

PRAISE TO GOD
FOR
INDEPENDENCE,

A SERMON,

PREACHED ON THE 4TH OF JULY, 1823, BY THE
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"OH, THAT MEN WOULD PRAISE THE LORD FOR HIS
GOODNESS, AND FOR HIS WONDERFUL WORKS TO THE
CHILDREN OF MEN."

Psalm cvii, 8.

WASHINGTON, PA.
WM. SAMPLE, *FRINT.*

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PSALM CVII, 8.

THE fourth of July is intimately connected, in the mind of every citizen of our republic, with an important event in its history, and it will be the desire of every true lover of his country among us, that this connexion should be strengthened by every return of this anniversary. The declaration of independence, made by the representatives of this nation, forty-seven years ago, cannot fail to inspire sentiments, which, in a political point of view, it is important to cherish, as being congenial to that spirit of liberty whence it originated. It is not, however, in a political point of view that we shall consider the subject at present. The design of our meeting, in this place, requires us to give to our thoughts a wider scope and a more lofty direction. Leaving it to the mere politician, to review the event of our independence in connexion with the memory of the sages who projected it, with the maxims of political justice on which it was founded, and with the valor and the perseverance, the toils and the sufferings by which it was established, we shall contemplate it in a light still more interesting and important, and certainly no less becoming either our character as citizens, or as creatures accountable to God for the right use of all the privileges we enjoy—we shall contemplate it as an event taking place in the good providence of God, and demanding from us, together with all our fellow-citizens, gratitude and praise.

To this view of the event which we have met to celebrate, we are naturally led by the text. In the psalm from which it is taken, the psalmist commemorates the goodness of God towards the human race generally, manifested in the dealings of his providence towards nations as well as individuals; classifies the instances of his goodness, and at the conclusion of each class, utters the same fervent desire, "Oh, that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men."

You will notice, my hearers, that it is not gratitude merely which is here required—not the bare sentiment as it is felt in the heart, but the sentiment as it is expressed by public acts. It is not gratitude : it is thanksgiving. It is more. A benefit bestowed produces gratitude, the outward expression of which is thanksgiving. But a benefit bestowed in such a manner as to carry with it signal manifestations of the goodness of the person bestowing it, produces another sentiment besides gratitude—admiration. Now, gratitude and admiration combined are expressed by praise. The proper objects of both these sentiments are contained in the text ; “ goodness,” the proper object of gratitude ; “ wonderful works,” the proper object of admiration. Praise is the public expression of both these sentiments. I say the public expression. God needs not words or outward actions from us, to render visible in the eye of his omniscience the most hidden emotions of our hearts. He “ knoweth our thoughts afar off,” ere they are distinctly formed, so as to become the objects of our own consciousness. But, in the duties of religion, God and ourselves are not, at least, in all cases, the only beings concerned. Our fellow-men are also interested. They have a right to be benefitted by our religious feelings and impressions. Devotional feeling and desire may, indeed, often rise up to God from the pious heart, covered and enclosed on all sides from the view of mortals by the stillness and silence of solitary ejaculation—and a precious and delightful exercise it is, thus to pour out the heart to God in secret—but, there are other occasions when we are required to let the ascending current of fervent and holy desire diffuse its influence upon the souls of others around us ; and to do this it must vent itself in the expression of words and actions.

The religion prescribed by the Author of nature corresponds with the uncorrupted tendencies of nature, which are found in the constitution of our minds and bodies, and which powerfully urge us to communicate to others those views and feelings, with which our own minds have been previously and strongly affected : and the enemies of revealed religion may declaim as long and as bitterly as they please against the use and propriety of public acts of devotion ; all who know by experience what the sentiments of devotion really are, will, in practice, dissent from these advocates of a dumb and concealed religion, and agree with the psalmist in the hundred and sixteenth psalm, “ What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits towards me? I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord. I will pay my vows unto the Lord now in the presence of all his people. Oh, Lord, truly I am thy

servant; I am thy servant, and the son of thy handmaid, thou hast loosed my bonds. I will offer to thee the sacrifice of thanksgiving, and will call upon the name of the Lord. I will pay my vows unto the Lord, now in the presence of all his people: in the courts of the Lord's house, in the midst of thee, O, Jerusalem. Praise ye the Lord." It is, then, the public expression of admiration and gratitude which the psalmist intends by praise in the text. He intimates that this duty is too much neglected, and expresses his desire that it should be otherwise. These are the ideas contained in the text: we shall pursue them, however, only within the limits of the subject suggested by the present occasion, and enquire,

1. What is requisite in order to praise God aright for our national independence and the "wonderful works" by which it was established:
2. Enquire why this duty is so much neglected among us: and
3. Shew how desirable it would be for us as a people, if the fact were otherwise. Oh, that the people of these United States would praise the Lord for his goodness and for his wonderful works unto the children of men and to themselves, in particular!

