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DISCOURSE

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DOVER,

NOVEMBER 15TH, 1798,

A DAY OBSERVED

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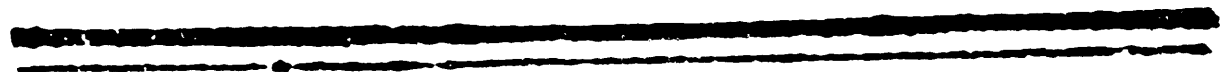
ANNIVERSARY

Thanksgiving.



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A
THANKSGIVING
SERMON.

PSALM 148th. 1st, 2d, 3d, 4th.

Praise ye the Lord. Praise ye the Lord from the heavens : praise him in the heights. Praise ye him, all his angels : praise ye him, all his hosts. Praise ye him, sun and moon : praise him, all ye stars of light. Praise him, ye heavens of heavens.

THESE words were uttered by the Psalmist from a most exalted view of the great Creator, and his works of nature and providence. And they are well adapted to direct our minds on this occasion of public thanks and praise. In the passage before us, the Psalmist first exhorts men to praise the Lord ; and in a particular manner he has reference to his own nation, the Jews. But then he doubtless meant to extend his exhortation to all mankind. Praise ye the Lord, says he, from the heavens. Here it seems as though he borrowed an argument from the works of God in the firmament, to excite men to praise the great Creator. His argument may stand thus—from a view of the heavens, which eminently display the divine perfections, be persuaded to praise the Lord. Praise him all his angels. Here the Psalmist is not contented to call upon men on earth, to praise the glorious Creator, but he calls on the heavenly hosts, the immediate ministers of God's presence
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nd providence. Men and angels are called upon to praise God actively, in the full exercise of their rational faculties. Men are capable of pious praises, in a degree, from the view they may have of the divine perfections. But they move in a sphere much below the angels of light. They are pure and stand continually before the throne, and have the most striking displays of the divine perfections and glory to fill their souls with sentiments of praise. These beings are capable of the most exalted praises, from the most pure sentiments, and in the most noble manner. But the inspired writer calls not only upon men and angels to praise the Lord, but he calls upon the inanimate creation, upon the earth and things in the earth, upon the heavens and the heavens of heavens, Praise ye him, ye sun & moon, and all ye stars of light. Here he gives full scope to his mind, and takes in all the works of God. These inanimate parts of the universe praise God, by a display of his perfections in their creation, and in their being wisely fitted to answer the end of their being. But mankind are required to do more than to praise God passively. It is true, they do this in the wonderful construction of their bodies, and the moral powers of their minds. But yet they ought to do it by a right use and application of these powers, for the ends for which they were given. By praising the Lord, we are to understand an acknowledgement of his divine perfections, as displayed in the works of creation, providence and redemption. And in order to praise him, we must have proper apprehensions of his character.

WE cannot suitably honor God in this service, without a proper knowledge of him. We must view him as being infinitely perfect, without any defect,

defect, dependence, wants, or liabilities to change; and as being of the most spotless purity; and the most absolute moral rectitude. All his perfections must be considered in harmony, as being the properties of absolute perfection. Having this apprehension of God, we shall entertain no ideas of him, that will suppress our most exalted esteem, reverence and adoration. But we shall discover every thing, that is necessary to exalt our ideas of him, and to excite our minds to the most exalted praises. In our praises of God, we ought not to suppose, that we can add to his felicity, or do him any service, that shall render him more independent than he is in his own nature. Absolute perfection natural and moral involves the idea of the most perfect independence and happiness. He that is absolutely perfect cannot be liable to any injury; nor can he be subject to any wants. Nor is it our duty to praise the Lord because he standeth in need of our services, but because it is fit and reasonable, that creatures should pay homage to their Creator; and because this is adapted to fill our souls with noble religious and moral sentiments, and to form our minds to a meetness for the enjoyments of heaven.

ALL religion begins in the belief of a God; and all religious and moral obligations are grounded on the existence of a God of all possible perfections. And the praises of God tend to illustrate these obligations, and to impress them upon the mind with efficacy. We must then praise the Lord, but not thinking thereby to add to his felicity, or to flatter him, as men do one another.

We must also praise the Lord with humility and reverence. God is in heaven and men upon earth.

