

A

S E R M O N,

PREACHED NOVEMBER, 26, 1812.

THE DAY OF

PUBLIC THANKSGIVING

IN

MASSACHUSETTS.

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TO ascribe glory to Jehovah, for his transcendent perfections, and his infinite benefits, is the appropriate duty of a thanksgiving season. Such an employment must ever be congenial to the pious heart. Yet the emotions to which it gives birth, are mingled, and various. Meditating on the glories of the Deity, we painfully perceive and feel our own depravity and vileness. In the light of his purity, our own pollution appears more than ever conspicuous and hateful. And how can we recount the long catalogue of his mercies, and not be oppressed, almost to sinking, with a sense of that deep-died ingratitude, and those numberless crimes, by which we have forfeited every divine favor?—With the recollection, likewise, of our *blessings*, public and private, the remembrance of our *calamities* and *sorrows* is intimately associated. And in such company, affliction pierces the heart with keener anguish.

Circumstances such as these, have never failed to dim the lustre, and interrupt the joy, of our days of thanksgiving. Often has the pious worshipper approached the altar of God, with a heart but half attuned to his delightful work. Often has he been constrained to mingle with his praises, the sighs of despondency, and the tears of sorrow.

But the present season is peculiar. It has no parallel in the history of our country. A cloud, impenetrable by mortal eye, overshadows this once happy land. A burden of distress, till now unknown, presses on all classes in the community. Yet who can tell that even this is more than the *beginning of sorrow*? Surely the Lord has a controversy with our nation. His anger is displayed in forms too evident to be doubted; too awful to be trifled with. Never were we called to celebrate a thanksgiving, in circumstances like the present.

To guide your minds and meditations, on such an occasion, I feel to be no easy task. Even to select an appropriate *theme* from the book of God, has been perplexing. After some time spent in anxious research, I have fixed on the noble and pious resolution of the prophet HABAKKUK; a resolution formed and uttered amid a scene of distress and despondence not dissimilar, perhaps, to that which now pervades our country; a resolution too, in which I trust not a few in this assembly can cordially concur. You will find it in the *third* chapter of his prophecy, the 17th and 18th verses.

Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labor of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls; yet I will rejoice in the Lord; I will joy in the God of my salvation.

How illustrious appears this triumph of the prophet's faith, and his holy confidence in God! Especially when we reflect that the dismal group of evils here presented to view, was not the mere off-

spring of a lively fancy, but a tremendous *reality*, just at the door. The prophet assuredly knew that his beloved country would shortly be invaded and ravaged by the Chaldean armies; for, in the name of his God, he had already denounced these dire calamities. He had a very distinct and lively view of the horrors of the scene. Surveying it with a prophetic eye, he perceived that the merciless foe would carry desolation wherever they went; would turn a fruitful land into barrenness; and with undistinguishing, unsparing hand, would plunder the products of the field and the vineyard, of the fold and the stall; whatever contributed to the support, the convenience, or the delight of life. Perhaps too he foresaw that the work of destruction would be completed by drought, by blasts, by storms, and other immediate judgments of Heaven. By these means, the prophet himself and his people, that people whom he had often instructed and warned, and for whom he had often toiled, and prayed, and wept, would be stripped of every earthly comfort, and plunged into the depths of penury and distress. Thus sickening to the imagination, thus appalling to the heart, was the prospect. And now, behold the man of God. Does he sink into despondence? Does he vent himself in unmanly lamentations? Does he utter impious complaints against Heaven? Does he meditate forbidden methods of relief? Does he resort to any created source of comfort? None of these. He repairs directly to his God. With humble, holy confidence, he looks upward to heaven. In the same moment, all within is calm; and all around loses its terror. He seems to say: "Let every human wo approach; let invasion, and war, and

famine mingle their horrors ; let every earthly resource fail ; let me drink the cup of affliction to its dregs ; why should I sink ? Why should I pine ? My all is not gone. My best, my only portion remains. My God lives ; and He is still the same. In his unerring wisdom, and unchanging mercy, I will confide. His Almighty arm shall be my support ; his promise, my hope ; his love, my solace, in the darkest and most distressful hour. He can remove my afflictions ; He can restore my lost comforts. But if otherwise, *all is well*. I will rejoice, and triumph in my God, in want, in distress, in anguish, in sickness, in death, and through all eternity."

Here, my dear brethren, we view the genuine spirit, and here, the divine consolations, of religion. Here we have the Poet's sublime description realized :

"His hand the good man fastens in the skies,
And bids earth roll, nor feels her idle whirl."

