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*Mercies in Judgment :*



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S E R M O N,

PREACHED ON THE DAY OF

GENERAL THANKSGIVING,

DECEMBER 19, 1797,

IN

The Parish Church of St. Andrew, Wardrobe,  
and St. Ann, Black Friars, London,

*By the Reverend WILLIAM GOODE, A. M.*

PASTOR OF THE SAID CHURCH, AND LECTURER OF ST. JOHN'S WAPPING.



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1797.

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S E R M O N, &c.

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PSALM CI. 1.

I WILL SING OF MERCY AND JUDGMENT,  
UNTO THEE O LORD WILL I SING.

TO fix our attention on the hand of God as directing all the mercies and judgments which surround us is the appropriate design of this day—a design, surely, which cannot be considered as unfruitful, when we are so apt to be forgetful. Especially are we inclined to forget our mercies,—a spirit of thankfulness to God is too great a stranger to the human heart. But, above all, when these mercies are found in the midst of judgments, we dwell upon the unpleas-  
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ing prospect, while we overlook the many instances of divine forbearance—the many displays of protecting power—the various interpositions of providential care—and the liberal bounties of God's gracious hand.

To raise ourselves a little from those gloomy views which sometimes oppresses the mind, to distinguish amidst our fears the causes of joy, and the grounds of better expectations, to mark the evident interpositions of Divine Power and Goodness, will excite a frame of mind which highly becomes us, and may discover more reasons for gratitude and humble confidence than on a superficial review of things we may apprehend. And, while thus we are rendered thankful for the evident answers to former prayers, we may hope that the GOD OF OUR MERCIES will become the GOD OF OUR SALVATION.

May the Lord make what shall now be spoken, effectual to excite this desirable disposition.

It may not be amiss, in the FIRST place, to remove an objection, which will tend much to depress that spirit of thankfulness, and of cheerful gratitude, which ought to lead the employments of this day. It is, I acknowledge, an  
objection

objection which has been felt in my own mind, and which I have heard from others; but which is not, I am convinced, founded in truth.

It has been said, the present situation of our affairs rather requires a fast, and the spirit of deep humiliation, than the dispositions implied in the exercises of this day.

It must be acknowledged the times are critical—the aspect of providences is gloomy—the judgments of the Lord are abroad in the earth (would to God that the inhabitants might thereby learn righteousness!)—and, in the present uncertain revolutionary spirit of the world, what will be the issue we know not. But surely we ought to remember, “It is of the Lord’s mercies we are *not consumed*, &c.” And, if in judgment the Lord remember mercy, then it is greatly incumbent upon us, in our prayers and humiliation, not to forget the tribute of gratitude and praise.

We have a remarkable instance of this in the Jewish nation, just returned from their captivity: They were yet in great straits, surrounded with enemies who were bent upon their destruction. In the next chapter, therefore, we find them  
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observing a solemn fast to the Lord. "Now in the twenty and fourth day of this month, the children of Israel were assembled with fasting, and with sackclothes, and earth upon them. And the seed of Israel separated themselves from all strangers, and stood and confessed their sins, and the iniquities of their fathers." Neh. ix; 1, 2. But, at the same time, if mercies are received mercies must be acknowledged, and therefore in the same month we find them celebrating a day of chearful thanksgiving. "And Nehemiah, which is the Tirshatha, and Ezra the priest the scribe, and the Levites that taught the people, said unto all the people, This day is holy unto the Lord your God; mourn not, nor weep, for all the people wept when they heard the words of the law. Then he said unto them, Go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared; for this day is holy unto our Lord: neither be ye sorry, for the joy of the Lord is your strength. So the Levites filled all the people, saying, Hold your peace, for the day is holy, neither be ye grieved. And all the people went their way, to eat and to drink, and to send portions,

portions, and to make great mirth, because they had understood the words that were declared unto them." Neh. viii; 9, 10, 11, 12. This is the temper of mind we are this day called to imitate, a temper of grateful praise, and as opportunity offers of kindness and benevolence.

These things being premised, let us proceed to take notice of the great mercies, which God has mingled in the present dispensation of his righteous judgment.

