

A

DISCOURSE,

Delivered by request,

JULY 4, 1806,

IN THE

METHODIST CHURCH

AT BELLEVILLE.

BY JOHN DOW,

MINISTER OF THE GOSPEL.

NEWARK, (N. J.)

PRINTED BY JOHN A. CRANE.

—••••—
1806.

Several persons, who heard the ensuing discourse delivered, have expressed a desire to see it in print; the trustees of the church in which it was preached, have obtained a copy for publication; intending that the profits arising from the sale thereof, shall be applied for the benefit of the said church.



A DISCOURSE, &c.

1 SAM. xii. 23, 24.

I will teach you the good and the right way; only fear the Lord, and serve him in truth, with all your heart; for consider how great things he hath done for you.

THESE words, and the verses with which they are connected, were addressed by Samuel, the prophet of the Lord, unto the people of Israel; and were occasioned by a change they had wantonly effected in the government of their nation. Until this period, the civil polity of that people was purely Theocratical; God himself condescended to be their executive, and committed the dispensation of his government to men whom he had set apart and divinely inspired for that purpose. Had they been sensible of their exalted privileges.—regarded the instructions of God, and been contented and satisfied under his administration, they might have remained a happy and a dignified nation: but alas! such is the powerful influence of evil example, that they suffered themselves to be drawn into the wicked practices of their idolatrous neighbours, the heathen nations; whose usages

and customs were abhorrent in the sight of God, and prohibited the people of Israel under the severest penalties.

Not being satisfied with having borrowed from them their religious superstitions, they were resolved to adopt also their form of government, “and added (according to their own confessions) “unto all their sins, this evil, in asking a king.” The mild and equal system under which they had hitherto been placed, was not perhaps, in their opinion, sufficiently energetic; or it was not attended with that vain pomp and empty glare which are so captivating to depraved man: hence they wished to substitute in its place the pageantry of court, the splendid equipage of regal grandeur. This was highly offensive to the Majesty of heaven, who declared on that occasion that “they had rejected him, that he “should not reign over them.”

Samuel, grieved on account of their base and injudicious conduct, remonstrated against the measures they proposed, and among other things informed them that, should their wishes be gratified, the consequences would be truly oppressive. “And he said this will be the manner of the king that shall reign over you; “he will take your sons, and appoint them for “himself, for his chariots, and to be his horse- “men; and some shall run before his chariots. “And he will appoint him captains over thou- “sands, and captains over fifties, and will set “them to ear his ground, and to reap his har- “vest, and to make his instruments of war, and “instruments of his chariots; and he will take “your daughters to be confectionaries, and to

“ be cooks, and to be bakers : and he will take
 “ your fields, and your vineyards, and your
 “ olive-yards, even the best of them, and give
 “ them to his servants ; and he will take the
 “ tenth of your seed, and of your vineyards, and
 “ give to his officers, and to his servants ; and
 “ he will take your men servants, and your
 “ maid-servants, and your goodliest young
 “ men, and your asses, and put them to his work
 “ —he will take the tenth of your sheep, and
 “ ye shall be his servants : and ye shall cry out
 “ in that day, because of your king which ye
 “ shall have chosen you, and the Lord will not
 “ hear you in that day.” But they continued
 clamorous, and were determined to be like their
 neighbours, let the consequences be what they
 would ; till at length Samuel, by the command
 of God, (who intended to punish them in this
 thing) yielded to their importunities. The ad-
 vice, contained in the text, was given them at
 an after period, when they were made in a
 measure sensible of their iniquity, and begged
 the interposition of the prophet. The good
 man, notwithstanding the ungenerous treatment
 he had met with from this people, continued
 to manifest a regard for their welfare ; he re-
 minded them that the evils with which they were
 threatened, in consequence of the change in
 their national affairs, could only be averted by
 the strictest piety ; he assured them of a conti-
 nued interest in his prayers, and then added
 the salutary counsel which is to be the basis
 and theme of our ensuing discourse—“ I will
 “ teach you &c.”