I. What is requisite to the right performance of this duty? An enlightened understanding, a christian spirit, and a godly temper.

An enlightened understanding, that we may know the value of the blessing for which we are called upon to praise God; a christian spirit, that we may offer praise in an acceptable manner; and a godly temper, that we may regard God, and Him alone, as the proper author of the "goodness and the wonderful works" which we celebrate, and therefore the only proper object of the praise that we render. May God grant us these dispositions, for Jesus' sake! Amen!

To praise the Lord aright on this occasion, an enlightened understanding is requisite. Ps. xlvii, 6. "Sing praises to God, sing praises: sing praises to our King, sing praises. For God is the king of all the earth, sing ye praises with understanding." "I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also," says Paul, I. Cor. xix, 15.

That we may be suitably affected by the goodness of God to us, we must possess correct information as to the character of God and our relation to him, as his dependent and accountable creatures, and especially, as to the value of the benefits which particularly demand our gratitude. Leaving other considerations out of view for the present, suffer me to insist a little on the importance of that great national blessing, our independence, which

we are called upon by the occasion to commemorate, by offering up our praises to Almighty God.

We have no disposition to speak evil of Great Britain. It is the land of our fathers. It contains a more worthy population, than can be found in any other country in Europe, more enlightened, more virtuous, more free. But, still, we are under the strongest obligations to praise God for our independence; for this reason, amongst innumerable others, that, by it, we have been severed, and that in the most happy juncture of time, from all political connection with that country. That this great section of our continent, over which the authority of our government extends, should remain forever linked with the destinies of a government on the other side of the Atlantic, it were the most extravagant and preposterous to suppose; but certainly, it was not to have been expected that the separation should have taken place, without the consent of the mother country, at a period so early in the history of the colonies. That it did take place, at such a period, has been a circumstance peculiarly auspicious. Since that period, she, with the rest of Europe, has been involved in scenes the most terrific ever displayed on the face of the globe. Over the length and breadth of Europe has the demon of discord been stalking and collecting its inhabitants to the bloody field. The wars that have followed have been unexampled in the history of our species. It was not one nation lifting up sword against another, but a general congress of the nations rushing together in mortal conflict. Had these United States continued, during these sanguinary scenes, colonies of Great Britain, how different may we not suppose, would have been our situation from what it has actually been! And, if we have reason to praise God for our independence because it has been the means, hitherto, of our separation from these troubles which have, in such a terrible manner, affected the nations of Europe; we have no less reason for gratitude, on the same account, when we take a prospect of the future. What is the situation of that devoted portion of the globe at this hour? The people without confidence in their rulers; and the rulers without confidence in their people: princes, supported by an immense horde of mercenary soldiers, on the one hand, arrayed against their subjects; and their subjects, on the other, impatient of the restraints of power, and eager for revolt. This state of things cannot long continue, but gives dreadful omen of a conflict approaching among the powers of Europe, more terrible and more extensive, even than that from which they have been so lately delivered. And, if we consult the "more sure word of prophecy" for the fates of this distracted portion of

globe, we shall there find that these gloomy anticipations, which in themselves may be considered as amounting to nothing more than probable conjecture, receive abundant confirmation. For, that Europe is the seat of "the Beast," over which he once reigned in gloomy supremacy, and upon which God has now been pouring out the vials of his indignation for so many ages, is beyond dispute. And according to the series of events symbolized by the "Harvest" and the "Vintage" in the "Revelations," it would seem, that the latter of these events is yet future, and not far distant. And when, in the mystical language of this book, "the angel" shall receive an order "to thrust in his sickle into the earth and gather the vine of the earth, and cast it into the great wine-press of the wrath of God, and when the wine-press shall be trodden without the city, and blood shall come out of the wine-press even unto the horse bridles by the space of a thousand and six hundred furlongs—when this awful event shall have taken place—when this deluge of blood shall have rolled away, may we not indulge the pleasing hope, that our beloved country shall be beyond the limits of its destined course?