Who would not be that man ?—If there is ought on earth of true dignity and greatness of character, it belongs to him whose sentiments and resolutions are described in the text. If there is any thing which can prepare us to live with comfort, or to die with hope, it is here. If any thing can enable us to enjoy prosperity with moderation, and with safety, or to meet adversity with a calm and equal mind, it must be sought here. I may add, it is in this spirit, and in this alone, that we can rightly and acceptably solemnize a thanksgiving season ; especially such a one as the present.

Let us then pause, for a few moments, and *analyze* the character here brought to view. Let us contemplate that sublimest of mortals, who, when

clouds and darkness thicken around him, can still enjoy serenity and sunshine within ; and let us distinctly mark the elements which compose his mind. Who is he, my brethren, that when deprived of all which is naturally dear to the human heart, can still think honorably and affectionately of God ; can confidently repair to him, and find in him a compensation for all which he has lost, and infinitely more ;—can feel, not merely serenity and submission, but joy, and even transport ?—Let me attempt a very brief description of the rare and happy character.

I remark, first, that its prime and most distinguishing feature is a cordial and supreme *love* to the Supreme of beings. This love implies an enlightened and spiritual perception of the *real character* of God ; an entire reconciliation and attachment to his *whole* character ; and in short, an affectionate and supreme regard to him, *for what He is in himself*, or, for his own venerable and endearing attributes, independently of all favors, temporal or spiritual, received or expected from him. Unless our love to God have this last characteristic, it is hollow and delusive. It is utterly unworthy the *name* of love. Genuine affection, even for a fellow-creature, respects the estimable and lovely qualities of its object. Destitute of this, all professions of esteem and love, are mere hypocrisy. If I regard a fellow-creature, merely on account of certain benefits promised, expected, or actually received from that fellow-creature, it is not *he* who is really and ultimately the object of that regard ; but *myself*. So, I may have a certain complacency in the Deity, considered as a Benefactor, and a Savior ; and from the hope that He will bless me in time, and

save me to eternity, I may have a *gratitude* to him, animated, and even ardent in its kind; yet if this is all, I have no true love to him. My hope, my gratitude, my love, my religion commences and terminates in myself, and is all resolvable into the mere principle of self-love. It has nothing of the pure, exalted affection which the Spirit of God enkindles in the human soul, and which has ever warmed the bosom of every real friend of Jehovah. Nor will it produce the sublime sentiments and resolutions expressed by the pious prophet in the text. Such an earth-born affection may flame and dazzle in the season of prosperity. But it will generally expire when trouble comes. The fuel being withdrawn, the fire goes out of course. Not so the genuine love to God which glows in the hearts of his children. Having the intrinsic perfections of Jehovah for its object, and those perfections being absolutely immutable, this love is in some degree unalterable too. Regarding the Glorious Giver infinitely more than all his gifts, it can adore, it can bless the Giver, and find its happiness in him, when the gifts are withdrawn.

Closely connected with this pure and exalted love to the Deity, is a *reconciliation of heart to his government*. The man who regards every part of the divine character with entire complacency, is prepared to feel a similar complacency in the divine administrations. For what is the government of God, but a continual exertion and display of his own august and infinitely amiable perfections? It is the joy of every upright mind, that the universe is completely subject to him who created it; that all creatures are in his hands, all events under his control, all worlds at his disposal. Such

a mind perceives it to be infinitely fit, and infinitely happy that it should be so. The good man has an entire confidence in the wisdom, the rectitude and the benevolence of the divine allotments. He does not, indeed, pretend or wish to comprehend all the particulars, much less all the *reasons* of Jehovah's government. It is enough for him to know that *the Lord reigns*; that no event takes place, but by his permission or agency, and under his control; that infinite wisdom can never mistake, or be disappointed; that infinite benevolence can never be unkind; that Almighty power can never fail to execute the designs of perfect wisdom and goodness; and that a day will assuredly come, when the glory of Jehovah's government will shine forth, like the sun, to the full conviction of all his intelligent creatures, and to the perfect, endless joy of all his friends. These views and prospects afford the good man a perpetual feast. They add lustre to his brightest day of enjoyment. They gild and cheer the midnight gloom of adversity. Are his dearest earthly delights withdrawn? Do troubles throng around him? He recollects that affliction is but the necessary fruit of sin; that all his blessings are forfeited blessings; and that he owes it to infinite mercy and forbearance, that he is not utterly consumed. With a serene and patient spirit, he can therefore say, "It is the Lord; let him do what seemeth good to him." "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away." I will bless his holy name. Nay more, amid all the frowns of Providence, and all the anguish of my heart, "I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation."

