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THANKSGIVING SERMON.

REV. H. A. BOARDMAN, D. D.



HEALING AND SALVATION FOR OUR COUNTRY
FROM GOD ALONE.

A SERMON

PREACHED IN THE TENTH PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, PHILADELPHIA,
ON THANKSGIVING DAY, NOV. 24, 1864.

BY

1864
HENRY A. BOARDMAN, D. D.



PHILADELPHIA:
WILLIAM S. & ALFRED MARTIEN,
No. 606 CHESTNUT STREET.
1864.

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PHILADELPHIA, December 6, 1864.

To the REV. HENRY A. BOARDMAN, D. D.

Dear Sir:—The undersigned, almost all of whom had the privilege of hearing your late Thanksgiving Discourse, believing that its general circulation would both gratify and benefit many besides themselves, beg the favor of you to permit them to have the Discourse published. Should you accede to our request, please hand the manuscript to the bearer of this note, in order to publication, and oblige,

Yours, very truly and respectfully,

R. C. GRIER,	ROBERT PATTERSON,
JOHN H. BROWN,	SAMUEL HOOD,
THOMAS A. SCOTT,	JOS. PATTERSON,
W. H. DRAYTON,	THEODORE CUYLER,
JAMES THOMPSON,	H. L. SPROAT,
JAMES ROSS SNOWDEN,	JAMES SCHOTT,
WILLIAM A. PORTER,	D. HAYES AGNEW,
WILLIAM M. SMITH,	CHARLES F. HASELTINE,
WILLIAM B. HIESKELL,	ROBERT H. McGRATH,
R. CRESSWELL,	SAMUEL ASBURY.

PHILADELPHIA, December 8, 1864.

GENTLEMEN:—It was the aim of my Thanksgiving Sermon to present, in the simplest form, the one great truth which is clearly of paramount importance to us in our present troubles. I suppose there is ground here upon which Christian men of all sects and all political parties can stand together. It gratifies me to know that the Discourse met your approval; and I cheerfully place it in your hands, precisely as written and delivered.

With much respect,

I am faithfully your's,

HENRY A. BOARDMAN.

To the Hon. R. C. GRIER,

MAJOR-GEN. PATTERSON,

JOHN H. BROWN, Esq., and others.

SERMON.

JEREMIAH XVII. 14:—"HEAL ME, O LORD, AND I SHALL BE HEALED:
SAVE ME, AND I SHALL BE SAVED: FOR THOU ART MY PRAISE."

THE occasion calls for a sermon of thanksgiving. To this service the day is dedicated. The sanctuaries of the land are thrown open; and from the high seats of magistracy, the people are summoned to enter in and lay their sacrifices of praise upon the altars of the Most High. We have cause for thanksgiving. Our personal and domestic blessings are not to be numbered. The least favored amongst us are loaded with mercies. Who can review his life without exclaiming, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits"? Who can look around him without feeling that his blessings greatly exceed his trials, and immeasurably transcend his desert? The happiness of life is mostly made up of little things,—so little, that they pass, often, without being chronicled, or even noticed. A true disciple will find motives to gratitude in the possession of his rational faculties; in his daily food and raiment; in his means of culture and improvement;

in his business, his books, his friends; in the interchange of social sympathies; in the opportunities of doing and receiving good; in whatever of comfort he may derive from his home. It is a great mercy that we pass so many days and months without experience of bodily pain or sickness; and that when sickness and sorrow do come, they bring so many alleviations with them. Especially ought we to be thankful for God's Holy Word; for the atonement of Christ; the mission of the Spirit; the Sabbath and its ordinances; the forgiveness of our sins; reconciliation to God; the consolations of the Gospel; and the hope of everlasting felicity. These surely are mercies which may well enkindle the gratitude of every heart.

With great propriety, also, have we been reminded of the exemption of the country from pestilence and famine, and foreign war. Had any one of these scourges been laid upon us, it might have brought us to the brink of ruin. That they have been averted, is to be ascribed wholly to the unmerited goodness of our Heavenly Father.

