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Mr. BALDWIN'S

THANKSGIVING SERMON,

FEBRUARY 19, 1795.



A

S E R M O N,

DELIVERED

*FEBRUARY* 19, 1795:

B E I N G

T H E D A Y O F

PUBLIC THANKSGIVING

THROUGHOUT THE UNITED STATES.

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*PSALM XXXIII. 12.*

BLESSED IS THE NATION WHOSE GOD IS THE LORD, AND THE PEOPLE WHOM HE HATH CHOSEN FOR HIS OWN INHERITANCE.



IN obedience to the call of the PRESIDENT of the United States, we are now, my brethren, assembled in the house of God, to offer Thanksgiving and Prayer to the “great Ruler of nations, for the manifold and signal mercies which distinguish our lot as a nation.” And as God is this day publickly to be praised in the assemblies of his people, I have thought the passage now read, might be a suitable foundation for our present meditations.

This beautiful psalm, whoever might be the penman of it, is evidently designed to set forth the power and goodness of God in such an amiable light, as to excite our confidence, awaken our gratitude, and warm the devout passions of the soul with sacred joy.

If we contemplate God either in his word or works, we shall find abundant matter for joy and thankfulness: “For the word of the Lord is right, and all his works are done in truth. He loveth RIGHTEOUSNESS and JUDGMENT; the earth is full of the GOODNESS of the Lord.”

From this view of the *righteousness, equity, and benevolence* of the divine government, the pious psalmist was led to exclaim as in the text; “Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord, and the people whom he hath chosen for his own inheritance.” That we may more fully enter into the spirit of the text, we shall attempt,

I. To show when it may be said of a nation, that the Lord is their God.

II. Consider what evidence a people may have, that the Lord hath chosen them for his inheritance.

III. We may infer the duty and obligations of a people thus favoured and blessed.—In illustrating of which, we shall attend to several particulars contained in the proclamation.

I. Then, we are to show when it may be said of a nation that the Lord is their God.

As a nation we form a particular character, in distinction from that of individuals. As such, we may exhibit the amiable features of virtue and religion; or the base picture of vice and infidelity. In this character we may receive temporal blessings, as the fruits and reward of virtue, and also suffer national calamities as the punishment of our vice and impiety.

Therefore, 1. When as a nation we acknowledge the eternal God to be the Creator, Preserver, and Upholder of all things. When we acknowledge his universal dominion over all worlds, and all beings. And when we attribute those divine perfections to him, which are necessary to form his exalted character, and render him the proper object of our love and esteem.

2. When we acknowledge that system of truth contained in the Bible to be *his word*; and as such, reverence and obey its doctrines and precepts. When we cordially subscribe to its divine originality, and rest all our hopes of futurity on its precious promises. When we endeavour to imbibe its genuine spirit, and live agreeably to its dictates.

3. When we acknowledge him as the alone object of religious worship and adoration, in distinction from all false gods and idols. When at stated seasons we attend upon his institutions, and offer up our prayers and praises through that medium which he hath appointed.

4. When we acknowledge him as our rightful Sovereign, and live in subjection to his laws. For it can never be supposed that a people have chosen the Lord for their God, while they refuse to have him reign over them. The very language of his enemies is, "Let us break his bands in sunder, and cast his cords away;" whilst those who approve of his government say, "The Lord is our Lawgiver, the Lord is our King, he will save us." And said Jesus, "Then are ye my friends, when ye do whatsoever I command you."

5. When we acknowledge his universal providence over all the works of his hands. If we rely upon his protecting care and providence, we shall manifest it, by appealing to his wisdom to direct us, when involved in darkness and difficulty ; and to his power to defend us, when surrounded by threatening dangers. And finally, in leaving the issue of our most interesting concerns, to the righteous disposal of Him who controls all human events.