How obvious is it, that the man who can cor-

dially adopt these exulting expressions, is one who has *chosen the living God, as his portion and felicity*. This is another trait in the happy character exhibited in the text. Indeed, whenever we look into the book of God, we are constantly presented with this, as the prominent and distinguishing characteristic of his children. "O Lord," says one, "thou art my refuge, and my portion, in the land of the living." The Lord is my portion," says another; "therefore will I hope in him." "My flesh and my heart faileth," says a third; "but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion forever." It was precisely in this spirit, that the pious Abraham went forth, at the call of God, leaving country, and kindred, and all that was dear to man. "He went out," says Inspiration, "not knowing whither he went." But he knew by what *authority* he went, and under whose protecting care. This was enough for the good man. The presence and the favor of his God, to him was *every thing*. Indeed, what could he want more? Could not this compensate all sacrifices, supply all losses, solace all inquietudes, and meet his most enlarged and elevated desires? And what can any of you, my beloved hearers, want more, if you have the Eternal and All-Sufficient God, for your Friend and Felicity?—*Without* this, you are poor indeed. You pine amid abundance. The riches of both the Indies, could they be yours; the wealth of the universe itself, would leave you indigent, unsatisfied, and wretched. Come then, ye strangers to religion and to enjoyment; come, learn the true secret of happiness. God, in the gospel offers you, not the treasures of the Indies, or of worlds, (these to a soul immortal, would be a poor inheritance,)

out what is of *value* infinitely superior. He offers you *HIMSELF*, as your God, your Friend, your portion, your everlasting all. Come then, with broken hearts; come, with humble faith, and supreme affection, to the Lord Jesus; submit to him as your Saviour, and your King; and from that blessed moment, you are made forever. *GOD*, the *ETERNAL GOD*, is your *INHERITANCE*, and your *PORTION*. Thus enriched, and thus ennobled, you may look down on all the splendors and wealth of the world, as on the toys of children. You may enjoy the comforts of the present scene with dignified moderation, or part with them without regret. If Providence smiles, you may taste in all your variety of blessings, the sweetness of a Father's love. If it frowns, you may be assured that *the light and momentary afflictions* of this mortal life shall *work for you a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory*. You need not be anxious about the little, dying enjoyments of the present scene, since your *eternal all* is secure. He who has engaged to receive you to himself at last, will never forsake you in any period of your earthly pilgrimage. Nor will he lay upon you any burden, without affording answerable strength and support. He will supply all losses. He will impart consolation under all trials. Then what *though the fig-tree should not blossom, nor fruit be in the vine; though the labor of the olive should fail, and the field should yield no meat; what though the flock should be cut off from the fold, and the herd from the stall;—still you may rejoice in the Lord, and joy in the God of your salvation.*

The subject, my brethren, imperfectly as it has been illustrated, affords us much important and an-

inating instruction—instruction ever unseasonable ; and to the present occasion, in a high degree appropriate.

It teaches us, in the first place, what is the nature of genuine and pious gratitude ; and what is that frame of mind which we should endeavor to bring with us, to the solemnities of this day. Real gratitude to God, my brethren, is a plant of rare growth. It is not found in every human heart ; nor in *any* human heart which has not been visited by the grace of Heaven. It implies a principle of pure and supreme *love* to the God, of our mercies, of love to *himself*, and his all-amiable perfections ; and not of mere complacency in his benefits. It implies a heart bowed to his holy government, submissive to his sovereign will, unreservedly confiding in the wisdom, rectitude and kindness of his providential allotments, however dark, or seemingly severe. In a word, it implies that God himself is our chosen portion ; that his favor and presence are the source, the sum, the crown of all our joys and comforts, in time and in eternity ; and that we chiefly prize both our temporal and our spiritual blessings, as gifts of his hand, and pledges of his fatherly love. This is gratitude. And if such is *our* spirit ; if we come to the house of God this day, in the exercise of such a disposition, we may humbly hope that He is graciously with us, to smile on our services, and accept our offerings.

Secondly. We are taught by the bright example in the text, that there is no season unsuitable for praise and pious joy ; that there are no circumstances amid which a devout heart will not find abundant materials for gratitude. This is a lesson which we are slow to learn, and ready to forget.