War must at all times be considered as the rod, as the scourge, of the Almighty. And surely the present, in its rise, its rage, its principles, and effects, has been the most violent and destructive. It is the general scourge of Europe, in the hand of the Lord our Redeemer, to vindicate the glories of his injured person, and the honor of his cause.

The events, which of late years have been passing before our eyes, have surprized and astonished us. We have wondered at the secret springs from which they could arise, at their powerful and general operation; and these till of late have remained concealed. But, if any one would know the causes of the late revolutions in

Europe, and the state in which we stand, I would advise him to read a late publication, entitled, “Proofs of a Conspiracy against all the Religions and Governments of Europe,” by J. Robison. There he will find the whole arising from the secret but combined efforts of infidelity—digested into separate and regular conspiracies—carried on with all the artifice, subtilty, and rancour, of Satan—laying down as principles of action what must tend to the subversion of society as well as of religion—and acting with determined perseverance, till they burst forth in all the horrors of revolution, where nothing was transacted, amidst all those cruelties and immoralities which have surprized and confounded us, beyond what their secret principles justified to themselves. What we have considered as the scum arising from the violent effervescence of revolution is here discovered as originating from settled principles of action, avowed in their secret associations. Upon this view of things, whether, had we been more desirous of it, we could long have evaded the commencement of hostilities, is a question very difficult to determine.

I will not say the war was undertaken designedly for the support of religion, but this I must say, whatever were the designs and motives of those who engaged in it, in the end it will be found, that all religion is closely connected with it, and all our civil and religious privileges depend upon a happy issue.

In this view, every success which tends to our security is a blessing for which we cannot be too thankful, when we consider what has been, and now is, the avowed temper of our enemies. Every circumstance that has been instrumental to preserve us from such a contagion, either before or since the war, is an instance of God's goodness towards this favored land: favored we yet must call it, since, whatever we may have hitherto endured through the scourge of war, our sufferings can bear no comparison to the distresses of almost all the nations around us.

Amongst the latter of these, though first in its effect, is, what none here, I trust, will deny, the religious character of our king. This, I conceive, in the present case, may be mentioned with peculiar propriety, since, the last time we met here on a similar occasion, it was our cor-



dial employ to return thanks for his unexpected recovery from a most alarming affliction ; and I hesitate not to assert, that we have now equal reason to be thankful for the prolongation of his important life, to the wishes of his people. Had we seen a king upon the throne of these kingdoms, such as filled almost all the thrones of Europe, like them he would either have joined the combination, or have been the dupe of the designing artifice, of Infidelity. And, from what we have seen, notwithstanding such obstructions to their progress, we may reasonably conclude we should then have felt all the same miserable effects, and been plunged into the same awful scene of horrors ; either in the natural course of events, or in the righteous judgment of God. But we have to bless God that ours is the only king who was not more or less the coadjutor or dupe of their satanical designs.

The black and stormy cloud has long been hanging over Europe ; and bursting here and there with the most desolating effects ; while we, though anxiously alarmed, have only felt comparatively a few drops falling as it were from its skirts. Sometimes the gathering storm  
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has seemed to be approaching nearer, but has graciously and unexpectedly been removed; and, I trust it will yet be so, while there is in this kingdom a remnant of the Lord's people, a praying remnant, who are found at a Throne of Grace; who like the faithful Israelites sigh and cry for the abominations of the land, and earnestly supplicate through the Redeemer the forgiveness of their own sins, and the transgressions of a guilty nation. In such general darkness and distress we ought not indeed to expect great things, nor to hope for splendid advantages; if preserved through all in the enjoyment of our privileges, it must excite our admiration, and claim our gratitude and praise.—It is in this respect we are now called upon to mark the interpositions of a gracious God, and, blessed be his name, many such now suggest themselves to our recollection. Let us fix our attention on a few.

Some time ago it pleased the Lord to threaten us with a famine; but in the time of extremity he opened the source of supply—then he gave us an abundant harvest which dissipated our fears; and, in the meanwhile, stirred up a spirit

of liberality in the more opulent; which prevented the progress of disaffection in those who might have been irritated by the keener feelings of distress.

