

SERMONS  
ON  
IMPORTANT SUBJECTS,

BY THE LATE REVEREND AND PIOUS

SAMUEL DAVIES, A.M.,

Sometime President of the College in New-Jersey.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

---

THE FIFTH EDITION.

---

TO WHICH ARE NOW ADDED,

THREE OCCASIONAL SERMONS,

NOT INCLUDED IN THE FORMER EDITIONS;

MEMOIRS AND CHARACTER OF THE AUTHOR;

AND

TWO SERMONS ON OCCASION OF HIS DEATH,

By the Rev. Drs. Gibbons and Finley.

VOL. II.

*NEW-YORK:*

PRINTED FOR T. ALLEN, BOOKSELLER AND STATIONER,

N<sup>o</sup>. 12, QUEEN-STREET.

—1792.—

## SERMON XXV.

### INGRATITUDE TO GOD AN HEINOUS BUT GENERAL INIQUITY.

---

2 CHRON. XXXII. 25.—*But Hezekiah rendered not again according to the benefit done unto him.*

**A**MONG the many vices that are at once universally decried, and universally practised in the world, there is none more base or more common than ingratitude; ingratitude towards the supreme Benefactor. Ingratitude is the sin of individuals, of families, of churches, of kingdoms, and even of all mankind. The guilt of ingratitude lies heavy upon the whole race of men, though alas! but few of them feel and lament it. I have felt it of late with unusual weight; and it is the weight of it that now extorts a discourse from me upon this subject. If the plague of an ungrateful heart must cleave to us while in this world of sin and imperfection, let us at least lament it; let us bear witness against it; let us condemn ourselves for it; and let us do all we can to suppress it in ourselves. I feel myself, as it were exasperated, and full of indignation against it, and against myself, as guilty of it. And in the bitterness of my spirit, I shall endeavour to expose it to your view in its proper infernal colours, as an object of horror and indignation.

None of us can flatter ourselves that we are in little or no danger of this sin, when even so good and great a man as Hezekiah did not escape the infection. In the memoirs of his life, which are illustrious for piety, zeal for reformation, victory over his enemies, glory and importance at home and abroad, this, alas! is recorded of him, “That he *rendered not again* to his divine Benefactor, *according to the benefit done unto him*; for his heart was lifted up, therefore there was wrath upon him, and upon Judah and Jerusalem.”

Many had been the blessings and deliverances of this good man’s life. I shall only particularize two, recorded in this chapter. The Assyrians had overrun a great part of the country, and intended to lay siege to Jerusalem. Their haughty monarch, who had carried all before him, and was grown insolent with success, sent Hezekiah a blasphemous letter, to intimidate him and his people. He profanely bullies and defies Hezekiah and his God together; and Rabshakeh, his messenger, comments upon his master’s letter in the same style of impiety and insolence. But here observe the signal efficacy of prayer! Hezekiah, Isaiah, and no doubt many other pious people among the Jews, made their prayer to the God of Israel; and, as it were, complained to him of the threatenings and profane blasphemy of the Assyrian monarch. Jehovah hears, and works a miraculous deliverance for them.

He sends out an angel (one was sufficient) who destroyed in one night, as we are elsewhere told, (2 Kings xix. 35) no less than a hundred fourscore and five thousand men; which extensive slaughter, a Jewish tradition tells us, was made by means of lightning; a very supposable and sufficient cause. Sennacherib, with the thin remains of his army, fled home inglorious; and his two sons assassinated him at an idolatrous altar. Thus Jerusalem was freed from danger, and the country rescued from slavery and the ravages of war. Nay, we find from profane history, that this dreadful blow proved fatal in the issue to the Assyrian monarchy, which had oppressed the world so long; for upon this the Medes, and afterwards other nations, threw off their submission; and the empire fell to pieces. Certainly so illustrious a deliverance as this, wrought immediately by the divine hand, was a sufficient reason for ardent gratitude.

