

*History of the 70*

*The Christian Duty of Thanksgiving.*

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A  
S E R M O N,

PREACHED AT

*HANWORTH* in the County of *MIDDLESEX*,

On *THURSDAY, APRIL 23, 1789,*

BEING THE DAY APPOINTED FOR

A Solemn Thanksgiving to Almighty God,

F O R

*His MAJESTY's Happy Recovery.*

By *T H O M A S L A N C A S T E R,*

*CURATE OF FELTHAM, AND MASTER OF AN ACADEMY AT  
PARSON'S GREEN, MIDDLESEX.*

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*L O N D O N :*

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D E D I C A T I O N,

To the King's Most Excellent Majesty.

Most Gracious Sovereign,

**T**H E happy Event of YOUR MAJESTY'S Recovery claims not only the *joyful*, but also the *devout* and *lasting Remembrance* of all your Subjects. They have attested their Joy by unexampled Tokens of Attachment to your sacred Person and Loyalty to your Government. Never was any National Event  
A celebrated

celebrated with such UNIVERSAL AND HEARTFELT SATISFACTION, by all Ranks, from the highest to the lowest.

NEITHER have they been unmindful of that Tribute of RELIGIOUS GRATITUDE to Heaven, which the Event so justly demands — and which it is the peculiar Duty of my Profession to cherish and strive to perpetuate.

IT is on this Principle, that I am desirous, *with all Humility*, to lay at YOUR MAJESTY'S Feet, a Discourse, preached on THAT MOST HAPPY OCCASION.

THE Obscurity of its Author, and its own Imperfections, might have dictated its Suppression. But the MAGNITUDE OF THE EVENT, which seems to call

upon

upon every loyal Subject to testify his zealous Attachment, and make an humble Tender of his sincere Congratulations — and YOUR MAJESTY'S known Condescension — have outweighed all other Considerations, and determined me to send it into the World, under the Sanction of YOUR MAJESTY'S illustrious Name.

DEDICATIONS, SIRE, are often rendered nauseous by fulsome Adulation: and even just Praise is not always acceptable to the best Minds. Therefore, though the public and private Virtues which have deservedly enthroned YOUR MAJESTY in the HEARTS OF YOUR PEOPLE, afford a copious Theme for the latter, I will not presume to approach with an Offering which is often counterfeited — often most lavished upon Characters most opposite to that of YOUR MAJESTY.

THAT

THAT YOUR MAJESTY may long *thus* reign, in  
*Health, Happiness and Peace*, — blessed with the  
Society of the *best of Queens*; — and that YOUR  
MAJESTY'S *Royal Descendants* may wear and adorn the  
Crown of these Realms to the End of Time; is  
the devout Prayer of

YOUR MAJESTY'S

Most loyal and dutiful Subject,

And obedient Servant,

*Parson's Green,  
July the 20th. 1789.*

THOMAS LANCASTER.

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A S E R M O N, &c.

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I T H E S S A L O N I A N S, Chap. v. Ver. 18.

*In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of  
God in Christ Jesus concerning you.*

**I**T is a remarkable and very engaging peculiarity of the holy Religion we profess, that the duties which are performed with the greatest pleasure, are most frequently and urgently pressed upon us. This is a plain proof, both that our Religion is from God—and that he, in giving it to us, intended our Happiness.

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This remark is in a singular manner verified in the sublime and ravishing duties of Praise and Thanksgiving to God, for general and particular mercies. No duty is discharged with such obvious pleasure and glowing satisfaction. It seems sufficient for its own reward, if there were no other. And no duty is more frequently urged upon Christians. Not an Epistle of St. Paul is without admonitions to it. The other inspired penmen of the New Testament strongly recommend it. And our blessed Master himself commands it on all proper occasions. Moreover, the rapturous effusions of the holy Psalmist, of Moses, and of all the Prophets, plainly shew, that this was the most fervent and edifying duty of Religion, under the Mosaic dispensation also.

Duly impressed with such considerations, I can readily believe, that all you, who are assembled here this day, have met, with thankful hearts, joyfully to celebrate an happy event, which deserves to be recorded, and for ever remembered, as a lively instance of God's wonderful providential mercy to all the people of this land.