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He is a king upon his throne, and we are his subjects. He is the Creator, but man is the workmanship of his hands. God is a being of all possible perfection ; but man has no absolute perfection. God is a being of spotless purity and holiness ; but man is a polluted sinner, and a rebel against his throne. God is a being Almighty and independent ; but man is impotent and full of wants. Therefore, we ought to address the most high in our praises with humility and reverence, and not with haughty confidence, or indecent airs of familiarity. Gravity and solemnity ought to attend all our religious services. Divine praises are an important part of religious service, and ought not to be performed with inattention, or with carelessness.

WE must also praise our great Creator and preserver with sincerity ; that is, with the real sentiments of our minds, not uttering things, we do not really believe, or with which our minds are not suitably affected :—For such must be the praises of the hypocrite, which are an abomination to the Lord. It is to be feared, that many persons join in praises to God without properly considering the importance of the duty, or attending to any agreement between their real sentiments and their expressions. It is surprising, that men should utter themselves deceitfully before the Lord and adore him for his perfections, when they have no proper sense of his moral character upon their minds. Strange they should praise him for his mercy, when they are continually abusing it ; and living in practices, that tend to excite his displeasure. Strange they should praise him for his holiness, when they live in impurity. Can this be done in sincerity and truth ? Will not a sense of divine compassion ex-
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cite the mind to repentance? Will not a realizing view of God's holiness mortify sin within us and assimilate us to himself? God will never view himself as honored by hypocritical praises and adorations; nor will such services inspire the mind with pious sentiments, or assimilate the soul to the moral perfections of Deity.

BUT further, we ought to praise the Lord in the exercises of repentance. The person, who has suitable apprehensions of God's moral character, must of consequence entertain suitable ideas of his own vileness and moral deformity. The person, who has proper ideas of God's goodness, mercy, justice, holiness and divine majesty, cannot but acknowledge his own crimes, and mourn that he has offended his good and gracious sovereign. Nor will any praises or acknowledgements of God's perfections be considered, as a religious service in men, who by their wilful continuance in sin, bid defiance to God's moral government. A love of sin and a resolution to practise it will not accord with pious adorations.

THE praises of the great Creator must proceed from a heart abhorrent of moral pollution, and every thing, that shall be displeasing to the divine majesty. The praises of God, rightly performed, proceed from sentiments of gratitude, love and thankfulness. But how can these sentiments exist in a mind, that has no regard to God's laws, but is continually in the violation of them? Can a person be religiously thankful for favors, which he misimproves and abuses? Can he love God, who has not a sincere desire to please and glorify him?

Repentance and sincere obedience to God's laws are the proper emanations of love, they are the fruits and evidences of it; and our obedience to the divine laws is the most noble praise, that we can render to God. By this he is more highly honored than by all the pageant homage, that can be rendered him, without thankful and submissive minds.

WHEN we make a right use of our rational powers and faculties, in the service of our Creator, we do honor to his perfections far greater than can be reflected from the universe of inanimate nature. The heavens declare the glory of God, & the firmament sheweth forth his handy work. But these are meer machines or passive powers, that are acted upon by the divine energy. But the honor done to God, in the right exercise of the moral powers of the mind, proceeds from a voluntary service, and exhibits the highest possible skill of the divine architect.

If then we would suitably render praises and glory to God, the great Creator and Governor of the world, we must be willing subjects of his kingdom, and honor all his laws by obedience to them. By this, says our Saviour to his disciples, is my father glorified, that ye bear much fruit.

BUT there are some particular acts of duty, by which we are especially required to praise the Lord. This we are required to do by prayer. In this duty we not only petition for what we may stand in need of; but we also adore the divine excellencies, and thankfully acknowledge all blessings received.

received. This we are all bound in reason and religion to do, at all proper seasons, in our retirements and in our families ; but more especially in the congregation of the people, assembled for the honor of God, in the public services of religion. It has in every age of the world been customary, among all nations professing religion, to call solemn assemblies, to render praises and thanks to God, for the displays of his perfections, in all his works ; and this usage has been supported by divine appointment. The Jewish nation, especially, abounded with solemnities of this nature. They had their feast of tabernacles, their feast of pentecost, their feast of passover, and their feast of harvest. All these were to bear up memorable events of God's providence ; and to cultivate in their minds sentiments of gratitude and praise to their Creator and Saviour.

It is true, we are not bound to practice the Jewish forms of religion as such, but we are bound to render, as Christian societies, public praises to the great Creator and Redeemer. Both reason and revelation dictate the importance of the duty. Public benefits ought ever to be publicly acknowledged. We ought not only to praise God in our hearts, but also in suitable expressions of the mouth. We ought in our devout addresses to heaven, on such occasions, to recount, so far as we can, the expressions of divine goodness, power and faithfulness, run them over in our minds and express our thankfulness for the bestowment of them.

