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Mr. *Browne's*

Thanksgiving Discourse,

*December 6. 1770.*



A 3  
DISCOURSE

DELIVERED

On the Day of the Annual Provincial

THANKSGIVING,

December 6. 1770.

By JOHN BROWNE, A. M.

Pastor of the Church in COHASSETT.

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“ God is a Refuge in times of trouble.”

King DAVID.

“ In every thing by Prayer and Supplication, with Thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God.”

Apostle PAUL.

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# A DISCOURSE, &c.

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DANIEL, vi. 10.

*Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house ; and his windows being open in his chamber towards Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime.*

**U**PON examining the holy bible in order to find a subject suitable to employ our meditations on this occasion, I have selected the pious and exemplary conduct of a persecuted man of God, whose circumstances were truly distressing.

This prophet Daniel was one of king Nebuchadnezzar's captives when the Jews were carried into Babylon. "An excellent spirit was found in him ;" and he lived in great favour under the reign of this king, and his successors, in that empire, until a very distressing act was passed against him by Darius. This king was unwarily seduced, by an impious set of men near the throne, to sign a decree which would eventually have proved fatal to this devout prophet, had not the Almighty miraculously interposed for his deliverance. The act was this, "That whosoever shall ask a petition of any God or man for thirty days, save of the king, shall be cast into the den of lions." Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house ; and his windows being open in his chamber towards Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times

a day, and *prayed* and *gave thanks* before his God, as he did aforetime. The extreme difficulty to which this excellent man was reduced was so far from suppressing his usual devotion, that he was rather invigorated therein. Although prayer, and giving thanks ought ever to be connected when we address the supreme Being, yet, strictly speaking, there is a difference betwixt them. What I mean is, that *prayer* intends confession of sin, and supplication for mercy ; and *thanksgiving* denotes a grateful sense of favours already received. With this distinction we may consider the devotion specified in our text.

*He prayed.* However good a man he was, yet he was not perfect, or entirely free from sin ; and every sinner has reason to humble himself before his Maker, to fear his displeasure, and earnestly seek for his mercy. Daniel, no doubt, confessed his sinfulness and unworthiness before God, and with a truly contrite heart deprecated that shocking distress, in special, which he knew he must inevitably experience, unless he would wrong his conscience, bid adieu to LIBERTY, and renounce his allegiance to his Maker. He knew that God was a very present help in time of trouble, and that no design formed against a faithful servant of his could prosper, or be carried into execution, without his permission. All remonstrance to his earthly sovereign he was sensible would be ineffectual for the repeal of a decree, which, according to the despotic and stupid custom of the Medes and Persians, was unalterable. To God, then, he devoutly repairs, who alone could command deliverance for him ; and in consequence of his sincere humiliation, prayer, and thanksgiving, he was signally rescued by him who is mighty to save. Under his amazing anxiety, if he had even forgot the mercies of God, and confined his devotion entirely to humiliation and prayer, it had not been much to be wondered at : Instead of this, he discovers the greatest presence of mind, and extends his thoughts to the mercies he experienced in the midst of judgment. Accordingly, it is added, “ *And gave thanks before*

*before his God, as he did aforesaid.*" Almighty God was considered by him under the endearing character of a gracious and merciful father, although some of the dispensations of his providence are afflictive, and righteously severe. He esteems the father of mankind to be their greatest and best friend; as one who leaves no method of kindness unattempted to promote their happiness. He knew himself to be the offspring of God, fearfully and wonderfully made, sustained by his power, supplied by his goodness; and above all, renewed after the divine image, and therefore bound by the strong ties of duty, gratitude and interest to render to him the glory due to his name. He devoutly seeks for the further mercy of God, and renders thanks for the instances of it which he had already received. By the religious exercise of a grateful disposition he cultivated that instinct of nature which inclines us to be thankful to those from whom we experience mercy and kindness. We may suppose the state of his mind to be similar to David's, which is thus expressed, "I will love the Lord my strength. I will call upon the Lord who is worthy to be praised. The Lord liveth, and blessed be my rock, and let the God of my Salvation be exalted." This prophet seems resolutely bent to render to God according to the benefits he had received, though he well knew that his Maker needed not his services to increase his own felicity; he not being worshipped by mens hands as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth unto all life, breath, and all things. He wisely considered that our divine benefactor does not dispense his favours without expecting, and demanding some suitable return; even, to offer praise so as to glorify him, and order the conversation agreeable to the revelation of his will. We cannot rationally suppose that Daniel's addressing God *from his open window, with his face towards Jerusalem,* would be much to his honour; at least, it would have been unworthy of a place in the sacred text had this outward appearance of devotion been unattended with sincerity of mind. Unless his soul was deeply impressed with