6. And lastly. When we acknowledge the Lord to be the Giver of all our mercies. Nothing can be more calculated to keep us humble and thankful, than to realize our dependence on God. “ Every good, and every perfect gift, comes down from the Father of lights.” A sense of our own unworthiness, and of the divine goodness in bestowing favours upon us, will excite in us the most lively sentiments of gratitude and undissembled joy ; and will finally issue in thanksgiving and praise.

But we come

II. To show, what evidence a people may have, that the Lord hath chosen them for his inheritance.

The terms very naturally imply each other ; agreeably to the tenor of the new covenant, “ I will be their God, and they shall be my people.” And again, “ I love them that love me.”

Although this part of our subject may not appear so capable of proof as the former, since neither love nor hatred can be certainly known by the common course of providence, as one event happeneth to all ; yet undoubtedly there may be some rational

evidence given, in favour of the people whom God hath chosen.

As 1. God's disposing a people to choose him to be their God, is a clear evidence that he had previously chosen them for his inheritance. "Ye have not chosen me, (said the Saviour to his disciples, that is, first) but I have chosen you." They had indeed chosen him with all their hearts; but this was consequent upon his choice, and therefore could not be the cause, although it was the best evidence of their being his people. "We love him, because he first loved us." But we observe,

2. Special, and remarkable instances of divine interposition in behalf of a people, naturally lead us to conclude that God hath chosen them for his own.

Of old he chose the seed of Abraham for his people, and Jacob for the lot of his inheritance. And, although he suffered them for a season to be afflicted by their enemies, yet when the set time was come for their deliverance from Egyptian bondage, his arm was made quite bare in the fight of the nations.

The children of Israel at this time were sunk under the most abject slavery. They indeed groaned under their bondage, but had no idea of deliverance; and by being so long accustomed to serve, they had quite lost the spirit of enterprise. Yea, they were so far inured to their wretched condition, and so indifferent to the cause of freedom, that after Moses had exhibited his credentials, and given the most unequivocal proof of his being sent of



God to liberate them from their vile servitude, they were ready upon almost every appearance of difficulty or danger, to raise their clamorous voices and say, "Let us alone that we may serve the Egyptians." But their drooping spirits were finally cheered, and with one consent they rallied round the standard of freedom. And while the Egyptians for their cruelty, were visited with various *plagues*, and were now mourning the loss of their first-born, under cover of the night they made their escape. But the tyrant of Egypt soon determined to pursue them.

The ransomed tribes not being furnished with weapons of defence, in order to escape the Philistines, took their rout by the way of the wilderness; and were now encamped between Migdol and the Red Sea. Imagination itself could scarce conceive of a situation more disadvantageous and distressing than theirs. The sea spread itself in their front; on either side they were inclosed by inaccessible mountains. *Habiroth* on one side, and *Baal-zephon* on the other, forbade their flanking off. Whilst in their rear they beheld their late imperious master, with all their tyrant bands, in crowded columns advancing towards them; glittering in armour, and amply furnished with the whole apparatus of death!

At this critical moment when ruin appeared inevitable; Moses, who had the most perfect command of himself, endeavoured to calm their fears, and excite their confidence in God. "Stand still," said he, "and see the salvation of the Lord." The cloud which led their way, instantly went back, and

stood as an impenetrable wall before the Egyptian host. Moses now took his awful rod, and stretched his hand out over the sea, and the waters divided. Then, “the waters saw thee, O God, the waters saw thee, they were afraid, and the depths were troubled. He made the waters to stand as an heap, they were congealed in the heart of the sea,” until the chosen tribes had marched safely through.

But when one dark scene had passed, another equally distressing instantly opened to their view. They were now traversing the barren sands of Arabia beneath a burning sun, and their soul fainted within them. No fruitful fields supplied their hunger, nor cheering springs allayed their thirst. In vain they wish for the flesh-pots of Egypt, or for the waters of the Nile. No human exertions could save them. The Lord again interposed, and the heavens supplied them with bread, and the rock followed them with streams of living water.