Hitherto we have confined our remarks to but one of the numerous advantages belonging to our national independence. Time will not permit us to enter further into detail. We shall, therefore, dismiss this particular with simply mentioning—the greater degree of liberty, civil and religious, to which independence has given rise; the dignity and standing in point of national character which it has conferred, and the influence this must have upon the public mind, in stimulating to honorable enterprise in every thing conducive to national greatness, and besides all this, the advantage, in point of private happiness, which our citizens may now enjoy when they reflect that public offices in the administration of government are filled, not by the minions of a foreign court, the cringing sycophants of distant royalty, nor by the friends and needy dependents of an hereditary nobility, but by men of their own choosing, their friends and their neighbors, whose interests, attachments, and views are identified with their own.

2. To praise the Lord in an acceptable manner, a christian spirit is requisite. We should greatly err, my hearers, if, in tracing to their causes the revolutions which take place in the political world, we have not a special regard to that dominion over the nations which He exercises whom "the armies of heaven follow," and who "hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords." The government of the nations is one of the prerogatives of the Lord Jesus, which he exercises for effecting those gracious

purposes which he has it in view to accomplish respecting his church, as also for performing those works of judgment, by which he destroys the incorrigible enemies of his reign. The nations that refuse to do him homage he "rules with a rod of iron" and "dashes in pieces like a potter's vessel." Hence, when it is announced by God to the world, that he has set his "king upon his holy hill of Zion," the announcement is immediately followed by an admonition to earthly potentates, "Be wise now, therefore, O ye kings; be instructed, ye judges of the earth." Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little." Ps. ii, 11, 12. The loyal subjects of the king of Zion were persecuted in Great Britain. Pains and penalties were inflicted on them, to escape from which they sought an asylum on this continent, then an howling wilderness, where they might enjoy the rights of conscience unmolested by royal or papal usurpation. Here began that train of events, which, under the direction of the Lord Jesus, led to the independence of these states.—Let us bear this in mind, my hearers; let us mingle the exercises of a christian spirit with our praises to Almighty God for national blessings and national deliverances, recollecting that they should be greatly endeared to us, by the consideration that they have been brought about by the King of Zion in pursuance of his designs of mercy towards his church and people.

Let it be further remarked, here, that in praising the Lord for national blessings—and the same remark will hold good of all blessings whatever—we must always have, not only a due respect to the Lord Jesus in his character as King, for the reason assigned, but also in his character as Priest; since it is through his oblation and intercession alone, that we can approach the Divine Majesty, with acceptance, in offering praise, or, indeed, in the performance of any other duty. Such is the nature of that great deliverance which was brought by Christ, and such the importance of his atonement in the whole of our intercourse with God, that unless we are, in the first place, grateful for these blessings, we can hardly be said, in truth, to be grateful for any other; and it is certain, that in no other way than through these, can our gratitude, in any case, be accepted.

3. A godly temper is the third requisite in our praises to the Lord for our national independence.—There is no place in our subject for the indulgence of that species of philosophy which delights to dwell, with rapturous enthusiasm, upon the military talents of that illustrious chieftain who led our armies during the revolutionary struggle, and upon the other secondary causes

employed in effecting our independence ; while it pays as little regard to the First Cause, as though, indeed, the idea of a first cause and an over-ruling providence were to be exploded, as the figment of a heated imagination. Let the heroes and sages of seventy-six receive their merited honor. Let their names be revered, and their memories be handed down to a grateful posterity. Let them be ranked with the benefactors of mankind. Among them let *George Washington* stand pre-eminent. But, let it still be remembered, that they were but the instruments which a good and righteous God employed, in avenging our cause and working deliverance for us. Yes : it was He, the Lord of hosts, that effected it. It was He, who, having it in view to make us a free, great and happy nation, raised up those illustrious personages, and endowed them with those qualifications that were requisite for the several parts which they were to perform, in rearing the fabric of our independence. He gave sagacity to our politicians, wisdom to our senators, valor and military skill to our generals, courage and fidelity to their armies ; and to the people at large, a patient perseverance ; while He cast confusion and darkness upon the councils of our adversaries, and, by numerous and remarkable interpositions of his providence, baffled their efforts and disappointed their hopes. The disparity of the forces embarked in the contest, compared with its progress and successful termination, is, itself, a sufficient proof of this. How else should "one chase a thousand, and five put ten thousand to flight?"—how else should a nation of but three millions of people, without funds, without ships, without experience in military affairs, without resources of any kind, come off superior, in a war of seven years continuance, to the forces of a nation, whose history was a history of wars and victories, whose navy made her mistress of the ocean, at whose feet commerce poured treasures drawn from every clime and region of the globe, and who, by her power and policy, had the mercenary soldiers of Europe and the savages of our own borders at her command ? The giant of Gath, equipped in all the habiliments of battle, is prostrated before a stripling, with no other weapon but a sling and a stone. So, in the case before us, there was the same disparity of force, the same boastful confidence on the side of the stronger party, and the same humble reliance on the God of battles, on that of the weaker ; and a similar issue to the contest. And, can we, amidst the celebrations of this day, refuse to Almighty God, who alone determined the issue of the contest in our favor, that tribute of praise, which is so justly his ? or, can we be so unreasonable, not to say impious, as to permit instruments and second-