a sense of the overruling providence of God, and of the divine goodness displayed to the world, and to himself in particular, the mention of his behaviour would be extremely trifling ; and make much such a figure in history as it would to record, that the people of New-England opened their houses for worship once a year, assembled in them, and pretended to give thanks before God, but never sincerely did it ; or in other words ; that they had their *thanksgiving days* but never *gave thanks*. I am indeed afraid that *this* is true with respect to many who publickly appear before God, on such days. But be this as it may : there is no room to doubt but that the prophet, whose religious character we are considering, had his heart right with God. Although there seems to be the appearance of ostentation, the complexion of hypocrisy, and a desire to be seen of men, by his exposing himself to view at his chamber window ; and I may add, the appearance of fool hardiness also, in doing thus, when he knew the severe act that was passed by authority, and the risque he ran of being discovered, and consequently destroyed ; yet the whole may be very consistently solved and made perfectly to harmonize with prudence, and regular piety and devotion. His windows were already open as *usual*. He worshipped in an *upper* chamber as was customary among the Jews : Which seems to be sufficiently distant from observers ; and *to look towards Jerusalem* was agreeable to Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the temple ; this was moreover his usual practice : He acted now *as he did aforesaid*. He knew it was right to pray and give thanks before his God ; and to alter his usual method he, no doubt, thought would discover such a criminal fear of man, as would be offensive to God. He reflected on his own sincerity, and was certain that God could save him from the fury of lions, and rescue him from the envy and rage of impious men ; or if the Almighty did not see fit to work a miracle for his bodily preservation he was sure that if he was in the way of his duty, he should experience everlasting mercy in  
Heaven ;

Heaven ; therefore was he supported, having his heart fixed, trusting in the Lord. This good man's character was undoubtedly uniform and consistent, he was not only *prayerful* and *thankful*, but obedient, and truly exemplary in all parts of his behaviour ; for indeed none can be truly thankful without regularity of life. It is necessary that we live, as well as speak the divine praises ; these must be united as we would rationally expect acceptance with God. A due sense of God's mercies, or true genuine thanksgiving is seated in the heart, and this pious disposition of mind will be discovered and exerted in all the duties of a sober, righteous, and godly life. This is the test which we doubt not the prophet Daniel tried, and which every one of us must try himself by. We are not truly thankful for God's mercies this day, unless we are steadfastly resolved to be obedient to his will through the future course of our lives.

But I pass to observe, that the devotion of this holy prophet leads us clearly to determine, that however difficult the circumstances of any of mankind may be, yet they should always retain such a grateful sense of the mercies they enjoy as to render sincere thanks to that divine Being who is the author of them. The prophet, whose example is here proposed for our imitation, had such a sense of the loving kindness of the Lord, and of his firm reliance on the wisdom and righteousness of Providence, as that he might have expressed the resolution of his mind in as strong terms, as an apostle of Christ long after did, when he said ; that " neither life nor death, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature should be able to separate him from the love of God." What can be more expressive of sincere gratitude than the conduct of this religious man ; who (when an act was passed, the penalty annexed to the breach of which was the most shocking death) would submit to it rather than renounce his liberty, and wrong his conscience by omitting his usual supplications, and thanksgiving before his God ? He would be exposed

to the ravage of lions, rather than refrain from expressing that religious acknowledgment that is justly due from a creature to the Creator. While the tender mercies of those in authority were cruelty, he eventually found the natural rage of the fiercest and strongest animals to be converted into mercy. And why? The reason is plain. That omnipotent Being who can cause the wrath of man to praise him, and who can stop the mouths of lions, interposed for the preservation of one so tenacious of the liberty of conscience, so mindful of the care of providence, and thankful for the blessings of Heaven, as to attend his stated devotions in such a situation.

Now, considering the conduct of this excellent man, and the favour of God which he so signally experienced, we shall do well to reflect thus: That the solid pleasure and satisfaction which result from devout prayer, and thanksgiving to God, are sufficient to constrain every pious person to the steadfast observance of them. Where we see our duty to God, if seriously and punctually attended upon, productive of these happy effects, viz. composing our minds to a patient submission to his will, and disposing him to exert his power and goodness for our support and relief, shall we not in all things by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving make known our requests to him? Our difficulties, our distresses, however grievous, should never cause us either to distrust the care of divine providence, or to be unmindful of the benefits we receive. We constantly experience the goodness of God, although at some seasons we are favoured with more signal instances of it than we are at others. The least mercy is more than we deserve from that divine Being whom we have so often offended. The most minute instance of our Maker's kindness claims our eternal respect. Although innumerable evils should surround us: Although we should fear the destruction of our liberties civil and religious, and even the loss of life itself, yet we should remember that the Lord is our judge, the Lord is our law-giver, the Lord is our king and he can save us.