The interpositions of Heaven were so visible in behalf of this people, that an eastern soothsayer, after using in vain all the arts of magic to curse them, was constrained to say, “The Lord his God is with him, and the shout of a King is among them.”

When David upon a particular occasion was celebrating the divine goodness, it brought to remembrance those days of the right hand of the Most High, when God so remarkably interposed in their behalf; even when they were strangers in the land. “And when (said he) they went from nation to nation, and from one kingdom to another people, he suffered no man to do them wrong. Yea, he

reproved kings for their fakes ; saying, Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm." And thus he led them on to possess the promised land.

But we are called upon by the Man whom we delight to honour, thankfully to notice "the manifold and signal mercies which distinguish our lot as a nation." But where shall we begin ! The various streams of divine goodness have constantly followed us through all this wilderness.

The interpositions of a kind Providence towards us from the first settlement of this country to the present day, have been almost as conspicuous as those granted to Israel of old.

The groaning of our fathers under the persecuting yoke of oppression, although in their native land, was heard in heaven. Nor did they long groan in vain : for God was pleased to dispose their hearts to unite, in forming the important design, of attempting a passage across the pathless ocean, in search of these western shores. Numerous were the trials and disappointments they experienced in leaving their native land ; and many were the fears and discouragements with which they conflicted on the boisterous ocean ; until at length they discovered the Continent, and again trod on solid ground.

But how seemingly easy would it have been for the savages to have collected their numerous tribes, and hurled such showers of darts and poisoned arrows upon them, as to have obliged them to quit the shore ; or at least to have harrassed them in such a manner, as to have prevented them from culti-

vating the foil, and in that way forced them to re-embark.

Various indeed were the scenes of distress through which the first adventurers passed ; and various were the deliverances which they experienced. Death early discovered their infant settlement, and within less than five months after their first landing at Plymouth, swept away nearly one half of their number. Sometimes painted savages with hideous yells disturbed their peaceful camp ; and sometimes famine with meagre visage stared them in the face.

Three years after their arrival, they were brought to such straits, their provisions being spent, when it was three or four months to harvest, so that when they lay down at night they knew not where to get any for the morning ; and for three or four months together they had neither bread nor corn. “ Yet (said they) we bear our wants with cheerfulness, and rest on Providence.” Nor did they rely in vain. God heard their cry and sent them relief.

Thus when death, and savages, and famine, seemed all to combine against this feeble colony, God was pleased to give the high command, “ Destroy it not, for a blessing is in it.”

Heaven had undoubtedly designed this beautiful part of the creation, for nobler purposes than to lie an uncultivated waste, for beasts and savages to roam over. It was evidently marked out by Divine Providence, as the favoured spot, on which Liberty (which had long been imprisoned in other parts of the globe) should erect her spacious temple.

But this high design was not then fully understood ; and America, like a child in minority, for a long season was under “tutors and governors” of a foreign appointment, until the fulness of time came for her to be free.

But time would fail, to recount the various wonders of divine goodness towards this land ; or the numerous instances of oppression from a foreign power, which led on to that memorable season, which marked a new epoch in the history of the world—I mean the fourth of July, 1776, which announced the FREEDOM and INDEPENDENCE of America.

That auspicious morn will long be remembered (and perhaps as long celebrated) as the political birth-day of this nation. Then our fathers in council assembled, made their solemn appeal to the great Judge of the universe, for the rectitude of their intentions, and the justice of their cause.

And, my brethren, were not the interpositions of Divine Providence quite visible in our behalf, in disposing the different States to lay aside their local prejudices, and all unite in one great object ? And did not Heaven remarkably smile upon our exertions ? How surprising was the spirit of enterprise, which then appeared in every class of citizens ! Our legislators in Congress, nobly opposed and effectually counteracted the subtle and perfidious politics of a nation, long skilled in the intrigues of war. And our young sons, uninured to the dangers and hardships of a camp ; but animated with the noble sentiments of liberty, and led on by our immortal

WASHINGTON, encountered an army of disciplined *veterans*, with a courage and firmness which would have done honour to Roman bravery. Unsubdued by difficulties, and unappalled by dangers, our troops were led on from conquering to conquer; one army after another falling into their hands, until our foes were obliged to subscribe conditions of peace.