HAVING considered the manner, we proceed to point out the obligations and reasonableness of praising the Lord.

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WE are under obligation to praise him, because he is the Creator of all things, and has in them displayed the most absolute perfection. It is right, that creatures should praise and do homage to their Creator. All his perfections demand this of us. Was the universe brought into being by fate or chance ; were all things independent of Deity, it would be absurd to attempt the illustration of the point in hand. But we are sure, that God is the Creator of all things. For there cannot be more than one eternal self-existent being, and this is God ; and of consequence all other beings were made by him. And certainly our praises ought to be most exalted of that God, who has displayed such infinite perfections in his works.

How it is, that God can make that to be or exist, which once in essence was not, we cannot comprehend. How it is, that one single atom, which once was not, should come into existence, we cannot understand. This to us is wonderful. The power, which can effect it, surely must be infinite : and the wisdom that could contrive it, must be beyond comprehension.

BUT our views of God's wisdom and power must be exalted and excite wonder, as we ascend from atoms to infinity of atoms ; from atoms to species of beings, and from species to infinity of species of beings ; and from hence to infinity of worlds, or systems, which comprehend the universe.

OUR earth is but a small part of the works of God ; and yet there are in it more works than man could fully investigate, enumerate or understand,

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was he to continue on earth, from the period of its creation to its dissolution. There is in the animal world a vast variety of species of being, in an easy gradation, from the lowest to the highest; and the rational world here below consists of a number, which requires an high stretch of calculation to reckon up. But these are but meer atoms of God's extensive works.

If we look toward the firmament, an innumerable company of starry worlds arrest our sight. These globes appear by nice calculation to be of vast magnitude, and many of them far exceed our earth in diameter and circumference: and should we be admitted to travel the vast expanse, doubtless we should find globe rising upon globe, and system upon system, without ever finding an end.

Thus the holy scriptures give us vast conceptions of the extent of God's works. The Psalmist in our text makes mention of the heavens of heavens, that is, of heavens above heavens, rising upon heavens.

Thus St. Paul speaks of a third heaven, and in consequence there must be a first and second. And doubtless, there are in all these starry worlds suitable beings to inhabit them. Thus we read, that God not only in six days created the heavens and the earth, but all their hosts. Hosts of beings were created to inhabit the globes, which God had made. What an exalted view must this give an attentive mind of the vast works of God? Here we have in one complex view a striking representation of the great first cause.

POWER must be infinite to bring into being such an infinity of beings, and of such vast extent. And infinite goodness must be necessary to induce the great Creator to make such a variety of beings, capable of degrees of happiness, according to their nature and constitution. And infinite wisdom is necessary to the forming the plan of this universe, and maintaining it in such nice harmony, by laws adapted to its different parts and species. Here we see the evidence of God's immutability, in carrying on his works by standing laws. Here we see God's omnipresence in being in all parts of the universe, supporting and managing the vast fabric of creation. Well then might the Psalmist call on men and angels, the earth and the heavens, with all their hosts to praise the Lord.

BUT, if we descend more particularly to the works of God's providence, we shall find new occasion to render him praise. God not only created, but he preserves all things in being. The universe can no more exist independent of him, than it could create itself. The heavenly bodies, we see, are supported in their order, they are carried on in their various courses without confusion. If these inanimate beings are thus preserved by the power of God, we may well conclude their vast hosts are supported by his providence.

BUT it is but little, we can know beyond the stage, on which we are called to act. Here we have striking evidence of the all surrounding and supporting providence of God. In God we live, move and have our being. That power, which created, is still necessary to preserve us. Our bodily

dily life, it is true, is preserved by means or second causes; but then these depend upon the first. The inanimate world and its appendages are supported and preserved by stated laws, but these laws are nothing less than the power of God regularly exerted for this end. It would be a dangerous error indeed, for us to presume that all our blessings were the mere gifts of nature, independent of the providence of God. This would greatly derogate from the divine perfections, and suppress the pious sentiments of the soul. All the inanimate works of nature are instruments of God's providence. They are the medium through which divine blessings are conveyed, and though they are conveyed by second causes, and the instruments of human endeavors, yet we are as much indebted for them, as though they were derived from God's immediate agency without our endeavors.