Let

Let us now, if you please, consider the Duty of Thankfulness, as it is recommended in the Text;  
*In every thing give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.*

The practice of many Christians unhappily confines their Thanksgivings to great and rare occasions: but every thing we enjoy, we enjoy from the blessing of God: consequently, it becomes us, agreeably to this admonition of the Apostle, *In every thing to give thanks.*

And the Reason for which he calls upon us *in every thing to give thanks*, establishes our obligation to the duty of Thanksgiving, on a very deep and firm foundation. *For this* (says he) *is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.* Thus he makes it an indispensable Christian duty. He wishes us to pay our Thanksgivings, on all occasions, from a *Principle of Gratitude* to God, for the mercies and blessings procured and conveyed to us through Jesus Christ our Saviour. This, I conceive to be clearly implied in the Apostle's  

Expression;

Expression; and my idea is confirmed by the analogy of a similar case in the Old Testament.

If we look back to the delivery of the Law, by the hand of Moses, to the Children of Israel at Mount Sinai, we shall find that God prefaced the Ten Commandments with these remarkable words; \* *I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.* This amounts to as much as if he had said, "As I have delivered you out of a state of slavery, and rescued you from the tyranny of those who ruled you with extreme rigour, and oppressed you unmercifully: the return I require of you, is your obedience to the commands I am about to lay down, for the regulation of your conduct towards me, and towards one another." Thus, God demanded the obedience of the Israelites to his commands, on the *Principle of Gratitude* for great favours done to them.

\* Exodus xx. 2.

Now Jesus Christ, our blessed Saviour, instead of a temporal, effected a spiritual Deliverance for us. Instead of the slavery of Egypt, he hath redeemed us from the slavery of Sin! Instead of proud Pharaoh tyrannizing over unresisting captives, he hath vanquished our arch-enemy, Satan; and delivered us from the destruction of eternal Death! This is an obligation conferred on Christians by their Saviour, of infinitely more importance, than a deliverance from temporal bondage and captivity.—It demands, therefore, proportionably greater exertions of Gratitude from us to our adorable Redeemer. And he has thereby acquired the greatest right to demand our attention to our duty, in all its branches, on the *Principle of Gratitude* for the unspeakable favours and blessings he has bestowed upon, and procured to us.

Well, therefore, might the Apostle stir up his Christian converts, as well, generally, to the practice of every duty; as particularly, *in every thing to give thanks,*

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from a conviction that *this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning them*. And well may all, who call themselves Christians, be urged to the exercise of continual Thanksgiving, in gratitude to God for their Redemption by Christ Jesus! For in him we have all things pertaining to life and godliness—all that is needful to our present comfort, and everlasting happiness.

This comprehensive principle applies, in common, to all Christians, at all times, even under the most unfavourable outward circumstances.

Who, then, does not see that its application to us of this favoured land, is made much stronger, by the various blessings and privileges enjoyed by us, but denied to others; and especially by the never-to-be-forgotten Mercy, for which we are this day assembled, to offer up our devout and joyful Thanksgivings to the God of all comforts?

Let us reflect a little on the extent of this duty—  
 think on the particular Mercy we are now met to  
 celebrate

celebrate—and consider how we may exhibit the most  
 lively and lasting testimony of our Gratitude to  
 Heaven.