Another deliverance followed upon this. Hezekiah was sick unto death; that is, his sickness was in its own nature mortal, and would have been unto death, had it not been for the miraculous interposition of Providence. But, upon his prayer to God, he was recovered, and fifteen years added to his life. This also was great cause of gratitude. And we find it had this effect upon him, while the sense of his deliverance was fresh upon his mind; for in his eucharistic song upon his recovery, we find these grateful strains: *The living, the living, he shall praise thee, as I do this day: the father to the children shall make known thy truth. The Lord was ready to save me: therefore we will sing my songs to the stringed instruments all the days of our life.* But, alas! those grateful impressions wore off in some time; and pride, that uncreaturely temper, began to rise. He began to think himself the favourite of Heaven, in some degree, on account of his own personal goodness. He indulged his vanity in ostentatiously exposing his treasures to the Babylonian messengers: which was the instance of selfish pride and ingratitude that seems here particularly referred to.

This pride and ingratitude passed not without evidences of the divine indignation; for we are told, *therefore there was wrath upon him, and upon Judah and Jerusalem.* As the crime was not peculiar to him, so neither is the punishment. Nations and individuals have suffered in this manner from age to age: and under the guilt of it we and our country are now languishing.

In order to make you the more sensible of your ingratitude towards your divine Benefactor, I shall give you a brief view of his mercies towards you, and expose the aggravated baseness of ingratitude under the reception of so many mercies.

Mercy has poured in upon you on all sides, and followed you from the first commencement of your existence: rich, various, free, repeated, uninterrupted mercy. The blessings of a body wonderfully and fearfully made,

complete in all its parts, and not monstrous in any: the blessings of a rational immortal soul, preserved in the exercise of sound reason for so many years, amid all those accidents that have shattered it in others, and capable of the exalted pleasures of religion, and the everlasting enjoyment of the blessed God, the supreme good: the blessing of a large and spacious world, prepared and furnished for our accommodation; illuminated with an illustrious sun, and the many luminaries of the sky: the earth enriched and adorned with trees, vegetables, various sorts of grain, and animals, for our support or convenience; and the sea, a medium of extensive trade, and an inexhaustible store of fishes: the blessing of the early care of parents and friends, to provide for us in the helpless days of infancy, and direct or restrain us in the giddy precipitant years of youth; the blessing of being born in the adult age of the world, when the improvements of art are carried to so high a degree of perfection; of being born, not among savages in a wilderness, but in a humanized, civilized country; not on the burning sandy deserts of the torrid zone, nor under the frozen sky of Lapland or Iceland, but in a temperate climate, as favourable to the comfort and continuance of life as most countries upon earth; not in a barren soil, scarcely affording provision of the coarsest sort for its inhabitants, but in a land of unusual plenty, that has never felt the severities of famine; the blessing of not being a race of slaves, under the tyranny of an arbitrary government, but free-born Britons and Virginians in a land of liberty: these birth-right blessings are almost peculiar to us and our nation. Let me enumerate also the blessing of a good education; good, at least, when compared to the many savage nations of the earth; the blessing of health for months and years; the blessing of raiment suited to the various seasons of the year; the blessings of rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, of summer and winter, of seed-time and harvest; the agreeable vicissitude of night and day; the refreshing repose of sleep, and the activity and enjoyment of our waking hours, the numerous and refined blessings of society, and the most endearing relations; the blessings included in the tender names of friend, husband or wife, parent or child, brother or sister; the blessings of peace; peace, in the midst of a peaceful country, which has been our happy lot till of late years: or peace, in the midst of a ravaged bleeding country, which is a more distinguished and singular blessing, and which we now enjoy, while many of our fellow-subjects feel a terrible reverse: blessings in every age of life; in infancy, in youth, in adult age, and in the decays of old age; blessings by sea and land, and in every country where we have resided; in short, blessings as numerous as our moments, as long continued as our lives; blessings personal and relative, public and private; for while we have the air to breathe in, the earth to tread upon, or a drop of water to quench our thirst, we must own we are not left destitute of blessings from God. From God, I say, all these

