death. Here we see the whole creation delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God, and grace abound beyond sin. Here we see the pleasure of the Lord prosper in the hands of his Son, all things reconciled by the blood of his cross, every knee bow, and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord to the glory of God the Father. Here we see the restitution of all things, spoken of by the mouth of all God's holy prophets since the world began. Finally, here we see all sin and rebellion cease, death and hell destroyed, God the head and sovereign of the whole creation—*ALL in ALL*.

But God *gives them their meat in due season*. That is, we shall arrive at this glorious destination when it shall please infinite wisdom and goodness. Jesus Christ gave himself a ransom for all, *to be testified in due time*. In like manner we are assured, that all things shall be gathered together in Christ, *in the dispensation of the fulness of times*.† These are the

\* See John, iii. 17; iii. 35; xiii. 3, compared with chap. vi. 37. Rom. v. 18; viii. 19, 23. 1 Cor. iii. 11, 15; xv. 22, 28. Eph. i. 9, 10. Col. i. 19, 20. Rev. v. 13.

† 1 Tim. ii. 6. Eph. i. 10.

promises of infinite mercy, and we rest satisfied that they will eventually be fulfilled. God will give every one his meat, satisfy their immortal desire, when it is most consistent with his glory and their best good.

With these expressions of unbounded love, and such animating and glorious prospects before us, what abundant reason we have for the exercise of gratitude to God. Not only for the plenteous harvest the past year, the liberal and happy government under which we live, in which we are distinguished above all the nations of the earth; for the means of education which are continued and increasing, for the useful arts and sciences, but, above all, for the assurance that we are the objects of God's constant and unchanging love, and shall eternally share his bounty. For such distinguished blessings, such noble displays of a heavenly Father's benignity, the most exalted gratitude and the highest note of praise is but a reasonable demand. They are justly due; let not an insensible heart refuse the offering.

Let us then, on this day, and on all others, manifest our gratitude and praise to God for all the mercies we have received, and for those which we hope to realize in future. And let our gratitude not consist in mere words and professions, but in acts of reverence and obedience to God, and kindness and charity to man. As the *test* of all our professions, let justice and benevolence direct all our actions, as reason and revelation govern our faith. So may the world witness on this day, and all coming days of time, that our gratitude to God is not merely prayers and good wishes, but faith and good works.—*AMEN*.