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The consideration of God's sitting at the helm of the Universe should ever dispose us to put our trust in him; and not greatly fear what man can do unto us. Never let it be said that the difficulties which we feel, or think we have reason to fear, cause us to be unmindful of our creator, preserver, and constant benefactor. It was once the expression of a very impious woman to her religious husband, when his property was invaded, his children destroyed, and his life endangered, "*Curse GOD and die.*" But he replied in the greatness of his distress, "*Thou speakest as one of the foolish women speaketh: What? Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil? All that befalls the children of men is designed by their Maker to promote their happiness. The least glimmering of mercy amidst the greatest outward distresses is sufficient to excite our gratitude, if we reflect properly upon it. In all that occurs in the course of Providence we have reason to say unto God, thou hast done righteously, but we have done wickedly; thou hast punished us less than our wickedness deserves. David sang both of mercy and judgment. Shall light afflictions then, which are but for a moment drive us from a duty, which, when rightly performed, shall work out for us an exceeding and an eternal weight of glory? No surely. I would rather hope that we should "count it all joy when we fall into divers temptations; knowing this, that the trying of our faith worketh patience, and if patience have her perfect work, we shall be perfect and entire, wanting nothing."*

That I may more fully apply what has hitherto been discoursed, it may be observed, that the present aspects of divine providence with regard to the inhabitants of this province loudly call upon us for humiliation and prayer, and sincerely to join them with our present thanksgiving, after the laudable example we have considered; and in becoming obedience to the pertinent proclamation which enjoins the religious exercises of this day, and which expressly directs us to pray "*that those judgments which we labour under may be removed—that those which we have reason to fear may be averted.*"

Our situation is not altogether so distressing as was that of the prophet Daniel. There is no den of lions ready for us to be thrown into ; whereby a period might be immediately put to our present existence, and consequently to every other temporal enjoyment. Though this is not our case, yet our state is truly deplorable, and God only knows what we are yet to suffer. At the hand of our Maker indeed we deserve the greatest of judgments ; but we have never forfeited to man any of our civil rights. The royal faith has been plighted to this people, and we request only the continuance of our Charter privileges. Our fathers before us ever asserted their rights, granted by the Crown, and we steadfastly hope that it will never be said of their posterity in general that they willingly relinquish them. It is naturally to be expected that disorders, or extravagant instances of conduct will take place when a free people are irritated by what they think to be unconstitutional exertions of power ; such disorders have in fact happened ; we lament the cause of them, and hope the supposed ground of uneasiness will be rectified, and the minds of the people composed. But then (unhappy to relate) these eccentric motions of a disturbed, yet loyal people, have been strangely magnified ; and thus being exaggerated, we are ready to fear our burdens are increasing.\* What now, (may it justly

\* What people, unless those inured to slavery, would be unaffected, when in consequence of insurrections (much less formidable perhaps than some in our mother country, that have arisen from more frivolous causes) they have been visited with bands of soldiers ; who tho' said to be designed as conservators of the peace, and to aid the civil authority, yet our late chief magistrate had "no power over them," as he asserted :—that these men should infest the streets of our metropolis, by night especially, and in manifold instances break the peace—and that indictments found against military criminals by the grand jurors of our sovereign lord the king, should be prevented from being carried into execution, is truly marvellous ! Can it be wondered at that the populace under these circumstances should sometimes seek private revenge, and go on skirmishing with the soldiers (each no doubt alternately the aggressors) until the shocking massacre of March 5th took place ; which has completed the dismal tragedy for the present, and which God, of his infinite mercy grant, may never be repeated.