A little while since the whole nation was alarmed by the most unusual, unexpected, and distressing, appearance. The natural bulwarks of the nation were breaking themselves down; the very character of the British sailor was changed; disaffection and mutiny were the only remaining proofs of courage; our own sword had nearly been thrust into our own vitals—but the suppression was as sudden and unexpected as its rise.

The interposition of God, when an invading fleet stood upon the shores of a sister kingdom, was so evident, that Infidelity itself could scarcely but discover it. While our fleets wandered as though infatuated in the search, the hand of God alone perplexed the purposes of our enemies; defeated their designs; and drove them back in the way by which they came disappointed and ashamed.

But, on the present occasion, we are particularly called to recollect the three illustrious  
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and decisive victories obtained in three desperate engagements, with each of the three great Powers with whom we are at war : and each of these obtained in the very critical moment, to disappoint the designs of our enemies, and secure our threatened privileges and rights. Here the antient wisdom and valour of the British navy was again displayed, and he, who can make one to chase a thousand, or ten thousand to flee at the rebuke of one, still directed us by the same skill, still supported in our sailors the same spirit of courage and intrepidity, which has exhausted the naval efforts of our enemies : the only way in which they could personally annoy us. The last of these, both in the time and manner, appears most providential ; and, the more every circumstance is considered, the more evidently will the hand of God appear, while its effects are most important and beneficial.

If we look at those countries which have been sacked and plundered by the desolating brigands, and then turn back our eyes and consider our present situation, surely, amidst all our complaints, we must acknowledge our mercies are great ; and, while lamenting the impending judgments, must  
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feel our obligation to join notwithstanding in the song of mercy.

We have seen our enemies conquering the most powerful and veteran armies—rolling on and accumulating a force which has prevailed to carry all before them.—We have seen them ravaging the Low Countries—penetrating over the ice into Holland, spread, as it were, by the hand of Providence to expedite their way (such a phenomenon had not appeared for near a century before).—We have observed them running over the Pyrenees into Spain, climbing over the Alps into Italy, betraying the states of Venice, reaching almost to Rome, and then rushing back again to the very gates of Vienna.

And what have they done wherever they have fixed their hostile banners? what—but spread the poison of infidelity, and accomplish (as far as circumstances would permit,) their former avowed design of extirpating Christianity, and dissolving every social bond—but in every attempt against us they have failed !!! Their navy, nearly equal with ours at the first, has dwindled almost to nothing; while ours, by the good hand of God upon us, has risen to an height unparalleled

paralleled before. The providence of God has by these interpositions evidently said unto them, "Hitherto shalt thou go, but no farther," &c. The British kingdoms have been preserved, and, in every effort against us, they, who have thrust the world before them, "have become like common men." Surely then "the hand of the Lord is in all this," and we may sing of mercies in the midst of judgments. Surely we may consider these favors as pledges of his yet continued kindness, though to an ungrateful land; that yet he hears the prayers of his people; and, while thankful for his interpositions, and supplicating his aid, he will magnify himself as the God of our salvation.

If instead of these victories we had experienced defeat, what must have been the effect? Ere now we had been deprived of all our privileges and liberties, had been debarred or abridged in the exercise of our religion, this country had become the seat of anarchy and rebellion, or devoted to decline in subjection to a foreign power. And, if any circumstance can yet more distinguishingly mark the gracious providence of God, and claim our greater gratitude, it is this; the in-

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ward tranquillity in which this kingdom has been yet preserved, the peaceful exercise of our religious privileges, which we now enjoy; notwithstanding the many who, in prosecuting the same disorganizing plans, have aimed the same daring efforts, or directed the same subtle machinations, against all order and religion. It is true we experience many effects of the present awful state of Europe; but, when we consider attentively these undeniable circumstances, let us say if we have not great reason for gratitude and thanksgiving.

We will now close the subject by a few short observations, which may direct us to its proper improvement.

The FIRST use we may make of this view of present circumstances is to incite within ourselves a spirit of thankfulness.

We talk so much of our judgments and distresses, we dwell so much on the gloomy side of the cloud, that we perceive not the beams of mercy interspersed. But, let us recollect, the way to enjoy future blessings is to be grateful for those we possess; and, while discovering grati-  
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tude for the past; we may prefer with greater confidence our supplications for the necessities that yet remain.