Let the pious prophet be our Monitor on the interesting subject. We have, indeed, reason to bless God that, at present, we are far from realizing in their extent, those privations and sufferings described in the text. As yet, our fields and our orchards yield, with some exceptions, their accustomed products. Our flocks are not yet literally cut off from their folds, nor our herds from the stalls. The present year, like all the past, has been crowned with the abundant and diversified goodness of our heavenly Benefactor. Let us then unite to render him the glory and the praise which are due to his holy name. Let us, this day, agreeably to the admonition of our pious and beloved CHIEF MAGISTRATE, offer our sacrifice of thanksgiving for the invaluable blessing of *health*, which has so generally pervaded our nation ; for the *degree of plenty* which has crowned the year ; for *quietness and safety in our dwellings* ; for *preservation from the ravages of war*, and from *the violence of lawless and vindictive men* ; for *deliverance*, in instances more than we can number, from *public calamity*, or *domestic distress* ; for the *preservation of so many of our fellow-citizens, exposed to the perils of war* ; for the ample *provision* divinely made for our *individual wants* ; for the *pleasures of social life* ; and all those *improvements* which add to our convenience and comfort ; and, *above all*, for the *riches of divine wisdom and love* ; for the unspeakable gift of a SAVIOUR ; and for the glorious gospel, in all its rich variety of instructions, promises, ordinances and blessings, still indulged to a guilty and thankless people. For these favors, and for thousands and millions of others, which elude our memory, or baffle the power of expression ; favors which our

sins have forfeited, but which the adorable patience of Heaven bestows and continues, let us render the tribute of sincere and ardent praise. *Bless the Lord, O our souls, and all that is within us, bless his holy name! Bless the Lord, O our souls, and forget not all his benefits!*

True, my brethren, amid numberless causes of gratitude, we have much to deplore. Though the present year has been, generally speaking, a year of competence, as it respects the productions of the earth, we have experienced, in some particulars, the frowns of Heaven. Through an unusual want of heat, the Indian harvest has greatly failed; a failure which is most severely felt by the poorer part of the community; and which, in our present embarrassed state, it is scarce possible to supply from the more productive parts of the country. Our commerce, once the grand instrument of wealth to the merchant, of employment and bread to the laborer and mechanic, of convenience and comfort to every class in the community, and of supplies to the public treasury—alas! its condition is too well known. It bleeds, and almost expires, by repeated, and I fear, incurable wounds. Hence our national treasury, but recently full to overflowing, is drained; public credit has received a shock; the arts and sciences languish; the rich have become poor; the poor starve; and bankruptcy and beggary stalk abroad in every part of the land.

One consolation until of late, was ours; and it was precious. Amid a conflicting, bleeding world, we were a nation at peace. How enviable the exemption! How inestimable the blessing! Would to Heaven we had known our privilege, and held

it fast! But no—our ill-fated country, too, must precipitate itself into war—into war with the nation from which we sprang; a nation which professes, supports and propagates the same religion as ourselves; a nation which, in Europe, stands *a column amid a scene of ruins*; and the only nation which has hitherto opposed an effectual resistance to the most ferocious and overwhelming tyranny which ever afflicted the world. Questions which respect the *necessity* of this war, its *justice*, its *expediency*, its probable *consequences*, I shall not discuss at present. My sentiments on these topics were given you with undisguised freedom, on a former occasion.* It can be scarce needful to add, that nothing has arisen since, to change them. Amid a thousand painful thoughts which rush on the mind, at every recurrence of the subject, there is one reflection, truly agonizing. While most other nations have been dragged into this contest by a cruel compulsion, *ours* is a *free-will offering* on the altar of despotism. Yes; the only republic now in existence is really, though not professedly, lending its aid to a Power which has subjugated a great portion of the civilized world—a Power which seems resolved to efface if possible, every vestige of liberty from the globe.

Hitherto, the war has been signally unblest, and productive of little but disaster, defeat and disgrace on our part. Heaven grant that we may profit by this dear-bought experience; and that before our nation shall plunge the gulf of hopeless, irretrievable ruin, it may solemnly pause and ponder!—There is an inspired maxim, not less applicable to nations, than to individuals. Let it be seriously

*The Fast, July 23.

considered in this crisis, and let the stoutest heart among us tremble. *He that being often reproved, hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.*