blessings originally flow; and to him we are principally obliged for them. Indeed, they are conveyed to us by means of our fellow-creatures; or they seem to be the spontaneous productions of natural causes, acting according to the established laws of nature. But then it was God, the Fountain of being and of all good, that gave our fellow-creatures the disposition, the ability, and the opportunity of conveying these blessings to us; and it is the great God who is the Author of those causes which spontaneously produce so many blessings for our enjoyment, and of those laws of nature, according to which they act. These are but channels, channels cut by his hand; and he is the source, the ocean of blessings. Creatures are but the hands that distribute his charity through a needy world: but his is the store from which they derive their supplies. On this account therefore we should receive all these blessings as gifts from God, and feel ourselves obliged to him, as the supreme original Benefactor. Besides, it is very probable to me, that in order to bestow some of these blessings upon us by means of natural causes, God may give these causes a touch to turn them in our favour more than they would be according to the established course of nature; a touch so efficacious as to answer the kind design; though so gentle and agreeable to the established laws of nature, as not to be perceivable, or to cast the system of nature into disorder. The blessings conveyed in this way are not only the gifts of his hand, but the gifts of his immediate hand.

Therefore let God be acknowledged the supreme, the original Benefactor of the world, and the proper Author of all our blessings; and let all his creatures, in the height of their benevolence and usefulness, own that they are but the distributors of his alms, or the instruments of conveying the gifts of his hand. Let us acknowledge the light of yonder sun, the breath that now heaves our lungs, and fans the vital flame, the growing plenty that is now bursting its way through the clods of earth, the water that bubbles up in springs, that flows in streams and rivers, or rolls at large in the ocean; let us own, I say, that all these are the bounties of his hand, who supplies with good the various-ranks of being, as high as the most exalted angel, and as low as the young ravens, and the grass of the field. Let him stand as the acknowledged Benefactor of the universe to inflame the gratitude of all to him, or to array in the crimson colours of aggravated guilt the ingratitude of those sordid, stupid wretches, who still continue unthankful.

The positive blessings I have briefly enumerated, have some of them been interrupted at times: but even the interruption seemed only intended to make way for some deliverance; a deliverance that reinstated us in the possession of our former blessings with a new and stronger relish, and taught us, or at least was adapted to teach us some useful lessons, which we were not likely to learn, had not our enjoyment been awhile suspended. This very hour let us turn our eyes backward, and take a review of a length of ten,

twenty, forty, or sixty years; and what a series of deliverances rise upon us! Deliverances from the many dangers of childhood, by which many have lost their limbs, and many their lives; deliverances from many threatening and fatal accidents; deliverances from exquisite pains, and from dangerous diseases; deliverances from the gates of death, and the mouth of the grave; and deliverances for yourselves, and for your dear families and friends! When sickness, like a destroying angel, has entered your neighbourhood, and made extensive havoc and desolation around you, you and yours have escaped the infection, while you were every day in anxious expectation of the dreadful visit, and trembling at the dubious fate of some dear relative or your own; or if it has entered your houses, like a messenger of death, it has not committed its usual ravages in them. Or if it has torn from your hearts one or more members of your family, still you have some left, or perhaps some new members added to make up the loss. When you have been in deep distress, and covered with the most tremendous glooms, deliverance has dawned in the most seasonable hour, and light and joy have succeeded to nights of darkness and melancholy. In short, your deliverances have been endless and innumerable. You appear this day so many monuments of delivering goodness. You have also shared in the deliverances wrought for your country and nation in former and latter times: deliverances from the open violences and clandestine plots and insurrections of enemies abroad, and traitors and rebels at home: deliverances from the united efforts of both, to subvert the British Constitution, and enslave free-born Britons to civil or ecclesiastical tyranny, or a medley of both; and deliverances from drought, and the threatening appearances of famine, which we have so lately experienced in these parts: and yet they are long enough past to be generally forgotten!

In these instances of deliverances, as well as in the former, of positive blessings, let the great God be acknowledged the original efficient, whatever creatures he is pleased to make use of as his instruments. Fortuitous accidents are under his direction; and necessary causes are subject to his control. Diseases are his servants, his soldiers; and he sends them out, or recalls them, according to his pleasure.