The duty of Thanksgiving is of continual obligation. And the occasions of Thankfulness are perhaps more numerous than our minds can well comprehend. Not a day, nor an hour, goes over our heads, without presenting to each of us, many occasions of Thankfulness. In the morning, what a fine field have we for the display of Thankfulness, when we recollect our preservation from all the horrors and dangers of darkness? In the evening, consider how many persons daily fall sacrifices to those disasters, which we call accidents—contemplate your own escapes; and you will, I trust, see great reason for Thankfulness to the merciful power who has conducted you through the day in safety. As often as you receive the refreshment of meat and drink, think on the thousands who are, at the same moment, agonizing under the distresses of hunger and thirst; and you will, doubtless, be thank-  
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ful to him who sustains you with food. Contemplate your raiment—think of those who are shivering with cold and nakedness; and be thankful to him who has made so merciful a distinction in your favour. Consider the comforts of your habitation: then turn your eye upon the destitute, homeless wanderer, who hath not where to lay his head; and though your habitation be poor, you must thankfully acknowledge, that it is a great deal better than none.—Numerous as these occasions of Thankfulness are, they are far from being all that exist. Every enjoyment, every occurrence, nay every circumstance, when properly attended to, will furnish ample scope for the exercise of our Thankfulness to the merciful Giver of all good things; either on a spiritual, or on a temporal account. Every blessing of Heaven, whether it regards our individual, our social, our religious, or our political state, is to be considered as an effect of the divine bounty to us; and, as such, claims our particular Thanks, and warmest acknowledgments.

Reflect

Reflect, for instance, on the mercy we are now met to celebrate.

That our most gracious and beloved Sovereign was lately afflicted with a most alarming and hopeless disorder, is a truth well known to us all. Our prayers were offered up for his recovery. And, I believe, it is no more than justice to the devotion and loyalty of his subjects, to say, that they were offered up with a degree of fervency and unanimity very rarely equalled. We were, I trust, profitably humbled before God, at the prospect of the evils that might possibly arise to us, by a King, so *beloved*, and so *deserving* of our love, being snatched so suddenly away from his people.

It hath pleased God, in the abundance of his mercy and goodness, to hear our prayers; and our King is now *perfectly restored* to himself, and to us;—contrary to all expectation,—and in a manner little less than miraculous.

Now for this signal Mercy, we owe to the King of Kings our unfeigned and heart-felt Thanksgivings, and our continual care to approve ourselves lastingly

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grateful for a blessing so much desired. \* *This is the Lord's doing; and it is marvellous, and precious too, in our eyes.* † *The Lord hath done great things for us, whereof we are glad.* || *Now, therefore, stand still, that I may reason with you before the Lord, of all the righteous acts of the Lord, which he did to you and your fathers.* § *Happy art thou, O Israel, who is like unto thee, O people, saved by the Lord?—Therefore, ‡ O come, let us sing unto the Lord; let us heartily rejoice in the strength of our salvation. Let us come before his presence with Thanksgiving, and shew ourselves glad in him with Psalms. For the Lord is a great God, and a great King above all Gods.* † *Now know I, that the Lord helpeth his Anointed; and will bear him from his holy Heaven: even with the wholesome strength of his right hand. Some put their trust in chariots, and some in horses; but we will remember the name of the Lord our God.* \* *The King shall rejoice in thy strength, O Lord: exceeding glad shall he be of thy salvation. Thou hast*

\* Psal. cxviii. 23. † cxxvi. 3. ‡ 1 Sam. xii. 7. § Deut. xxxiii. 29.

|| Psal. xcv. 1, 2, 3. † xx. 6, 7. \* xxi. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7.

Given him his heart's desire, and hast not denied him  
 the request of his lips. For thou shalt prevent him  
 with the blessings of Goodness, and shalt set a crown  
 of pure Gold upon his Head. He asked life of thee,  
 and thou gavest him a long life: even for ever and  
 ever. His honour is great in thy salvation; Glory and  
 great Worship shalt thou lay upon him. For thou  
 shalt give him everlasting Felicity, and make him glad  
 with the joy of thy countenance. And why? because  
 the King putteth his Trust in the Lord: And in the  
 Mercy of the Most Highest he shall not miscarry.

The overflowing joy of your hearts on the happy  
 occasion of this Solemnity, does, I am persuaded, keep  
 all pace with my own. You will not, therefore, want  
 much persuasion to unite with me in † praising the  
 Lord for his Goodness, and declaring the Wonders that  
 he doeth for us, the most favoured among the children  
 of men.—Only we must remember, that the Thank-  
 giving due to our Almighty Protector and best Bene-  
 factor, ought not to terminate with this day, ap-

† Psal. cvii. 8.

pointed for the purpose. We must strive to render a thankful temper of mind habitual to us. It will greatly promote our happiness. It will lead us to delight in drawing near to God: and it will gradually prepare us for Heaven, where all is joy, harmony, and praise.

