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Psalm 107 "O give thanks unto the LORD, for he is good: for his mercy endureth forever!"

The Happy Nation A Sermon

Preached at Beverly, Nov. 24, 1825

Being the Day Appointed

By the Executive Authority of the

Commonwealth, For the Annual

Thanksgiving. By David Oliphant

Pastor of the Third Congregational

Rid me, and deliver me from the hand of strange children, whose mouth speaketh vanity, and their right hand is a right hand of falsehood; that our sons may be as plants grown up in their youth; that our daughters may be as cornerstones polished after the similitude of a palace; that our garners may be full, affording all manner of store; that our sheep may bring forth thousands and ten thousands in our streets; that our oxen may be strong to labor; that there be no breaking in nor going out; that is in such a case; yea, happy is that people whose God is the Lord. This Psalm appears to have been

composed after David's accession to the throne of Israel. The Lord has been good to this people and to their monarch, in subduing their enemies. He renders him, for the favor thus shown, his tribute of thanksgiving. But still they had other enemies to overcome; and in the former part of the text, he offers his petitions for the continuance of the Divine favor, in order that the complete redemption and prosperity of Israel might be accomplished. Rid me, and deliver me from the hand of strange children, whose mouth speaketh vanity, and their right hand is a right hand of falsehood. The object of this prayer is expressed in the latter part of the text; viz. That our sons may be as plants grown up in their youth.

The Psalmist prayed for victory over his and his people's enemies, that they might have peace. Is that people that in such a case; yea, happy is that people whose God is the Lord. Called again by our civil fathers, in accordance with a long continued custom, in this section of our country, to render to Almighty God our thanks and praise for his goodness to us another year, it may not be improper to take a brief survey of the present state of our happy land; to advert to some of the principal causes of our prosperity; and to the means of perpetuating it.

THIS WAS 1865
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In contemplating our present state, we may call to mind, in the first place, what the Psalmist prayed for in the text as the chief source, under God, of temporal prosperity; viz. peace. We are at peace among ourselves, and with foreign nations. We have no intestine divisions—no civil broils, leading to anarchy, bloodshed and misery. We are on terms of amity, and enjoy the blessings of free intercourse with all the nations of the earth.

We have no breakings in upon us by hostile nations. **We are not called to witness ravages and desolations of war, nor to experience in any form, this dreadful scourge of the Almighty**—one of the greatest with which a country can be visited—one of the severest with which the Sovereign Ruler of the earth chastises a wicked people.

We have no goings out from among us— no emigration to foreign lands, by which our country is depopulated. We are not exposed to be carried away into captivity, as the nations, or parts of them, often have been.

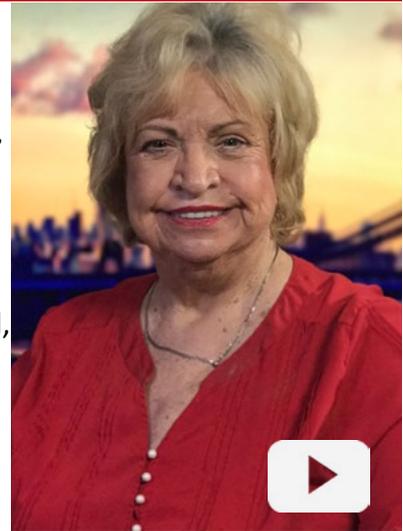
The last, though not the least of the ingredients which mingle in the cup of our temporal felicity that I shall notice is, the blessing of civil liberty. This is the crown of all the rest. The rest may be enjoyed, at least to a very considerable extent, where this is wanting. Liberty, in respect to temporal blessings, is the glory of this land, and of other lands where it is enjoyed. By comparatively few nations, however, is it enjoyed; and in none is it so well understood, and do so many blessings as yet flow from it, as in these United States.

We are made happy however—we are distinguished more by our moral and religious advantages, than in any other way. God hath not dealt so with any nation. Upon how many has the light of Revelation never shone! How many are yet enveloped in all the darkness of idolatry, superstition and infidelity, and dwell in places full of habitations of cruelty, without the Scriptures, without the institutions of religion, without the blessings of the Christian Sabbath and of the Christian Ministry; without any of the means of grace! But on the whole of this land, the light of heaven, through the medium

of the Scriptures, shines. On some portions indeed, this light falls with diminished rays, but for the most part, it pours upon us its full beams. The gospel is here preached, if not stately to all the people, yet occasionally to all, or nearly all, and with a greater degree of purity, simplicity, and fidelity, probably, than to any other people on the face of the earth. In short, our moral and religious state, far below, as it falls, what is should be, is still elevated above that of any other people; and I venture to say, it affords a broader and stronger foundation for our national prosperity and happiness, than anything else, or so far as we have anything to do in promoting these, than all things else. **THIS NATION PROPHETICALLY WARNED IN 1865**

Take away our moral and religious institutions, and with them our moral and religious feelings and habits, and though our salubrious climate and fertile soil might remain, liberty and peace would soon be torn away from us—the tide of our population would no longer rise and swell—the fountains of legislation and justice would be corrupted—education would no more be a common blessing—literature, science, and the arts, would cease to be cultivated—the efforts of agriculture, manufactures, and commerce would all be paralyzed, and we should sink in the scale of national prosperity and happiness, as fast as we have for many years been rising.

Righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people. It was to a religious influence mainly that the Psalmist referred, when he said in the text, that our sons may be as plants grown up in their youth, and our daughters as corner stones, polished after the similitude of a palace. **It is moral and religious culture alone that can give to the former** their full strength and stature, that is, make them the best and most useful citizens; and to the latter real comeliness and beauty, so that they shall



**WATCH FAYE ON
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be to the state, what the tall, well proportioned, highly polished, and richly ornamented columns are in gracing the house to which they belong. Mental culture, and a suitable preparation in other respects for the business of life, may do much towards rearing up good citizens—useful inhabitants for the commonwealth, but moral and religious culture will do more. Find a virtuous community—a moral and religious community, and you find a people necessarily prosperous and happy; for God is their friend—he blesses them with his smiles.

I would now advert to some of the principal causes of our national prosperity. It is to be feared that too many ascribe it to wrong causes, or to those real causes which are only secondary in importance; and probably there are not a few, who think but little, and who care but little about the causes, provided they can share largely in this prosperity—if they can gather riches, and enjoy all that heart can wish.

Put the question to some, even our most enlightened citizens, Why is it that this country has experienced such unexampled prosperity?—rising within the course of a few years comparatively, from infancy to manhood—from indigence to opulence—from being a handful of people to a great magnitude in the political constellation, and they will tell you, It is owing to our numerous local advantages—to our climate and soil; to the facilities of intercourse between us and other nations, and between different parts of our own country; to the enterprise and intelligence of our citizens; to the freedom of our institutions—the excellence of our laws, and the wisdom and impartiality with which they are executed.

And when they have said thus much, in the way of accounting for our national prosperity, they stop, and either never think of ascribing it to any other causes, or are unwilling to acknowledge any others. Now, without any doubt, all these causes, to which our national prosperity is referred, are real causes. They have had, and still have their influence in promoting it. But the great original Source of this prosperity is left out of view, and with very many he principal secondary cause. My hearers, we have been prospered as a nation, because the Lord has

been our God. We are happy, because He is for us, and not against us; and because the influence of that holy religion, which He has revealed for the benefit of mankind, has been, and is still so extensively felt throughout the community. God was never more evidently the Protector and Friend of the nation of Israel, than has been of our own; though in some special relations, he stood nearer to them than he does to us, and did more for them than he has done for us, or for any other people.

The spirit of liberty? Who gave them wisdom to lay so broad and firm a foundation for the beautiful temple of liberty which they have reared? Who sustained and inspirited them amidst all their early discouragements? Who preserved them from the invasions of a savage foe? Who multiplied their numbers, gave success to their enterprises, and when the hand of despotism would have crushed them again, enabled them to make successful resistance, and to establish their independence on an immovable basis? Was not the hand of the Lord in all this? If he had not protected and prospered, what would ever have been accomplished, compared with what has now been accomplished through his blessing?

It is true that all means which have been employed from the first settlement of this country to the present time, to bring about the events that have taken place, were necessary; but the blessing of God was equally necessary. Means have been the secondary causes of our **prosperity**—they are so still; but if we stop at the means, we refuse to give **God the glory due unto His name**. I love to trace His hand in all the leading events of our history, and at every period of it, to take a stand on the eminence which it affords, and survey the scene around me, and exclaim with pious admiration and



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gratitude, What hath God wrought! He hath done great things for us, whereof we are glad. And among the secondary causes of our prosperity, I love to mark and distinguish the influence which religion has had in forming our national character, and in raising us to the present elevated and conspicuous stand which we are enabled to take among the nations of the earth. I venerate the names of our distinguished men in the senate and in the field.

I would bestow the meed [a deserved share or reward] of applause for their wisdom, and heroic deeds. I am willing to allow all that can justly be claimed in behalf of the intelligence, efforts, and enterprise of the inhabitants of this land; but after all, I maintain that among secondary causes, the piety of our fathers, and of their descendants, has contributed more to the prosperity and glory of this nation, than any other, or than all others combined. Our fathers came here more on account of their religion than anything else. It was their spirit of religious freedom that enkindled in their bosoms the kindred spirit of civil liberty, and led them on ultimately to the establishment of their independence.

Let this influence but be felt, by those who make and execute the laws—by our public men, from those who sit in the chair of state, down through every subordinate grade of office—let it be felt by the ministers of religion, in our literary institutions, in our common schools, and among the several classes of the community, and there can be no question but that all the prosperity and happiness that we now possess, will go down to posterity, and be enjoyed, only in a greatly enhanced degree, by our children's children, even to a thousand generations, if time shall permit so many to live on earth.