It is consoling to observe that symptoms of a reflecting spirit have recently manifested themselves—and that such numbers, in various and distant parts of the community, are retracing their steps. Delusion is rapidly vanishing. Men begin to shut their ears to the suggestions of prejudice and passion, and to take counsel from reason, from common sense, and their own real interests. The reform has begun with the people. We fondly hope it may prove contagious, and extend its salutary influence to the rulers. Yet who can sufficiently deplore the numberless and nameless evils which have already sprung from this dire, unnatural war? The lives of hundreds of our citizens sacrificed—the defeat and capture of thousands—an enormous expenditure of the public money—the necessity of oppressive taxes—an increased bitterness of party spirit—animosities and contentions, terminating in bloodshed—repeated and violent assaults on the liberty of speech, and of the press—a reduced standard of morals—an alarming increase of every species of vice—thousands reduced from wealth, or competence, to beggary—thousands more, forced into absolute idleness, and thus becoming a prey to every temptation—the sins and miseries of privateering—these make but a *part* of the dismal catalogue.—Still let us, in this period of calamity, hope in the mercy of Heaven. “The Lord can clear the darkest skies.” True, we are a guilty people. Our iniquities, our provocations are great. But the compassions of God are *infinite*. Should

we, as a people, be humbled under his mighty hand; should our distresses teach us wisdom; should we penitently return to the forsaken path of duty, the blessing would be unspeakable. We might hope for the returning smiles of heaven. Our suffering, bleeding, sinking country would once more rejoice in Jehovah, as the *God of her salvation*.

Let me not conclude, without distinctly reminding my beloved hearers of the deep and everlasting interest which they all have, *as individuals*, in the subject which has employed our meditations this day.

The picture exhibited in the text, of piety, suffering yet triumphant; exulting amid distress, in the care and love of its ALMIGHTY FRIEND—What rich and sublime consolation does it present to the children of God! Hail, ye *highly favored* among the sons and daughters of men! See here your felicity. Take a survey of your portion. If the omnipotent and eternal God can make you happy, your happiness is secure; for this glorious Being is *your God; the God of your salvation*. He has begun to save you from *sin*, your worst foe, and from all its dire consequences. And He will save you to eternity. He is your God *now*, and He will be your God *forever*. You have then a source of enjoyment inaccessible to change, and independent of outward circumstances. Should you be stripped of every worldly comfort, of every human friend, still your better Friend and portion lives, and is the same. Should war, famine, disease, death, stalk through the land, and waste a guilty community, still you are safe under the protection, and happy in the favor, of the unchanging Jehovah.

Should the earth tremble to its centre, should the deep-rooted mountains be hurried into the midst of the sea, still the basis on which your happiness is built, remains unshaken ; still you may *rejoice in the Lord, and joy in the God of your salvation.* Surely then you will not suffer the *common* calamities of life to embitter your spirits, or impair your confidence in your Father's wisdom and love. You will trust him, you will think honorably and affectionately of him, at all times, and under all changes. Your habitual inquiry will be, *What shall we render to the Lord* for his wondrous mercy ; and your constant solicitude, to let all around you see "how much you owe, how much you love." The honor of God will be very near your hearts ; nor will you think any exertions too great, any sacrifices too costly, which may promote his cause in the world. You will look around you with compassion, on those who know not your blessedness, *who live without God in the world* ; and while you unceasingly pray for them, you will endeavor, by every kind and winning method, to allure them away from the perishing vanities of the world, and lead them up to the fountain of life and salvation.

And O my unhappy friends ! who know nothing of the blessedness of religion—who have no part nor lot in the privileges of the children of God. Are these things nothing to you ? Have you no concern in them ? Have you no desires after them ? Think not that the consolations of the christian are all delusion and enthusiasm, because you have never experienced them. They are great realities. They are realities of infinite moment to you. True, while the world smiles ; while health, and ease, and outward comforts are yours, you may

be less sensible of your need of these blessings. But remember, the world will not always smile. You will not always riot in health, and in the bounties of Providence. Suppose yourselves a moment according to the prophet's description, deprived of every outward comfort, and plunged in the depths of indigence and distress. Have you any internal resources, any store of comforts for such an hour ? Have you a GOD to rejoice in, when all created blessings shall depart ? Have you a SAVIOR to receive your souls, when your bodies shall languish and agonize on the bed of death ? If you have not, then you are *wretched*. Believe it, take the word of eternal truth for it, *he is a wretch*, in life, in death, and to eternity, who has *no God*.—Accept then the counsel, the kind invitation of this glorious and condescending Being. *Acquaint yourselves with him now, and be at peace ; thereby shall good come unto you.* Renounce your idols ; forsake the sins and follies of the world ; open your hearts to the living God ; choose him as your portion ; love him as your Friend—and doubt not that he will be your Friend and portion. His providence shall be your guard, his wisdom your guide, and his unfailing presence your comfort in sorrow, your light in darkness, your life in death, and your bliss through eternity.

ERRATUM.—Page 12, Line 1. For *ever*, read *never*.