In pursuing the subject, there are two parti-
 culars to which our attention will be directed ;

First, The duties which are here inculcated, and,

Secondly, The argument by which they are enforced.

The injunction before us is extremely comprehensive, and not only involves in it the whole of our duty to God, but suggests also the order and process of evangelical piety. Solomon tells us that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom—the very origin and foundation of that religious obedience which we are called to render: and consistent with this sentiment, is the arrangement made in our text:— We are first admonished to fear God. “Only *fear* the Lord &c.” To be under the influence of this fundamental principle of religion and piety, supposes that we entertain suitable views of those perfections in the divine character which render him the proper object of our dread.

What can be more highly calculated to excite our religious fears than the consideration that, as fallen, guilty creatures, we are responsible for our conduct to a being who possesses an indubitable right to demand our obedience—a being, from whose knowledge no secrets are hid, whose threatenings against the violaters of his laws are immutable, and whose power is adequate to the accomplishing of all his purposes?

Such are the perfections of that God whom we are commanded to fear, and such is the relation in which we stand to him: Should we not under these circumstances exclaim, in the language of a prophet, “Who would not fear

“ thee, thou king of nations, for unto thee doth
“ it appertain ?”

Can we for a moment question his sovereign right in and over us ? All created intelligences, whatever be the sphere of their existence, are amenable to him for their actions—before him adoring seraphs, in the mansions of bliss, bow with sacred reverence—beneath his frowns, apostate spirits, in the regions of misery, tremble with servile fear; and at his dread tribunal must all the race of Adam be soon arraigned—nor can the actions of our lives, or the latent principles of our hearts, be concealed from his omniscient eye. He has the most perfect knowledge of our going out, and coming in, our lying down and rising up; he is about our beds, and about our paths, and spieth out all our ways. “ All things,” says an apostle, “ are naked
“ and open to the eyes of him with whom we
“ have to do;” so that, “ if our hearts con-
“ demn us, God is greater than our hearts, and
“ knoweth all things.” An Achan in the camp of Israel, a hypocrite in the church of God, and the midnight devotee of sinful pleasure, are equally apparent in his view, and equally the objects of his just abhorrence. As to the immutability of his threatenings, we are assured, that though heaven and earth shall pass away, not one jot or tittle of his word shall ever fail. And what shall we say of his tremendous power and majesty ? The awful displays of his glory have caused even good men exceedingly to fear and quake; and if his wrath be kindled but a little, the wicked cannot abide his presence. All power pertains to him both in hea-

ven and on the earth—all nature is subject to his controul, and subservient to his will. When he determines to punish a wicked generation of men, the fountains of the great deep regard his mandate, and combine with the opening windows of heaven, to exterminate them from the earth by an awful deluge. Fire, hail, and storm are the auxiliaries of his justice, and, when he shall give the signal, universal nature must instantly perish in one general conflagration.

Such a representation of the divine character, especially when it is made for the express purpose of exciting our religious fears, I know is unacceptable, and painful to the unregenerate mind.—But, my brethren, it will not do for the ministers of religion to cry peace, peace, when there is no peace. The necessity of faithful, energetic preaching, is too obvious—and we feel ourselves justified on any occasion to declare, and that with emphasis, “That it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God!”

How many do we see around us who have no fear of God before their eyes, the language of whose practice is, “Who is the Lord, that we should serve him? and what profit shall we have if we pray unto him?” and who, in consequence of such impiety, are exposed to the overwhelming billows of Jehovah’s wrath?