Even the history of this fatal war is not without reasons for thanksgiving. It is of the Divine mercy that this rebellion has not attained its end in the overthrow of our government; and that our people have with such unanimity come forward to

the maintenance of our Constitution and Union. We must refer to His hand all the successes with which he has been pleased to crown our army and navy; and all the progress that has been made in suppressing this most criminal revolt. We may be thankful that any Slave States have become free; and should any method of universal emancipation be devised, which, like that adopted in our own and other Northern States, shall not involve the destruction of either the black or the white race, but conduce to the amelioration and happiness of both; we shall have very great cause for gratitude to God. Another beam of light which relieves the darkness of this scene, may be found in the noble spirit of philanthropy which has been evoked by the war; in the lavish contributions and generous labors applied to the relief of our sick and wounded soldiers and sailors.

Here are themes for thanksgiving; and others might be specified. But after all, this is but one side of the picture. We need not dissemble the feeling, that the prevailing sentiment of the country is not one of praise and rejoicing. With no disposition to surrender its birthright, the land, nevertheless, is very full of sorrow. Putting out of sight that large class to whom the war is bringing sudden wealth, and that larger class of frivolous people

whose heartless merriment nothing short of the grave could extinguish; most persons are oppressed with our national troubles. We did not look for three years and a half of war. We did not count upon the mutilation and slaughter of some hundreds of thousands of our young men. We did not expect to see death and sorrow carried into every village and hamlet of the country. We were not prepared to find ourselves, after so many frightful battles, confronted by a future as dark and impenetrable as that which now rises before us. And, therefore, while we are grateful for God's manifold mercies, the feeling which pervades the land to-day is not one purely of thanksgiving. This must be my apology for selecting a text which may, perhaps, have fallen upon your ears with an unwelcome sound "Heal me, O Lord, and I shall be healed; save me, and I shall be saved: for Thou art my praise."

It seems to be an ejaculation of the Prophet, who, turning from the contemplation of the judgments with which God was about visiting his country for its sins, reverently confesses his own morally diseased and helpless state, and supplicates the Divine pity. The sentiment is equally appropriate to an afflicted nation and an afflicted individual. I shall treat of it very briefly, as the prayer with which it becomes us as a nation, to appear in the presence of God.

The general proposition I wish to lay down, is, that GOD ALONE CAN "HEAL" OUR MALADIES, AND "SAVE" US FROM THE EVILS WHICH OPPRESS OR THREATEN US. It is not meant by this language that we can hope for deliverance, only through some direct, and, as it were, miraculous intervention of the Supreme Being; but, simply, that He must provide the means and instruments; raise up the men, and guide their counsels; control all hearts, and overrule all events, to the furtherance of the desired ends; if the nation is to be effectually "healed" and "saved." The case is past human cure. No people can get on wisely and well, even in prosperous times, without His guiding hand; how much less a people in our circumstances.

For the clearing of this point, consider, *that it is God who has visited us with these calamities.*

You will not misunderstand this remark. Your theology recognizes a Providence—a universal Providence—a Providence which comprehends all creatures and all events. You believe that whatever is, is by his appointment or by his permission; that, while he cannot ordain moral evil, he can permit it; and that what he permits, is just as essential a part of his plan as what he ordains. You see his hand in the fall of the angels, in the sin of our first parents, and in all the wars which have carried sorrow and

carnage through the earth. You have learned from his own word, that war is as much one of his implements for punishing nations, as pestilence or famine; that it was, more than any other, the scourge he used for chastising the Hebrews; that it was the ordinary judgment he denounced prophetically against the great pagan monarchies of antiquity; and that he everywhere challenges the same absolute authority over war, in respect to its source, its instruments, its duration, and its effects, as he does over the elements and the irrational animals. To cite extended proofs of this, would be to imply that you had never looked into your Bibles.