Shall we now, my brethren, ascribe all this glory to ourselves? No, we will say with the devout psalmist, "If it had not been the Lord, who was on our side, now may *America* say; if it had not been the Lord, who was on our side when men rose up against us, then they had swallowed us up quick." It was the God of armies which led our troops to victory and glory; and His forever shall be the praise.

Happy indeed is the nation whose God is the Lord, and the people whom he hath thus highly favoured.

We come now, as was proposed,

III. To infer the duty and obligations of a people thus favoured and blessed. The two following inferences very naturally arise from the subject;

1. If we have chosen the Lord to be our God, it is our indispensable duty to acknowledge, with thanksgiving, the numerous favours he confers upon us.
2. As we are dependent creatures, it is our duty to beseech the kind Author of these blessings to continue them to us; and extend those which we enjoy to all mankind.

In illustrating these observations, we shall attend particularly to the proclamation, upon which we are now convened.

1. We are called upon to offer thanksgiving “for the possession of Constitutions of government which unite, and by their union establish liberty with order.” If ever a people were under obligations to the great Ruler of the universe, for the full and free enjoyment of their natural rights and privileges, we certainly are.\* If we are not happy, we must blame ourselves for it; for our modes of government are not the dictates of a conquering tyrant; but the deliberate choice of American freemen. No foreign lord has dominion over us: but our rulers are of ourselves, and our governors proceed from among us. And as the most important offices, both in the Federal and State governments are elective; no *hereditary dunce* can ever be imposed upon the people, but the man whose tried wisdom, fidelity and patriotism, shall commend him to their choice.

But our Constitutions are said to “unite, and by their union to establish liberty with order.” But why do they unite? Undoubtedly because they secure the *equal rights* of all. We cannot reasonably expect that either “union or order” will long prevail, where the essential rights of one part of the community are violated, and government is institut-

\* As a nation, we certainly enjoy every natural right; and if under any of the State Constitutions, any class of citizens do not enjoy equal privileges, the matter will undoubtedly be attended to at a proper time, and the grievance redressed.

ed and administered for the benefit of a part only, and not for the whole. May we ever consider our rights unalienable, and in a constitutional way remonstrate against the smallest infringement.

2. We are directed to offer public thanksgiving to God, "for the preservation of our peace, foreign and domestic."

A moment's reflection, my brethren, will convince you of the propriety of this remark. For notwithstanding the embarrassments which our trade hath suffered on the seas, and the many unprovoked insults offered to our flag; we have shown ourselves superior to those who have injured us, by despising rather than retaliating their crimes. And although our western border has been partially distressed, yet the great body of the nation has been folded in the secure arms of peace. And by the blessing of God on the cause of Liberty in Europe; and the wise and steady exertions of our supreme Executive, aided by our Federal Council, we have been preserved from the horrors and calamities of a foreign war.

3. "The suppression of the late insurrection" is mentioned by our worthy President, as matter of public thanksgiving. And let the cause of that unhappy insurrection be what it may, we will rejoice and praise God, that the consequences were far less fatal than we feared; and that it has been wisely overruled, not only for the suppression of that rebellion, but for the strengthening and cementing of the union. May it also be farther beneficial,



by deterring others from opposing lawful authority, and prevent their making the desperate appeal to arms.

4. "The prosperous course of our affairs, public and private," calls for our grateful acknowledgments.

That our wealth and population have rapidly increased within these few years past, much beyond any former calculations, cannot be denied. And we have the satisfaction still to believe that the tide has not begun to ebb, but is yet increasing. Our settlements are extending; the wilderness yields to the hand of cultivation, and becomes a fruitful field; towns are built, and cities enlarged. Citizens of every class find sufficient employ, and ample encouragement to reward their industry. The liberal arts are nourished, and useful knowledge diffused; and surely there can be nothing wanting but real piety to make us truly happy.