justly be enquired) is our duty at such a season? Are we to entertain even the most distant thought of rising in Rebellion, or taking up arms against our mother country? or attempt to maintain our privileges by the point of the sword? No. (And indeed we have never meditated any thing of this kind, notwithstanding what our enemies have suggested.) To God we are to make known our cause. His arm is not shortned that it cannot save, nor is his ear heavy that it cannot hear. The hearts of kings, and of all mankind are in his hand, and he can turn them as the rivers of waters are turned. It is our duty in such a day as this, to bewail our past abuse of our privileges, acknowledge the justice of God in permitting such things to befall us, and resolve, by his grace assisting us, to live more to his glory for the future; and pray that our rightful Sovereign George the III<sup>d</sup>. may have length of days, riches and honour, and that he may always reign in the hearts of his subjects; that evil counsellors if any such there should ever be, may be prevented from approaching the throne; that wisdom and righteousness may be the stability of our times, and the fear of the Lord our treasure. This is our duty, and although we should strictly attend to it, we are not to expect that a miracle will be wrought for our safety and deliverance, but only that our grievances may be redressed in a gradual manner, and that harmony and brotherly love, joined with a free unburthened commerce may again take place between Great Britain and these Colonies. Our rightful earthly Sovereign has not a more valuable gem in his Crown than the Loyalty of Americans. Our natural affection for our mother country may possibly in some measure be abated in proportion to any oppressive measures which we may think have been used with us. But we hope in God for better times, and that we shall never degenerate into such wretchedness as to have our affections entirely weaned from our parent state. The immediate cause of our distresses, I humbly conceive, to us arises in a great measure from ourselves. What I mean is this. Domestick enemies, some indebted  
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(under God) for their daily bread, and others wallowing in their abundance, through the kindness of those whom they ungratefully despise, have aspired to tread on the necks of a free, loyal and generous people : Their advices have been received by men of like passions with themselves, and we have been stigmatized as Rebels to the King, and that happy form of government established in the British réalm which we earnestly desire to defend and maintain with our fortunes, and our lives.—But I will not further enlarge upon that which I sincerely wish there never had been any occasion to have been entered upon.

It may not be improper to observe further, that as we now assemble in the close of the year (agreeable to the ancient and laudable custom of this people) to render our unfeigned thanks for the bounties of God's common providence which we have received for our bodily support ; so we shall do well to be particularly careful that nothing interrupts us from such an attention hereto, as that we may render a just tribute of praise. Let us honor God with our substance by a decent support of ourselves, and distributing to the necessities of others. We are all apt enough to be sufficiently sensible of what we have for the supply of our wants, while at the same time we are not inclined to look through second causes to that powerful, wise, and good Being, who giveth us all things richly to enjoy. A comfortable supply of earthly produce is granted, through the blessing of God, to this people. Food, and raiment ; but more especially the *latter* we have more reason to be thankful for than perhaps ever before. I presume we grow more industrious, prudent and saving ; that we are not so proud as we were, live more on our own produce ; and it is to be hoped that we shall yet more and more do so. This good out of evil we should be thankful for. I don't say what the cause of this is, because you can all guess it with ease. But let the cause be what it will, the issue is plain. We are brought at length to see that we must be diligent for the cloathing ourselves ; and perhaps more has been done in New-England for this end, in the  

present

present year, than ever before in the same term of time. May God further smile on our handy work, and cause our latter end greatly to increase. If we are thankful, industrious, and obedient we may be hereafter so blessed by Heaven as to be able to cloath our mother country, and feed them too, if they should ever want our assistance. God has given us a good land, let us be thankful for it. God gives us health, let us improve it, and study more and more to be prudent in the use of what we possess. This is the best method wherein to testify our gratitude for what we have already received ; and to hope for the conferment of what we yet stand in need of. We may ruin ourselves : but if we are industrious, honest and thankful, if we trust in the Lord and do good we shall yet dwell in the land, and verily we shall be fed.

God grant that the inhabitants of this Land may experience the happiness resulting from the accomplishment of that benediction, " Happy art thou O Israel ! Who is like unto thee ? A people saved of the Lord, the shield of thy help, and the sword of thine excellency, thine enemies shall be found liars unto thee, and thou shalt tread on their high places." So be it to our American Israel, O Lord, and let them prosper that love us : " But let the wicked  
 " conspiracies of as many as have ill towards us be like the  
 " untimely fruit of a woman which never sees the Sun :  
 " that whatever evils the craft and subtlety of the Devil  
 " or man worketh against us may be brought to nought ;  
 " that we thy servants being hurt by no persecutions may  
 " evermore give thanks to thy name, through Jesus Christ  
 " our Lord.

" To whom with the Father, and holy Spirit be ascribed  
 " as is most due, for the blessings we assemble this day  
 " to commemorate, and for all other his mercies, all honor,  
 " and glory, adoration, praise and thanksgiving, now,  
 " henceforth, and for ever."

A M E N.

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