THE blessings of God's providence in this lower world are innumerable. A surprising providence has been maintained in the preservation of our race through many ages, and in the preservation of the various species of the animal world, for our use and comfort. God has given us the light and heat of the sun, and made all the elements subservient to our happiness, in general. The earth in all ages has brought forth her increase to supply our wants and to fill our hearts with joy and gladness.

BUT not only the common blessings of God's providence, but also the blessings of grace and redemption afford subjects of the highest praise.—God made man innocent and happy in his primitive state; he was in favour with his maker and was surrounded with all the blessings of paradise.

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But by his disobedience, he forfeited the favor of his Maker, and exposed himself to death, both of body and soul. And it might have been just for God to have left him forever to perish and remain in this situation. But yet his mercy induced him to provide a Saviour, to deliver man from the power of sin and death. He sent his own Son to die for the sinner, to make an atonement, through which the returning sinner might be accepted and made happy. This Saviour accomplished his work. He died for the sinner, rose from the dead and ascended into the heavenly sanctuary to make intercession for transgressors. Christ the Saviour not only did this, but he published at large the glad tidings of salvation, and gave to men the most excellent doctrines and precepts to guide them to heaven.

SHALL men not praise the Lord for this distinguishing grace, which was extended to save them from destruction? Is it not a subject worthy their attention? The angels of heaven descended to the earth, and sang praises on this event; glory to God in the highest and on earth peace and good will to men. And shall the blessed inhabitants of heaven render praises on this occasion, and shall men, who are immediately interested be silent and feel no sentiments of gratitude?

BUT we have not time to enlarge in general arguments, but must proceed to apply the subject particularly to ourselves, for our more immediate improvement. We ought to praise the Lord for general favors, and for all the displays of his perfections, in all his works.

But

BUT we have innumerable particular and discriminating blessings, for which we ought to be thankful. As a nation we have been, and still are distinguished by receiving the blessings of providence and grace. God has given us all things richly to enjoy. We have an extensive, fertile and wealthy country.

THERE are few countries on this globe, which are possessed of more local advantages than our America. Its distance from the potent kingdoms of the earth raises it, in a measure, above the reach of conquest and subjection from foreign attack. And though our distance from India and Europe subject us to distant voyages, for maintaining commerce with the countries in those quarters of the globe; yet these inconveniences are balanced by our nearness to the West-India isles, which with ease can pour in their wealth upon us.

Our country is also diversified with a great variety of other advantages of nature. It is bounded by a great extent of ocean on the east, which opens the way to maritime greatness. It is variously divided with lakes and rivers, which are great accommodations for commercial intercourse. This is an advantage, which some countries are not favored with. The extensive country of Africa is almost one large solid mass of earth, without any mediterranean inlets of the ocean, and without many useful and extensive rivers and lakes, to facilitate the business of commerce.

THEREFORE, some of its parts must ever remain

main uninhabited. But our America is accommodated with large and extensive navigable rivers and lakes resembling little seas, from the gulf of Darien, which divides South and North America, almost to its northern extremity. It is variegated with hills, mountains, plains and vales.

Its climate is favorable to health and population. Its situation is neither within the torrid or frigid zone, but the temperate. We are also favored with a country fertile in its soil. Its productions are sufficient to answer every necessary of subsistence, and to furnish many of the ornaments of life.

We have a country not only fertile, but extensive. Its present limits comprehend a vast extensive territory, and it is probable that, in some future period, large additions of territory will be made on the west, and stretching toward the Pacific Ocean.

We are also blessed with civil liberty. The rights of human nature and of government are subjects of free discussion. We have the power of forming and establishing our civil constitutions, of appointing our governors, senators, legislators and magistrates.

God has done great things for us. He has preserved us amidst many dangers, and carried us through great difficulties. When ambitious tyrants stretched forth their power to enslave us, his right hand gave us the victory. With a propitious eye did he look down upon our country. Some of us remember,

remember, and some of us did witness signal victories, which he obtained for us. Under his patronage and by his assistance we made our way to liberty and independence.

SINCE the American Revolution, we have been at some periods, in perplexity, but never in despair. When depredations were made on our commerce by Britain, we were ready to fear that the calamities of war would once more fall upon our land, and we should be obliged to defend our rights with the loss of our treasure and our blood. But through the enlightened policy of Congress, and the wise and faithful exertions of an illustrious WASHINGTON peace was preserved, and a treaty of amity and commerce established.