But from the uncertain tenure by which we hold these enjoyments, we are led to infer

2. That it is our duty to beseech the kind Author of these blessings to continue them to us, and extend those which we enjoy to all mankind.

And 1. By the proclamation we are directed "to beseech the kind Author of these blessings graciously to prolong them to us."

We shall be naturally led to this if we suitably realize, that the same hand which bestows our blessings, may take them away at any time, without asking our leave. And such is the versatility of all earthly things, that we know not what will be on

the morrow, or even what the present day will bring forth. We know not how soon the present scene may be reversed, and the dark clouds of adversity overshadow our brightest prospects. Let us then humbly acknowledge our dependence on that living Fountain, and thankfully adore the Giver of all our mercies.

2. We are exhorted to pray God, “to imprint on our hearts a deep and solemn sense of our obligations to him for them.”

Without this, we can never be thankful: for if we consider our enjoyments as the just reward of our own wisdom or industry, we shall feel thankful to none but ourselves. The Lord deliver us from the horrid sin of ingratitude! As our blessings are multiplied, may we consider our obligations increased, to love and adore our great Benefactor.

3. We are to beseech the kind Author of our blessings, “to teach us rightly to estimate their immense value.”

Our blessings, my brethren, are numberless and great. We are a people highly favoured of the Lord. Our civil and religious privileges are none of the least; we sit under our own vine and fig-tree, and none are permitted to disturb or make us afraid. We worship God according to the dictates of our own consciences, without the dread of an inquisition, or fear of persecution. We are indeed exalted to heaven in point of privilege; let us not forget, that “where much is given, there much will be required.”

4. We are directed to pray that we may be kept from “abusing” the favours we enjoy.

It is too often the case, that those who have called upon God in the day of their trouble, have forgotten him in the time of prosperity. Happy would it be if we could learn that sacred lesson, “to use the world as not abusing it.” Our blessings are given us to use, but not to abuse. They are often bestowed in abundance, so that we may disperse abroad, and give to the poor; and thus lay up a treasure in the heavens, which fadeth not away. But should we become vain in our prosperity, and forget the God which made us, and lightly esteem the Rock of our salvation; we must expect he will turn his hand against us, and deprive us of the blessings we abuse. May the Lord “preserve us from the arrogance of prosperity,” and enable us so to walk before him as a nation, that he may delight to prosper and bless us.

But we are to conclude our supplications by praying, 5. That God would “impart all the blessings we possess, or ask for ourselves, to the whole family of mankind.”

This beautiful sentiment, my brethren, breathes universal benevolence and good will to the whole human race. Much more is implied in it than what is expressed. I conceive that it fully authorizes and enjoins us, to extend our views to other objects not so particularly mentioned in the proclamation. And 1. We will fervently pray that the blessings of the GOSPEL of our Lord Jesus Christ, which we so peculiarly enjoy, may be extended to all mankind.

That the altars and idols of Pagan superstition may fall before the light of truth ; and that the shades of Mahometan imposture may be dispelled by the bright beams of the Sun of righteousness. And that the dragon, and the beast, and the false prophet ; and all the antichristian powers, which have in any way opposed and persecuted the religion of Jesus Christ, may be subdued. May the gospel with its benign influences extend from land to land, and from sea to sea ; until the knowledge of God shall cover the earth, from the rising to the setting sun.