Can we then, who are placed as watchmen on the walls of Jerusalem, with impunity forbear to give the necessary warning? on the contrary—Are we not constrained to cry out, in language of inspiration, “The lion hath

◀ roared, who will not fear? The Lord God
 “hath spoken, who can but prophesy?” To
 sanction such ministerial efforts, we are furnish-
 ed with the most unexceptionable examples:—
 David, after speaking of the judgments of the
 most high, concludes with saying, “Consider
 “this, ye that forget God, lest he tear you in
 “pieces when there is none to deliver”—“Sancti-
 “tify the Lord God in your hearts,” says a
 prophet, “and let him be your fear, and let
 “him be your dread”—and the great teacher
 of his church enjoins his disciples “not to fear
 “them who kill the body, and then have no-
 “thing more that they can do; but I will
 “forewarn you,” says he, “whom ye shall fear;
 “fear him who can cast soul and body into hell
 “—yea, I say unto you, fear him.” But that
 our views of the perfections of God, and that
 the fears they inspire, may be influential on our
 conduct, they are not to be raised in our minds
 merely by the strength of human intellects, or
 taught us by the precepts of men; no, my
 brethren, it is the province of him “who caused
 “the light to shine out of darkness, to shine in
 “our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge
 “of the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ.”
 It is of the highest importance, therefore, that
 we cultivate the impressions which are made
 on our minds by the Spirit of God; and not
 act like Felix, who trembled for a moment un-
 der the awakening influences of grace, but
 anon dismissed his guilty fears to a season bet-
 ter adapted to his own convenience, which, pro-
 bably, never arrived.—But, to pursue the or-
 der of our text,

We are not only enjoined to fear, but to **SERVE** the Lord.

We must give evidence that our impressions are genuine, and that our fears are wrought of God, by manifesting a reverence for the divine authority. “Only fear the Lord, and *serve* him, &c.”

Abraham exemplified his fear of God, by yielding obedience to the most difficult command; and hereby obtained this testimony:— “Now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine *only* son from me.” It is said of Noah, “That being moved by fear, he regarded the warning of God, and prepared an ark to the saving of his house.” “Job feared God,” and, as an evidence of it “eschewed evil.”—And Solomon informs us, “That by the fear of the Lord men depart from evil.”

If therefore we fear God, we must keep his commandments, we must serve him, and that not by constraint, or from hypocritical motives, but with unfeigned sincerity.

“Only fear the Lord, and serve him *in truth*.”

“God is a spirit, and they who worship him, must worship him in spirit and in truth. He searcheth the hearts, and trieth the reins of the children of men: hence he requires truth in the inward parts.” It was said of the Jews, “This people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their hearts far from me, and their fear towards me is taught by the precepts of men.” By such a pretended service, the majesty of heaven is insulted, and such worshippers are

guilty of an attempt to mock God. Let us be careful, my brethren, that in rendering our anniversary tribute this day, we offer not the sacrifice of fools; that we bring not a vain oblation, but that we tender unto God our grateful acknowledgements, from the altar of sincere hearts. Nay, would we meet with divine acceptance, our obedience must not only be sincere, but fervent and universal.

We are commanded to “fear God, and serve him in truth, with *all our hearts.*” In such a service, we should flame with unpholy zeal, and employ all the ardour of our affections: our undivided hearts, our souls and bodies, as a whole burnt offering, must be dedicated to God, would we meet with his divine approbation.—“Only fear the Lord, &c.”

That we may be excited to this reverential, unfeigned and universal obedience to God, you will permit me, in the second place, to dwell a little upon the argument contained in the text. “For consider how great things he has done for you.”

We might with propriety enforce the duties inculcated, from the consideration that the path of religion and piety is “the good and the right way,” and that it comes recommended us by its own excellencies.

That it is right, and meet, and our bounden duty to serve God, has, we trust, been sufficiently evinced by our preceding observations: and that this is the good as well the right way is equally demonstrable.

The fear of the Lord tendeth to good, both as it relates to our temporal and spiritual wel-

fare ; hence they who possess an experimental knowledge of the excellencies of true religion, hesitate not to declare with an apostle, “ That
 “ godliness is profitable unto all things, having
 “ the promise of the life that now is, and of
 “ that which is to come.” Religion very often secures to us the possession, and always sweetens the enjoyments of life ; it inspires the soul with a peace that passeth all understanding, and gives prelibations of joys to come. But the argument on which the prophet rested his counsel to the people of Israel, was the consideration of the goodness of God ; “ the great
 “ things he had done for them.” This was an argument founded in the strictest propriety.— Never was there a people placed under higher obligations to God than they were. He had delivered them from the despotic influence of the Egyptian court, from the galling yoke of tyranny and oppression. When pursued by their enemies, he made the very elements subservient to their welfare, while they were rendered unfriendly and destructive to Pharaoh and his host. He preserved them during their tedious march, through an uncultivated land. He gave them bread from heaven, and water from the flinty rock. He made them victorious in battle, and finally placed them in the possession of a land distinguished for its excellencies.