And, as a Day of Thanksgiving is particularly favourable to innocent Cheerfulness and Mirth, we must be particularly careful to guard this, and every succeeding day, against allowing our mirth to fly off into those extravagant follies and intemperate indulgencies, which have sometimes disgraced Solemnities of this kind; and which, whenever they take place, convert the Festival, into, what is furthest from its intention, an Occasion of Sin. God grant that such a horrid perversion may ever be far from every one of us!

Rather let us think of testifying our Gratitude to Heaven, by *using our most hearty endeavours to promote true Religion and Virtue.*

That leading principle of *Good-will towards men*, with which our blessed Saviour's birth was announced to the world, and which strongly characterises his Religion, renders it incumbent upon Christians at all times to study and practise every thing that can advance either the spiritual or temporal interests of their Fellow-Men. And the distinguished benevolence and humanity of Britons can never be more illustriously brought into action, than at this time, when the remembrance of our beloved Sovereign's Restoration to Health, and to the Exercise of his Government, would be most becomingly *perpetuated to Posterity*, by the erection of some beneficial Establishment, which might bear the Memorial of NATIONAL AND CHRISTIAN GRATITUDE, to the end of time. My present limits will not allow me to be large on this head. Therefore, I can but barely mention an Establishment, which has within these few years had its beginning in this nation. I mean the Sunday Schools. Would God they could be made general on this auspicious Occasion! I know of no undertaking that promises so well, with suitable

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able cultivation, under the Divine Aid, to stem the torrent of prevailing Impiety. They are encouraged by the most worthy, the most sacred, and the most elevated characters amongst us: and I should feel myself singularly happy in being called upon to co-operate with your benevolent views, towards their Establishment in this Parish.

However, this, we must remember, is not the only way in which it is possible for us to promote true Religion and Virtue, in gratitude to Heaven for the Restoration of our King; and for all the the spiritual and temporal Blessings we enjoy.—Our advice, our reproofs, our encouragement, and above all, our example, are means by which it is in our power to encourage the growth of Piety and Morality.

To this end, let us apply *our continual care to adorn the Religion we profess, by leading lives suitable thereto.*

This, my dear Fellow-Christians, is the leading point of all others. This must vindicate our Festival, and give it a lasting grace in the eyes of both God and Man. Indeed, without this, it can be accounted no

better than a solemn mockery of that awful Being, to whom we pretend to offer up our Thanksgivings. For it is certain, no bad man can be sincere in giving Thanks, or in performing any other act of homage to God, so long as he continues bad. The very act of giving Thanks, implies a sensibility of God's goodness, and a desire of his favour.

Therefore, the *Conclusion of the whole* is this; let every man put away the evil of his doings, and from this time forward walk before the Lord in *Newness of life*. We have all of us heretofore seen many afflictions, that have fallen upon us both singly, and as a nation. God hath, at various times, humbled our wickedness with fundry visitations. \* *And* (to use the words of Ezra) *After all that hath come upon us for our evil deeds—seeing that our God hath punished us less than our iniquities have deserved, and hath given us such a Deliverance as this: should we again break his Commandments, would he not be angry with us, till he had consumed us?*

\* Ezra ix. 13, 14.

Therefore,

Therefore, my Brethren, avail yourselves of this *happy time* when God, by his precious Mercies, *invites and allures* you to *seek after the things that belong to your peace*. Seek him now, when he is ready to be found of you. Pray for his grace to renew you in the spirit of your minds. Taste, and see how delightful it is to keep God's Commandments. Live in your duty. Live to God, and to your own Happiness. So shall your Praises and Thanksgivings, your Prayers and Services ascend acceptably to God the Father, thro' Jesus Christ our Lord, and through the blessed Aid of the Holy Ghost.

To whom, Three Persons, but One God, let us now ascribe, as is most due, all Honour and Glory, Praise and Thanksgiving, from this time forth for evermore. *Amen.*

F I N I S.