Let this **influence be properly felt**, and it will do more towards promoting the real prosperity and happiness of this nation, and making it truly distinguished, than all the wisdom of our statesmen, the victories of our fleets and armies, the ingenuity and enterprise of our citizens, and all other means combined. Let us be a virtuous and pious people, keeping the statutes, and obeying the precepts of the Lord, and we have the assurance of His protecting care, who is King of Kings, and Lord of Lords—the

Ruler among the nations, who setteth up one, and putteth down another, and can dash them to pieces like a potter's vessel.

This care has been signally manifested in the case of every pious and moral community on earth. And where is the nation to be found, either in ancient or modern times, that has forsaken the Lord—that has virtually cast off His authority, by violating His precepts, and disregarding His sacred institutions, that has not been visited with His judgments? How many have sunk down from a state of great prosperity and influence, into a state of insignificance! Not a few, for their wickedness, have been blotted from the list of nations. The Jewish Commonwealth especially, will forever stand as a solemn memento of the influence of piety in elevating, and of the influence of sin in depressing the condition of people. I come now, in the last place, to consider some of the means of perpetuating our national prosperity. And here, after the remarks which I have already made, I need not say, or at least dwell upon the point, that we should most earnestly seek the Lord to be our God, by unceasing endeavors to secure His favor and friendship.

With His blessing, and in the enjoyment of His smiles, and under His providential care and guidance, great as our prosperity may be at present, it will increase, and as far beyond our present expectations, as the condition of our country at this time, exceeds that of our fathers, struggling for existence in these originally inhospitable and uncultivated wilds.

But how should we secure this blessing? It must be important, or such a man as David, the best king that ever say upon an earthly throne, would never have said, Happy is that people whose God is the Lord. It is not difficult to answer this question. It is vastly more difficult to do, taking men as they are, what this answer implies. To secure God's blessing on our country, we must keep his statutes, and obey his commands. As a people we must become virtuous. Piety must be cultivated. Its influence must extend through all classes of the community. We are now enjoying benefits which the piety. There is a sad degeneracy in many respects among us their sons. The influence of this are to come after us will feel it,

and feel it severely too, unless a reformation in many of the opinions and habits of the present generation shall take place. A moral current has commenced its course in this nation, which if now seasonably checked by an opposing current of virtue and piety, will ere long spread desolation through this goodly heritage, and carry down with it into common and tremendous ruin, whatever is valuable in our civil or religious institutions.

It must eventually, if not checked, undermine and completely destroy this fair fabric—our national republic, which has been reared at such a vast expense of labor, blood, and treasure.

Many will say, let us improve our many natural advantages—let us employ to the best purpose our physical strength—let us improve our agriculture, increase our manufacturing establishments, extend our commerce, multiply our facilities of internal intercourse, enlarge the foundations of our literary and scientific institutions, increase the means of education among the people, select brave men for the field, and wise men for the cabinet and senate. As to piety and morals, they are subjects with which we need have but little concern. If this is not the language of words with many, it is the language of their practice. Now I would say, take care of piety and morals, in the first place. Guard these as an object of the first importance, and let the means which have been alluded to be regarded as secondary.

Attend suitably to the former, and the latter will not be neglected, but rendered more effectual. Piety will nerve the arm of the body politic with vigor; and will give success to every enterprise calculated to bring glory and honor to our name. But let piety lose its influence among the body of the people, and this arm is unnerved; and the time is not far distant, when it will be written in broad and legible characters, on our civil and religious institutions; The glory is departed. In order to promote this piety, and extend its influence as widely as possible—this piety, which is the best bulwark of defense that we can have, because that which God specially approves and follows with his blessing, his word must be circulated and studied—its truths must be believed, and its

I AM THANKFUL FOR YOU!

precepts obeyed. The young must early be instructed in the ways of religion, and brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. A nation's nursery is in the bosom of her families, and if the discipline here is not salutary, her citizens must be corrupt. Divine institutions must be regarded—especially the Sabbath. A nation of Sabbath breakers cannot long be a prosperous or happy nation. Vice must be frowned upon, in all its forms. There is a monster among the vices of this land, that prowls through it from one extremity to the other—that has gone out through all its length and breadth, and is making dreadful havoc on the morals, and peace and lives of our inhabitants. It is the monster Intemperance. He finds access to every class of the community, from highest to the lowest.

Even the female sex have not escaped his fangs, but have fallen victims to the enticements, which, hideous as he is, he has thrown around him. Not even the professor of the holy religion of the Gospel has always been careful to avoid his snares.

Let the parent inquire what he is doing—the master, the professional man, the legislator, the minister of religion, and the minister of justice, severally what they are doing. All have an influence. Let all resolve to exert it in favor of their country. Let them cherish the spirit of piety. Let them exert the influence of a good example. Is there a dishonest man, let him become a man of integrity. Let the profane put away their oaths. Let the Sabbath breaker reverence and observe God's institutions. Let the drunkard become sober; and whatever other vice may prevail, let it be abandoned. Every immoral man is an enemy to his country, however loudly he may proclaim his Happy is the people that is in such a case; yea, happy is that people whose God is the Lord.