But let me ask, Is this argument exclusively applicable to them ? Is it not equally appropriate to us ? Yes, my brethren, the anniversary tribute we offer this day, is expressive of the great things which God has done for us. On

this occasion, however, I should feel myself guilty of an unpardonable neglect, were I to confine my views solely to the events which we now celebrate.

I cannot forbear to call you to the consideration of what God has done for us in the general displays of his mercy and goodness, manifested in creation, providence, and grace.

How interesting is the contemplation of our rational existence? created after the image of God, made but a little lower than the angels, crowned with glory and honour, and, amidst the numerous tribes of animated beings, the only creatures on this earth who are capable of the refined enjoyments which result from the exercise of the intellectual powers: powers by which we are not only enabled to explore and investigate the mysteries of nature, but by which we may also become measurably acquainted with the deep things of nature's God.

How marvellous is the preserving goodness of God? In the midst of surrounding dangers, he has kept in existence our frail systems, those curious pieces of mechanism, which are so fearfully and so wonderfully made.

Consider the goodness of our great benefactor in the returning bounties of this delightful season. The earth is crowned with the mercies of the Lord, and all nature wears a smiling aspect. The waving harvest exhibits to the transported eye, in variegated and beautiful form, its golden treasure: and the fertile plains in general, laden with stores of unusual plenty, seem anxious to compensate the husbandman's industrious toil, to gladden his heart, and crown the festive board.

Yet what are all these, compared with the wonders of redeeming love, the gift of an incarnate God to save a wretched and a ruined world, the effusions of the Holy Spirit to enlighten, mollify, and renovate the heart, and the precious promises and declarations of eternal truth, to inspire our souls with joy?

But, my brethren, however proper, however important and interesting the consideration of these particulars may be, you no doubt, on this occasion, expect to meet with something more appropriate: I therefore proceed to consider some of the "great things which God has done for us" in our national capacity.

And here you will permit me to remark that in my opinion it is impossible, with any degree of propriety, to celebrate the anniversary of the American Independence, without adverting to circumstances immediately connected with that event.

We sometimes meet with characters who affect a great veneration for this auspicious day, and yet, strange to tell! they would discard as a mere farrago of sentences, as an incoherent jargon, the memorable instrument in which are recorded the causes which led to our independence, and which contains the first principles of our national existence.

There either is, or there is not a propriety in commemorating the event in question; if it be proper, the professed object is to make our grateful acknowledgements to God for an especial instance of his interposing goodness.—But, let me ask, what is to excite and direct our gratitude, if we are precluded the principal documents relative to the premises?

The orator, or preacher, on such an occasion as this, must not attempt to divert an audience by the mere reveries of fancy; he must adduce matters of fact, and appeal, for the truth of his observations, to the records of '76. By such a retrospect, and with such evidence before us, we become acquainted with the perilous situation in which this country was once placed, and if we possess one spark of ingenuous gratitude, we will adore the hand which effected our deliverance,

It should never be forgotten, that this great nation was once subject to the legislation and controul of a foreign power; a power, the seat of whose government was three thousand miles from us. It is true, there was a period when the British cabinet were disposed to act towards us upon the principles of justice and humanity, and, I may add, of sound policy. While this was the case, we were willing to submit to many inconveniences, and, had they pursued conciliating measures, this country might have remained in the same relation to them for many years without a murmur; but, in process of time, they viewed with a jealous eye the rising glory of these happy colonies, and devised measures to crush us while in embryo. They assumed the prerogative to tax us in all cases whatsoever, while they withheld from us the sacred privilege of an equal representation.— They gave us specimens of their legislative influence, and demanded immediate submission to their imperious mandate. Their menaces were succeeded by acts of violence and oppression: With hostile intention they invaded our