ary causes to rob him of the honor due to his name, for the "goodness and the wonderful works" which we are called, on this occasion, to commemorate? God forbid. His alone was the power: His alone be the praise.

II. The duty which has just been explained is lamentably neglected by us as a people. It is notorious, that in the manner of celebrating our independence generally throughout the United States, there is nothing of the nature of praise to God. To what can this be owing? Is it because the value of this blessing is not properly understood? or because it is considered as standing in no connexion with the Head of the church and his rule over the nations? or because men have forgotten to ascribe it to its proper cause, the "goodness and the wonderful works" of Almighty God. To these causes, doubtless, must it be ascribed. Nay, we frequently hear it declared, that religion and politics have no connexion. We cannot undertake to say precisely what are the views of those who speak thus. Perhaps they may mean only, that there should be no particular forms of religion prescribed by law: and if so, it is well. But if it be meant, that the laws of christian morality are not binding upon nations, or that any system of state-policy can be sound which is founded in maxims at variance with these laws, or that, when men "fearing God and hating covetousness" are to be found, qualified in other respects for office, others, not of this character, may be innocently elected, or that men in office are not bound to exert their influence in promoting the interests of religion throughout the land; then, I say, is the opinion both dangerous and impious. It is impious, as implying a denial both of the authority and government of God over the nations: and it is dangerous, as it teaches the rulers of this world to set at naught the restraints and obligations of religion, leaving nothing to guide them but the fluctuating and uncertain principles of expediency. To the prevalence, however, of opinions of this kind, or which, indeed, is but saying the same thing in different words, to the want of christian principle among us, especially on subjects of national concernment, it will be owing, that when the accounts of the proceedings of this day, from one extremity of the country to the other, shall meet our eyes in the public prints, it will be seen, that there were, indeed, many and great demonstrations of joy for the fact of our independence while there were few or none, of admiration and gratitude to Almighty God for "his goodness and wonderful works" manifested in its establishment. "And the harp and the viol, the tabret and pipe, and wine are in their feasts; but they regard not the work of the Lord, neither consider the operation of his hands." Isa. v, 12.

III. Now, my hearers, how desirable, that the case were otherwise ! " Oh, that " our fellow-citizens " would praise the Lord for his goodness and for his wonderful works to the children of men. Oh, that there were in them such an heart that they would fear the Lord and keep his commandments always, that it might be well with them and with their children forever." What a spectacle of moral grandeur would this nation exhibit, if it were characterized by those properties requisite to a devout and grateful acknowledgment of the goodness of God ! Upon such a spectacle the inhabitants of heaven might look down with complacency ; and among the inhabitants of earth, every lover of moral excellence would turn his eye towards it with admiration and delight, as presenting a scene of glory amid the darkness of this world, like the vision of " the holy city, the new Jerusalem," which the beloved disciple saw " coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband."

The national character, if adorned and strengthened by those virtues necessary for praising God aright, would afford the best possible security to our liberties, while it would render the possession of them doubly valuable. Christian principle is necessary to give solidity and elevation to political virtue. The man who holds his political rights, not merely as the prize of his valor, or his birth-right, but as a boon from the God of providence, will feel himself under the strongest obligations to defend them against every aggressor, and will be careful, at the same time, not to forfeit them under the laws of eternal justice, by wantonly invading the rights of others. Let the men of that generation, which saw the wonderful works of God in the achievement of our national independence, exemplify these remarks. A great proportion of them were men who feared God and put their trust in him. A strong and high religious feeling, often excited and supported by addresses from the pulpit as well as from the press, glowed in the breast of the christian part of the community, animated their valor and supported their patience in those times of peril.