AMERICA then basked, for a season, in the sunshine of prosperity. But her tranquillity was not of long continuance.

The French nation, a people, to whom Dæmons might be said to be compared, not content with committing the most horrid enormities throughout Europe, extended their infernal designs to America. To carry their purposes into effect, they committed the most unjustifiable depredations upon our commerce, and Frenchmen like, endeavoured to sow the seeds of irreligion, licentiousness and discord in the minds of Americans.

BUT propitious heaven has discovered to us their base and nefarious designs, and exposed them to the infamy and contempt, which they deserve. We fear not that nation, which bid defiance to Almighty

mighty God, disavow all religious and moral obligations, and endeavour to trample upon the rights of all mankind.

GOD will weaken their strength, bring to nought their designs, restrain their wrath, and make them examples of his righteous displeasure. Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, that he has prevented the machinations and intrigues of our enemies from having their designed effect, has preserved us from general confusion, in a good measure united us in our councils; and given such energy to our government, that some of the base sons of sedition & calumny have met with the punishment, due to their villanies.

GOD has raised up among us men of wisdom and virtue to direct our councils and to carry on the administrations of our government, and the civil & political state of America affords matter of wonder to the world. Rejoice O America, for the Lord hath done for thee great and wonderful things.

WITHOUT enlarging, we must proceed to observe, that we have distinguishing religious, as well as civil privileges. We have the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, whilst many other nations are left to the meer light of nature.

WE have the most extensive liberty of conscience. We have the enjoyment of free gospel worship, and the institutions and ordinances of Christ. But we enjoy not only national blessings, but also many individual advantages.

T H E R E

THERE are no persons among us, but what have reason to acknowledge that God has highly favoured us. Where is the person that can justly observe, that he has not received more blessings, than he deserved ; and more blessings than he has in the best manner improved ? Have our sufferings exceeded our enjoyments ? Cannot all of us call to mind something for which we ought to praise the Lord ? Have we not all hitherto been preserved from death, whilst many of our friends and neighbors have been numbered with the dead ?

HAVE we not been preserved from many calamities, which have fallen upon the heads of others ? While the inhabitants of many towns and cities have been visited with the most distressing pestilence ; we have been remarkably favored with health. If we have been visited with sickness, we have been restored. God has also blessed the labors of our hands, and given us a comfortable increase of the fruits of the ground. But will any of us be ready to say the hand of God has been heavy upon me, or some of my friends ; and therefore I cannot be thankful or render him praise. The reflection is impious indeed. If God has chastened us, it was designed for our own benefit, that we might be partakers of his holiness. And shall this extinguish every sentiment of praise for blessings received ? Have we no comforts remaining ; no source of delight, no cheering hope ?

How is our life preserved ? Do we not live on God's bounties ? Where then is our gratitude ? Shall we not give praise to our God, our kind preserver, because he will not give us all our desire ? Can we know what is best for us ? Shall we dictate God in his government of the world ?

THE things we most desire might prove our ruin; and doubtless our present situation would terminate well, did we wisely improve it. Let us praise God, therefore, for he is good and merciful. Let us not dwell on the dark side of God's providence, but recount the blessings we enjoy.

THE blessings we have in general received in the year past, which we are now called together to commemorate, are great and numerous. God has blessed the work of our hands, he has given us rain from heaven, afforded us the beams of the sun, and given of the increase of the earth sufficient for the support of men and beast. He has not sent the destroying angel into many of our habitations, or suffered pestilence to increase. And though several have been called to mourn the loss of departed friends, yet the number is not great; and these have many blessings remaining, for which they ought to render praises to God. Let us then endeavour to obtain suitable apprehensions of God's perfections, and be careful to have our hearts suitably affected with a sense of them. Let gratitude and thankfulness fill our souls and animate our pious adorations. It is not the design of this religious solemnity to regale ourselves with carnal, spurious mirth. Divine praises are a service very different from this. Nor is it the design of this solemnity to indulge ourselves in intemperance. But a sober use of God's bounties is the most proper way to express our thankfulness. And in providing a bountiful repast, we ought to refresh our minds with a renewed sense of God's abundant goodness.

IN all the expressions of joy on this occasion, may a sense of God's presence rest upon our minds,
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and our conversation be decent and praise-worthy. May this day's solemnity of praise and thanksgiving make our minds wiser and better, and be a mean of preparing us for the more exalted praises of God in the sanctuary above.

AMEN.