peaceful shores, and, as we have heard from the declaration which has just now been read, “they plundered our seas, ravaged our coasts, burnt our towns, and destroyed the lives of our citizens.” We do not mention these particulars to excite your indignation for the wrongs we once sustained; but we bring them into view to assist you in considering, agreeably to the counsel of our text, the great things which God has done for us. Had not God interposed in our behalf, our ruin must have been completed; no doubt, my brethren, before this period, we should have been loaded with the shackles of despotism, and, like the Hebrew nation in the land of Egypt, have groaned beneath the iron rod of tyranny and oppression!

But the sons of Columbia were not destined to be slaves. It pleased God, at this period, to awaken generally in the breasts of our citizens a spirit of pure patriotism, a glowing ardour for liberty, which could not be extinguished but with the taper of life: fired thus with a love of freedom, this day thirty years ago, by their representatives in Congress assembled, they announced to the world their determination to be free, abjured their allegiance to the British crown, and “assumed that separate and equal station, among the nations of the earth, to which the laws of nature, and of nature’s God entitled them.” Ere this commenced a contest apparently the most unequal; but God was pleased to sanction our measures, and to give success to our arms: “He taught our hands to war, and our fingers to fight;” “Out of weakness we were made strong, waxed

“ valiant in fight, and put to flight the armies
 “ of the aliens.” For many years we have en-
 joyed national peace and prosperity, and are
 once more permitted to recognise, in a public
 manner, the great things which God has done
 for us.

To day we are called to contemplate, as the
 basis of our political happiness, the invaluable
 blessings of freedom and independence. These
 are benefits which we cannot too highly appre-
 ciate, and which are inseparably attached to a
 government founded on pure republican prin-
 ciples.

In expatiating on these unspeakable blessings,
 suffer me again to use the language of the first
 charter of our rights, which is indeed the lan-
 guage of reason: “ We hold these truths,” says
 that instrument, “ to be self-evident, that all
 “ men are created equal; that they are endow-
 “ ed, by their Creator, with certain unalienable
 “ rights; that among these are life, liberty, and
 “ the pursuit of happiness — That to secure
 “ these rights, governments are instituted a-
 “ mong men, deriving their just powers from
 “ the consent of the governed; that whenever
 “ any form of government becomes destructive
 “ of these ends, it is the right of the people to
 “ alter or abolish it, and to institute new govern-
 “ ment, laying its foundation on such princi-
 “ ples, and organizing its powers in such form,
 “ as to them shall seem most likely to effect
 “ their safety and happiness.” In this para-
 graph are contained political doctrines of vast
 importance; doctrines, however, which are
 only acknowledged by popular governments.

Hereditary monarchies, however varied in their forms, or whatever *appearances* of equality and justice may be attached to them, are subversive of these great and fundamental principles. In such governments the power is not derived from its proper source, the consent of the governed: such systems are not the choice of the people, for their choice is not consulted.

Nor are the sacred rights of men secured and enjoyed, in the *operation* of such governments.

Popular representations in the inferior departments of government, while the executive is rendered in a manner absolute by hereditary succession, is a mere sham, an impious delusion, and can only be intended to save appearances!

And let me ask, under such a government have the people an opportunity to alter or abolish it, when it becomes destructive of their happiness? Yes, my brethren, experience has taught us that a change under such circumstances may be effected; but not without a revolutionary conflict, not without the shedding of blood, and all the horrors of a civil war. And from these considerations we argue, in opposition to a prevailing sentiment, that no people have a right to institute a form of government which binds the hands of their posterity, and by which they are deprived of the sacred privilege of acting for themselves.