We affirm, then, that this war which is ravaging our country, is of God. The causes, remote and proximate, which led to it,—the oppression, the fanaticism, the ambition, the cupidity, the disregard of human rights, and the invasion of constitutional rights; the wrongs and the sins on the one side and on the other, were of his permission, as really as was the actual commencement of the war against the Union—the baleful result in which they all culminated. Not to concede this, were to suppose that here was a series of events pregnant with momentous consequences, which was independent of God's control,—a step only from handing the world over to the sway of a dismal atheism. But

if these things were of God, so also must have been the whole course of the war; and not less, the various evils which now loom up on the horizon,—the natural product of the fatal contest that has been forced upon us, largely augmented by human infirmity and passion.

This general view might suffice to show, that our only hope of deliverance is in God. If he sent these evils, he alone can remove them. He claims it as his prerogative, “I wound, and I heal.” (Deut. xxxii. 39.) None can “wound” without his leave; nor can any “heal” without his help. If this were practicable in any circumstances, it could not be in our’s; the wounds are too many and too deep. If the Great Physician do not undertake the case, it must be given over as hopeless. A little attention to details will make this apparent.

In the *first* place, there is the *military problem*.

In April, 1861, this was thought to be a very simple problem. Turning back to almost any file of newspapers of that day, one will encounter a strain of confidence and self-glorying, which reflected but too faithfully the public sentiment. Arithmetic was put to the genial task of cyphering out the military weakness of the South. A people so destitute of manufactures, sparsely diffused over

a broad extent of territory, and hampered by the presence of four millions of slaves who would instantly spring to arms against their masters, must soon succumb to our armies. The period fixed in the high places of the land for the duration of the war, and published to all the Cabinets of Europe, was "three months." Would to God that the prophecy had been of a loftier inspiration. The three months have become three years—and now wise men refrain from predicting when the end is to be.

To review the progress of the war would be as impracticable here, as it would be useless to pronounce a panegyric upon our army and navy. Their patriotism, their courage, their endurance, are the theme of every tongue. They have won numerous battles. They have achieved great results. But it were puerile to pretend that all has been done which we have hoped for, and prayed for, and looked for. Powerful armies still confront our forces. And no one is so sanguine as to believe that the rebellion can or will be subdued, until we have raised new armies still. The feeling lies unuttered in many a bosom, that tens of thousands of graves may yet be added to the vast cities of the dead, peopled by this war.

Have these facts no voice? Do they not in thun-

der tones proclaim a GOD? Do they not affirm, that "the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong;" but "the MOST HIGH ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will?" If there are any so blinded by party-feeling, or so delirious with revenge, as to contemn these truths, the discipline of these three gloomy years has been lost upon them. While the war goes on, we *must* confide in our armies. But to confide in them, irrespective of the GOD of battles, were a huge impiety. Here, beyond a question, has been our mistake. Instead of exalting GOD, we have exalted man. We have glorified our own skill and prowess and numbers, without considering sufficiently that armies and nations are before God as the chaff of the summer threshing-floor. The feeling which befits us to-day is, "Some trust in chariots and some in horses: but we will remember the name of the Lord our God." Our own skill has not availed to "heal" us. Our own bravery has not availed to "save" us. Let us go to Him who holds the reins of every war, and decides the issue of every battle, and cry, "Heal us, O Lord, and we shall be healed; save us, and we shall be saved: for Thou art our praise."

The necessity for this appeal to God will be no less apparent, if we turn, in the *second* place, from the military to *the political problem*.

The end to be accomplished—the end, *i. e.*, which all parties profess to have in view—is, *the restoration of the Union*. The difficulties in the way of this result, were very formidable from the hour hostilities commenced. They have been multiplied a hundred-fold since. The question is one which reaches to the very foundations of the government; and involves every vital principle embodied in our Constitution. It comprehends, on the one hand, all the delicate problems pertaining to the relations of the Federal and State organizations; and, on the other, all the interests involved in the subject of Slavery. There is no lack of sciolists who are ready to dogmatize on each of these topics; nor of heated partisans, who use them as vehicles for coarse vituperation. One need not spend his breath in arguing with either simpletons or madmen. Thoughtful men of all parties must feel the solemnity of these problems. Take the latter of them. Here is a system of servitude coeval almost with the colonizing of the South. It has grown with its growth, and strengthened with its strength. The whole social structure is pervaded by it: it runs through its domestic, civil, commercial, and religious life, as the arteries and veins do through the human body. That it has carried debility and disease with it; that it has produced an untold amount of evil, physical and moral, (as it