Let this view of present circumstances also encourage in us a spirit of prayer and supplication.

Though things are not just as we could wish them at home or abroad, our only helper is the God of our mercies; who turns the heart even of rulers in the channel which he pleases. Our murmurings and ingratitude are not likely to change our affairs for the better. But, when we are found at the Throne of Grace, we are surely engaged in the best way of its attainment, and, through the goodness of God, we do not pray without encouragement. These circumstances of providence may justly be considered as answers to former prayer, and directions to future dependance. God will indeed hear a praying people, and, if they be but a remnant, they shall be as the salt of the land to preserve it from destruction. But, *remember*, “if the salt have lost its favour wherewith shall it be seasoned.” If God’s people are declining from a spirit of prayer and supplication what must be the issue? Whatever wise plans they may form



for the amelioration of the state, whatever activity they may discover in their execution, judgment is not far behind—"henceforth it is good for nothing but to be trodden under foot of men."

Let this view also encourage us quietly to wait for God under the necessary burdens that may arise from so unprecedented a situation.

In these, as Christians, it becomes us to discern and acknowledge the hand of God, and the effects of his righteous displeasure. It is true we feel. And we begin to feel where we might have expected it long before, in a part the most keen to sensibility in a commercial nation, but still let us again recollect, how little in comparison of all around us! While then we look to him who only can direct and deliver, while we commit ourselves to his wisdom and unerring providence, the many interpositions of his former care may encourage our hopes, that yet, in the time of our extremity, he will appear, and the dark cloud, which now hangs with threatening aspect, will break, and be dissipated by the beams of mercy.

But

But these views should above all instruct us to  
BEWARE OF INFIDELITY.

Oh that I could speak it with a voice that might pervade every corner of the land, BEWARE OF INFIDELITY. This has been the cause of all the evils which have desolated Europe. And, amidst all our alarms, the greatest danger that now presses upon us springs from the rapid spread of such principles amongst ourselves, which seem to call upon the great God our Saviour to avenge his honour and his cause.—Infidelity generally makes its first advances under the plausible pretext of natural virtue and morality; conceals its true nature for a time, till the mind led from evil to evil is gradually prepared for the most diabolical plans. And, when once the authority of the Lord our Redeemer is shaken off, soon all authority will be disregarded, and, when the bonds of our obligation to God are broken, every social bond will soon be loosened and deranged. We have seen therefore those, who were the chief supporters of an infidel combination, the first to suffer its effects.—How far, in the present awful crisis of Divine Judgments, the providence of God may permit the contagion to spread, we

presume not to conjecture ; but, should it diffuse itself throughout this land, should it extend throughout the world, the world would be but treasuring up wrath for itself, and desolation from the vindicating hand of God.

Let us then, who are so favored, learn from these considerations to be thankful for, and to diligently improve our religious privileges, while continued in their enjoyment. Hitherto these blessings have been spared to us, and, in this respect, we are privileged above all the nations. We may use with peculiar propriety the language of the Psalmist. "He sheweth his word unto Jacob, his statutes, and his judgments unto Israel. He hath not dealt so with any nation : and as for his judgments, they have not known them. Praise ye the Lord." Psalm cxlvii; 19, 20. We trust that many of you know their value. Oh then be careful to improve them. "Walk while ye have the light lest darkness come upon you."

And ye that know your blessedness therein use a Throne of Grace for yourselves and a guilty nation, and wait in patient expectation the end of the Lord. But, if accepted in the  
beloved,

beloved, whatever may come upon the nation, or the world, it shall be well with us ; it shall be well in time, through all the trials we are called to endure ; it shall be well in death ; and, blessed be God, beyond is the kingdom of unchanging rest and peace for ever. And, when the Lord Jesus Christ shall come again, with glory infinitely surpassing, yea, disgraced by any comparison with that which now excites the gazing admiration of many of our fellow creatures, he shall come to welcome us to that blissful kingdom, and exalt us in the glories of his complete salvation.

May he by all his dispensations on earth prepare us for, then bring us there, to his own eternal praise, with the Father and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

THE END.