We have reason to bless God that we are delivered from such evils, and that our government is of such a nature as to guarantee to us, and to our unborn posterity, the blessings of freedom and independence. The energy of *our* political compact is lodged where it ought to be, in the hands of the people. God grant

it may ever be kept there ! Our public functionaries are men of our own choice ; to us they are amenable for their conduct, and we displace them when we please. Under these circumstances we should learn to be content, and to submit with cheerfulness to the will of the majority, which constitutes the sovereignty of the nation.

Connected with these political advantages, is the prosperity and advancement of our most holy religion. Under despotic governments vital piety, being shackled with discriminating establishments, has ever groaned and languished, while superstition, error and delusion have been proportionably increased and strengthened—but the equalizing system of republicanism is friendly to the interests of religion, and calculated to promote the cause of truth and virtue.

After having thus noticed some of the benefits resulting from the nature of our government, it cannot be improper to turn our thro'ts for a few moments to the local advantages of our country, and the increasing prosperity which attends us.

The remoteness of our situation from the belligerent powers, demands our grateful consideration. While the whole European world is shook to its centre by destructive commotions, deluged in blood, and experiences all the direful concomitants of war, the olive-branch extends o'er us its peaceful shade. Were we situate more contiguous to the contending parties, we should almost necessarily be drawn into the general contest ; but being placed from them at so great a distance, we have it in our

power to maintain a neutral ground, and, far from the bloody scene, continue to cultivate our peaceful arts.

Add to this our great extent of territory, the temperature of our climate, our fertility of soil, natural productions, and commercial advantages, and say—Has not the Lord done great things for us? Need I now remind you of the prosperous circumstances which attend our country, emanating from these local advantages?

Consider the flourishing state of the arts and sciences amongst us, and the advancement of our literary institutions; the growth of our manufactures, the improvement of our agriculture, the extension of our trade, and the increase of our treasures, and, let me ask—Is there a people under heaven who bids so fair for the summit of national dignity and fame as these *United States*?—But I hasten to a close.

Our subject furnishes us with a lesson of religious instruction, and with a hint of political prudence.

First, We remark, that piety to God lays the foundation of every kind of happiness, and is more immediately connected with our national prosperity than is sometimes imagined. “Righteousness,” we are told, “exalteth a nation, while sin is a reproach to any people.” The tribes of Israel were recommended to a religious obedience, as the only remedy against the national evils with which they were threatened: the counsel which was given to them is well adapted to us; let me admonish you then to “fear the Lord, and serve him in truth with all your hearts.” Should we withhold this rea-

sonable tribute, should we forget the mercies of God, reject his authority, and neglect our great salvation,—the accumulated mercies we enjoy will only increase our condemnation, and enhance our wretchedness forever!

Secondly, Our subject suggests to us a hint of political prudence.

We should learn duly to appreciate a government, in the establishment of which the hand of God was evidently, and eminently displayed. The material evils which were experienced by the Hebrew nation, may be traced to a restless anxiety to throw off the government of God, and to substitute in its place one founded in pride, caprice, and selfishness. Let us avoid their folly and their ingratitude, and learn to be content and satisfied with a government, which yields to us the peaceable enjoyment of all our rights and privileges:—and, above all things, let us never desire to be placed beneath the jurisdiction of regal power, a form of government which originated with impious heathens. This was the fatal rock on which the Israelites were dashed, and proved the basis of all their misfortunes. Hence, the Almighty, in addressing that nation at a very remote period of its existence, declares, “I gave thee a king in my wrath, and took him away in mine anger.” The man who advocates a monarchical form of government, and who wishes to bow to the shrine of human royalty, is not worthy to be denominated a citizen of a free and independent country, or to share in the blessings which flow from republican influence!

A word of cautionary advice will now finish our remarks.

It is scarcely necessary, I trust, to remind you, that after offering this public testimony of our gratitude to God for national mercies, we should insult the dignity of our nation, reproach our own characters, and incur the displeasure of heaven, were we to engage in scenes of dissipation and intemperance.

Should there be a solitary individual in this assembly, who may be disposed to such impropriety of conduct, I warn you against the evil, and conjure you not to let your afternoon's exercise disgrace your morning service.

And now to God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, be rendered ascriptions of eternal praise.—*Amen.*