has, certainly, in ten thousand cases, been overruled for the good of the inferior race), only complicates the problem. In every view, it is a colossal institution. We must all deplore its existence. We must all reprobate its agency in stimulating the leaders of this rebellion to their assault upon the Union. We must all desire the well-being of the African race. But how to meet the questions which the course of the war is beginning to force upon us, is a task for which few will feel themselves prepared, who are capable of comprehending these questions.

I am not speaking for or against any political party; nor for or against any line of policy. You belong to all parties. You have a common stake in the welfare of the country; and a common desire for the safety and improvement of the two races. And you must view with a common solicitude the approach (for it seems to be approaching), of a period when you are to stand face to face with the question, "What is to be done with four millions of emancipated blacks? What will their good demand of the country? What provision will or can be made for their control and education? And how is the mighty convulsion which must follow the sudden annihilation of this complex system, to be so

guided and mollified as to be made a savor of life, and not of death?

These are topics for humane and patriotic men of all parties—as well for those who deprecate the overthrow of slavery as a misfortune to the servile race, as for those who can see in the system only unmixed evil. The single object for which they are introduced here, is to show that we need a more than mortal wisdom to conduct us through this labyrinth. The country is not without skilful statesmen and large-hearted philanthropists. But it may be doubted whether it has for centuries fallen to the lot of the philanthropists and statesmen of a nation, to deal with problems so profound and intricate as those which seem about to demand a solution here. Happily, there is one resource left us; it is the only one. “The foolishness of God is wiser than men.” To His eye, this tangled maze is lighted up as by a meridian sun: this chaos is symmetry and beauty. He knows what is best for the slave and for the master; for the South and for the North, and for both combined. If He has decreed that the system shall be annulled, He knows just how it should be done; and how the African should be cared for; and how the issues of the crisis can all be met; and the country “healed” of its wounds, and “saved” from its peril. And, therefore, our

great and urgent duty is to commend our rulers to His teaching; to supplicate for our whole nation that divine illumination which He alone can bestow; and to cry to him unceasingly, "Heal us, O Lord, and we shall be healed; save us, and we shall be saved: for Thou art our praise."

To the same result we should be led by considering the other of the two topics just suggested, the restoration or re-construction of the Union. I state a familiar fact, when I say, that there is no question of the day upon which there is a greater diversity of opinion. In no party is there any homogeneity of sentiment on the subject. It divides and subdivides all parties. The ablest statesmen of the country are the poles apart. The question involves, under God, the entire future of the nation. And confounding, as it does, all the wisdom of the land, how obvious, how indispensable, the duty of laying it before Him who can resolve it. If there be any method by which these States can be brought together again in a just, beneficent, and lasting Union, He must reveal it, and our place is humbly to ask him to do it.

This observation brings me to the *third* and last of the great problems which we can hope to see resolved only by invoking God's assistance, viz., the *social problem*.

In the judgment of very many on both sides of this fratricidal war, and of intelligent foreigners generally, the great difficulty of all lies here. The conflict of arms may be carried to a decisive issue. The political questions of slavery and re-construction may be disposed of. But can these two peoples ever again become one nation? If by one nation here were intended a nation in the sense that Austria is one nation—a collection of provinces inhabited by distinct races, speaking different tongues, alien from one another in all their traditions, and having almost nothing in common but their allegiance to the same sovereign—there might be no Gordian knot to untie. But such a union would not answer the first conditions of our great charter. It would be little short of a grim burlesque upon the idea of a republic. For the purposes of our Constitution, we must be one nation in sentiment and sympathy—so far at least as to be able and willing to cooperate in carrying on the same government, acknowledging the same laws, and sharing the same burdens. This implies somewhat of mutual respect and confidence. But this war has alienated the two sections of the Union as much in feeling as in form. It has replaced the ancient concord with hate and (shall I say it?) revenge. The testimonies which come to us on

this point from the South, and which too often salute our own eyes and ears, would seem to warrant the conclusion, that any real union of the two populations must be for ever impossible. The prevalent sentiment with us appears to be, that it is only a forced and nominal union which can be expected under the most favorable circumstances; and even to this the South is not willing to listen.