We have said, also, that religious principle enhances the value of political rights. It does so by preserving liberty from abuse. Without it, equal laws, free institutions and all the forms of civil liberty may subsist, for a time ; but they will be little else than forms. What is the right of character, for instance, to a man, in a community where the licentiousness of the tongue and of the press is restrained by no religious principle ? Who, that possesses any virtuous sensibility, will suffer himself to be proposed as a candidate for the suffrages of the people, when he knows, that the moment this is done, ca-

lummy will open upon him a thousand batteries, and that should he be successful, the spirit of envy, never to be appeased, will be busy in distorting and misrepresenting all his actions? But, will nothing but religious principle preserve liberty from abuse, and thus secure to every member of the community the unmolested enjoyment of his rights? I answer, no—nothing, except the restraints of power; and in proportion as these are imposed, liberty is abridged. And, if from public stations, we descend to private life, and follow men through all the various scenes of their occupation, we shall see abundant evidence to convince us, that the influence of civil liberty upon private happiness, is inconsiderable compared with that of true religion, and almost imperceptible without it.

If the genuine notion of liberty be, the peaceable possession of our unalienable rights; then, a vicious people cannot be free. The freedom of a savage they may possess: but a savage has no rights, none, at least, which are not liable, every moment, to be invaded by superior force. And what superiority in physical force is, among savages, that, is superiority in art and knavery among a civilized, irreligious people.

I add, in the last place, that a disposition to praise God aright for his goodness and for his wonderful works, is desirable, because, in its varied exercises through life, it constitutes a part of that preparation, whereby the good are fitted for heaven. It belongs, as we have already seen, to the essence of true religion, to which pertains the promise of the life which is to come, as well as of that which now is, and which, while it extends to all the relations of human society, and sheds a most delightful influence upon them all, conducts its possessor to immortal felicity at last, and, by accustoming us to contemplate and admire the goodness and the wonderful works of God, here below, prepares us for the beatific vision of his face, above, where his goodness is displayed in the highest and widest range of its operations forever. Happy, thrice happy they on whom the goodness of God produces these effects! May it have these effects upon us all, my hearers; for heavy and severe will be the retributions awaiting us, if we be found rebels against the Lord, notwithstanding all the great and wonderful manifestations of his goodness to us, as a people. Nor is it enough, that we express our gratitude for the Lord's goodness to this nation, by observing this anniversary as a day of public thanksgiving: we must revere the authority of God, while we love him for his goodness; a sense of gratitude to God must augment the force and efficiency of all our obligations; and we must take delight in reflecting the image of his beneficence on all around us. And, here, I cannot avoid selecting from the number of those bene-

volent enterprizes which always solicit our attention as men and professing christians; one which the present occasion particularly suggests to our notice and which especially concerns us as citizens of this confederated republic. I have in view, you perceive, the condition of that unfortunate class of our country's population, to whom she denies not only the privilege of citizens but the rights of freemen; and that, though she has published it to the world as one of the fundamental doctrines on which the charter of her own liberties is predicated, that "all men are born equally free." My hearers, there is awful guilt resting upon this nation; and, in the language of that distinguished citizen, who, it is said, penned the declaration of our independence, "I tremble for my country, when I reflect that God is just." It would, I grant, be both injustice and folly to grant an immediate and universal release to the slave population. But none of us can believe that this nation has ever done, or is now attempting to do all that ought to be done on this subject. Far, very far from it! Have we not seen, in our streets, day after day, companies of men, women and children driven (generally chained) towards those regions in the west, to which our congress, during the last year, extended the curses of slavery? Have not laws been enacted, in some of the states, prohibiting the instruction, the religious instruction of the blacks? And what has been the state of public feeling in regard to these things? Has there been any pity, any shame, any indignation excited?—The day will come, O my country, when the forbearance of that God, who is no respecter of persons, and who "has made of one blood all nations of men," shall, I fear, be exhausted towards thee: and then, with what measure thou hast meted to the poor African, it shall be measured to thee again. "Wo to thee that spoilest and thou wast not spoiled, and dealest treacherously and they dealt not treacherously with thee: when thou shalt cease to spoil, thou shalt be spoiled, and when thou shalt make an end to deal treacherously, they shall deal treacherously with thee. O Lord, be gracious unto us, we have waited for thee: be thou their arm every morning, our salvation, also, in the time of trouble." Isa. xxxiii, 1, 2.

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