2. As we enjoy the blessings of PEACE, we sincerely wish the same to all our fellow-men.

Base indeed must be the heart, which for any pecuniary advantages would wish a war to continue, which makes such havoc of the human species. Hence, my brethren, let us offer up our prayers continually to the GOD OF PEACE, that the present distressing war among the European nations may come to an end. And that it may terminate in the overthrow of tyranny and despotism ; and in the establishment of liberty and the EQUAL RIGHTS of man. And particularly, that that nation which came to our relief, in the day of our trouble, may speedily *obtain* and *give* such honourable conditions of peace, as shall convince the world that they are friends to liberty, order, and humanity ; and are only to be dreaded by tyrants. May they soon realize all the advantages, which a free and enlightened people can derive, from a government framed by the unalterable principles of reason, and founded upon the eternal basis of *equal rights*.

But 3. As we desire and enjoy LIBERTY and FREEDOM ourselves, we will not forget our brethren, who are in captivity and slavery.

Our unhappy countrymen, who have fallen into the hands of the *Algerines*, whose “tender mercies are cruelties,” shall not be forgotten in our supplications. We will beseech the God of all compassion to remember them in the land of their captivity, and to give them favour in the eyes of those who have carried them captive. We will not only pray for them, but whenever we shall be called upon by proper authority, we will cheerfully subscribe for their redemption, and restore them again to the embraces of their friends, and the blessings of freedom.

But the benevolent sentiment we now dwell upon, does not confine our wishes here ; no, we wish the same blessings of liberty which we enjoy to all mankind. May the day soon arrive, when not difference of climate or features, nor the colour of the skin,—when nothing but crimes shall consign any of the human race to slavery.

Urged by my own feelings, I am persuaded, my brethren, you will indulge me to mention in particular one of our suffering friends. I mean the brave, but unfortunate *Marquis de la Fayette!* “At the age of nineteen he espoused the cause of America,” and early determined to embark for this country. But before he could accomplish his design, intelligence arrived at Paris ; “that the American insurgents, reduced to two thousand, were flying before a British force of thirty thousand regulars.” In

short, things appeared so discouraging, that our commissioners at Paris “thought it but honest to dissuade him from the present prosecution of his perilous enterprize.” But nobly triumphing over every discouragement, he said, “Hitherto I have only cherished your cause—I am now going to serve it.”\* He at length procured a vessel, at his own expense, and came to America. Soon after his arrival, Congress conferred on him the rank of Major-General, which he accepted of; but with the condition of serving at his own expense.†

His services for several years together in the American army are too well known, to require a particular detail upon this occasion. The latter part of his command, however, was peculiarly distinguished by the difficulties he encountered, and the important services he rendered this country. Particularly in counteracting, and harassing the movements of the British army in Virginia.

From his embarrassed situation at a certain time, Lord Cornwallis thought himself so sure of taking him, that he wrote to the British court, that “the boy could not escape him.” But the fact proved just the reverse; for he found, not long after, that it was impossible for him to escape; and was finally obliged to resign himself and army as prisoners of war.

Can we now, my brethren, who enjoy the fruit of his toils, forget this generous patron of American freedom, who is now suffering the horrors of a wretched confinement, and languishing in a dreary

\* Amer. Geog. p. 136, 137.

† Ibid.

prison? No, we will raise our supplicating voice to Heaven for him. And may that God who heareth the groans and sighs of the prisoner, break the bars of *Magdeburg Castle*, and let that oppressed patriot go free. And may the glorious gospel of peace, which proclaims liberty to *captives*, and opens the prison doors to them that are *bound*, extend its heavenly influence throughout the world.

To conclude.

While we commiserate the case of the unfortunate, and sympathize in their distresses, let us endeavour wisely and thankfully to improve our privileges and blessings to the glory of God, and the best good of our fellow-men. Let us diligently cultivate habits of “sobriety, order, morality and piety;” and study to lead quiet and peaceable lives in all godliness and honesty.

And may the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Israel; the God in whom our fathers trusted and found deliverance, continue to be our God, and to bless us. “There is none like unto the God of Jeshurun, who rideth upon the heaven in thy help, and in his excellency upon the sky.” “The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms.” “Happy is that people that is in such a case; yea, happy is that people, whose God is the Lord.”

A M E N.