Here is a difficulty which the most sanguine will concede to be of towering proportions. The sphere to which it pertains, is that, not of government and police, of manners and letters; but of thought and feeling. The task to be performed is that of allaying resentments, extinguishing animosities, turning enemies into friends, and obliterating from millions of hearts the memories of battles, conflagrations, hospitals and prisons, rife with unutterable sorrows. Of course, man is powerless here. What can *he* do in such a presence, but sit down, mute and sad in his conscious helplessness?

But is the task, therefore, hopeless? I do not know whether it will ever be accomplished. This only I know: "That with GOD all things are possible." He can do it. He can cause the wrongs of this war to be forgotten, and its hatreds buried. He can rekindle the fires of affection upon altars where they long ago went out. He can fuse these

discordant fragments into a homogeneous mass, instinct with the warmth of a new and genial life. He can make us again one nation—not in name and aspect merely, but in sympathy and purpose. I do not say that He will do this. I say He can do it; because He is Omnipotent. And, further, if it be a part of his purpose (as we all humbly hope and pray) not to give us over to final dismemberment and ruin, we have ground to believe that, sooner or later, He will do it. And this is reason enough why we should plead with Him on this behalf; why we should cry importunately, “Heal us, O Lord, and we shall be healed; save us, and we *shall* be saved: for Thou art our praise.”

Not to advert to other topics, I think it has been shown that in respect to the three great problems of our condition—the *military*, the *political* and the *social*, we must look to GOD for healing and deliverance. I think it has been shown that his blessing alone can crown our arms with success: that we may succeed there, and, if left to ourselves, fail disastrously in the adjustment of our political relations: and that if by his favor both of these interests could be arranged, there would still remain those wide-spread antipathies and estrangements which He alone can compose. It has, further, been pointed out that

if we desire Him to interpose for the healing of our maladies, we must seek this great mercy at his hands, as we do all other mercies, by earnest prayer. This implies some other things besides prayer; especially does it imply A GENERAL REFORMATION AND RETURN TO GOD—at once the evidence and the fruit of the sincerity of our prayers.

Here, precisely, is the work to be done, if we would see our distracted country restored to peace and unity. We watch intently the measures of our Government. We await with anxiety the daily bulletins from the field. But we have duties nearer home. Without Divine illumination our statesmen are blind. Without Divine protection our armies are impotent. These armies and magistrates are simply the representatives of the nation. It is *the temper of the nation* which God regards. *They* would not fail of a blessing, if we, as a nation, should return to God. Can any one who acknowledges a Providence, doubt that this war was sent as a punishment for the sins of the nation; that it has been prolonged on account of our sins; and that if we should put away our sins, God would withdraw his rod? The voice which comes to us from his throne to-day, is, "Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backsliding." Suppose the response could go up from every part of our land, which went

back from the chosen people: "Behold, we come unto thee: for thou are the Lord our God. Truly in vain is salvation hoped for from the hills and from the multitude of mountains: truly in the Lord our God is the salvation of Israel." (Jer. iii. 22, 23.) Would you not look to see the land presently resting from this weary war?

In such a reformation the CHURCH is bound to take the lead. Of its agency, both South and North, in bringing on the war, and protracting it, it is not needful to speak. No one, it is presumed, will venture to say that it is guiltless in this matter. Nor will it be denied, that it may exert a potential influence in bringing about that merciful intervention of an injured God, which would speedily terminate our troubles.

Not to enter into details, there are in our country several millions of persons who profess the evangelical faith. They are of all classes and all occupations. They are in the humblest and in the loftiest conditions. They are in daily contact with our entire population. They are doing more, whether for good or ill, to shape the destiny of the country than any other equal portion of our people. These Christians claim to be the followers of Christ. They profess to be imbued with his Spirit, and to walk in his steps. There is not one of them

who will not admit, THAT IT IS HIS PARAMOUNT OBLIGATION TO DO WHAT HE BELIEVES HIS MASTER WOULD DO, if He were here in his circumstances.

What, then, have we reason to believe OUR SAVIOUR WOULD DO, if He were here during these troublous times? He would do just what He did in Judea. It would be his meat to do his Father's will, and to promote his Father's glory. He would set an example of obedience to the laws. He would do nothing to embarrass the magistracy of the land in the legitimate exercise of its authority. He would frown upon sedition and rebellion. He would frown upon revenge. He would rebuke covetousness, pride, ostentation, dishonesty, hypocrisy, falsehood and intolerance. He would instruct his disciples to love one another, to shun all acrimony of speech, and all malevolence of temper; "not to backbite with their tongues, nor take up a reproach against their neighbor." He would say to them, "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you." He would everywhere exhibit a meek, patient, forgiving, benevolent spirit. He would do good to all who came within his reach. He would exhort others to the practice of forbearance, moderation, and charity. He would render to Cæsar the things

which are Cæsar's, and to God the things that are God's. He would do his utmost to diffuse a spirit of love and kindness, and to make His own blessed Gospel the *ruling power* in all our affairs, civil and military, social and ecclesiastical.

I will not mock you by stopping to prove that this is the sort of life our Saviour would lead if he were here in person. Every Christian must know this. And we know just as well that we are bound to imitate His example. It is as much our duty as it would be His to cultivate the spirit that has been described. And if this were done; if that great body of Christians who claim to have been sprinkled with His blood and baptized into His spirit, should begin thus to live up, in some good degree, to their profession, and to follow him in earnest, what a "healing" power would it exert upon the wounds of our suffering country. How much would it mitigate the horrors of this contest. How certainly would it bring down, as a choice blessing upon our rulers, new supplies of the wisdom and the fortitude, the integrity and the prudence, the forbearance and the courage, which they need in the discharge of their arduous and responsible duties. How effectually would it replace the uncharitableness and the discord, the aversions and the divisions, which prevail among ourselves, with candor, conciliation, and

unanimity. With what silent energy would it act upon the public press, upon the courts and legislatures, and upon the whole tone of the country. How surely would it tell even upon the misguided hosts that are waging this criminal war against the Government. In a word, with what confidence might we hail it as the harbinger of some decisive interposition of a benign Providence which should arrest this sanguinary strife, constrain the revolted States to lay down their arms, and secure to us a wise, equitable, and permanent peace.

Here, my Brethren, is the remedy for our disorders which the BIBLE offers us. There is no lack of catholicons. They are tendered by political parties and by individuals, by men in power and by men out of power, every day. The pulpits of the land overflow with them. We need not stop to compare r to sift them; to inquire what they may comprise of truth and wisdom, and what of error and folly. Whatever may be done or left undone, one thing is certain: *our deliverance must come FROM GOD.* And the surest pledge and instrument of it, would be A GENERAL REVIVAL THROUGHOUT THE LAND OF THE SPIRIT AND PRACTICE OF TRUE RELIGION. There is more to be hoped for from the *Church of Christ* than from Cabinets and armies; for armies and Cabinets will properly fulfil their mission only as the Church

fulfils her's. Let the Church shake herself from the dust, and come out from the world, and seek a fresh baptism of the spirit of love and holiness, and give herself anew to her heavenly vocation, and cry without ceasing, on behalf of an humbled and penitent people, "*Heal* us, O Lord, and we shall be healed; *Save* us, and we shall be saved;" and when another Thanksgiving Day returns, our Sanctuaries will resound with the grateful anthem: "Glory to God in the highest; and on earth PEACE. GOOD WILL TOWARD MEN."

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