And now mention the benefactor if you can, to whom you are a thousandth part so much obliged as to this Benefactor. What a profusion of blessings and deliverances has the Almighty made you a subject of! And O! what obligations of gratitude do such favours lay upon you! What ardent love, what sincere thanksgiving, what affectionate duty do they require of you! These are the cords of love, the bonds of a man, wherewith he would draw you to obedience.

Dare you now make the inquiry, What returns has this divine Benefactor received from you for all this goodness? Alas! the discovery which this

inquiry will make, may convict, shock, confound, and mortify us all; for we are all, in a prodigious degree, though some much more than others, guilty in this respect, guilty of the vilest ingratitude. Alas! are there not many of you that do not return to God the gratitude of a dog to his master? That brute animal who receives but crumbs and blows from you, will welcome you home with a thousand fond and obliging motions. The very dull ox you fodder, knows his owner. But O! the more than brutal ingratitude of reasonable creatures! Some of you perhaps do not so much as acknowledge the agency of Providence in these enjoyments; but, affecting a very unphilosophical infidelity under the name of philosophy, you make natural causes the authors of all good to you, without the agency of the first Mover of all the springs of nature. Others of you, who may be orthodox in your faith as to this point, yet are practical infidels, the most absurd and inconsistent sort in the world; that is, while you verbally acknowledge, and speculatively believe the agency of Providence in these things, yet you live as if there was no such thing: you live thoughtless of the divine Benefactor, and disobedient to him for days and years together. The very mercies he bestows upon you, you abuse to his dishonour, by making them occasions of sin. Do not your consciences now convict you of that monster sin, ingratitude, the most base, unnatural, and yet indulged gratitude? How do you resent it, if one whom you have deeply obliged should prove ungrateful, and use you ill? But it is impossible any one of your fellow-creatures should be guilty of such enormous ingratitude towards you as you are guilty of towards God; because it is impossible any one of them should be so strongly obliged to you as you are to him.

Ye children of God, his peculiar favourites, whose hearts are capable of and do actually feel some generous sensations of gratitude, what do you think of your conduct towards such a Benefactor? I speak particularly to you, because you are most likely to feel what I say. Have you rendered again to your God according to the benefits done you? O! are you not mortified and shocked to reflect upon your ingratitude, your sordid monstrous ingratitude? Do you not abhor yourselves because you were capable of such base conduct? From you I expect such a generous resentment. But, as to others, they are dead in trespasses and sins, dead toward God, and therefore it is no wonder if they are dead to all penitential ingenuous relentings for their ingratitude.

But if all this does not suffice to make you sensible of your enormous guilt in this particular, let me lay before you an inventory of still richer blessings. At the head of this stands Jesus Christ, the unspeakable gift of God. *God so loved the world, (hear it, men and angels, with grateful wonder) as to give his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.* John iii. 16. *God sent his Son*

*into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world, through him, might be saved.* John iii. 17. The comforts of this life alone would be a very inadequate provision for creatures who are to exist for ever in another; for what are sixty or seventy years in the long duration of an immortal being! But in the unsearchable riches of Christ are contained the most ample provisions for your immortal state. Jesus Christ is such a gift as draws all other gifts after it: for so the apostle argues, *He that spared not his own Son, but gave him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things.* Rom. viii. 32. And the purposes for which he gave this gift, render it the more astonishing. He gave him not only to rule us by his power, but to purchase us with the blood of his heart. He gave him up to death, even the death of the cross. In consequence of which an economy of grace, a ministry of reconciliation, is set up in our guilty world. Various means are appointed, and various endeavours are used to save you, perishing sinners. For your salvation Jesus now intercedes in his native heaven, at the right hand of God. For your salvation the Holy Spirit strives with you; conscience admonishes you; Providence draws you by blessings, and drives you by chastisements; angels minister to you; Bibles are put into your hands; ministers persuade you; friends advise you; and thousands of saints pray for you. For this end, prayer, preaching, baptism, and the Lord's supper, and a great variety of means of grace are instituted. For this end heaven is prepared and furnished with many mansions; the pearly gates open, and dart their splendours from afar to attract our eyes; and things which the eye, that has seen so many things, had never seen; which the ear, that has had still more extensive intelligence, had never heard; nor the heart of man, which is even unbounded in its conceptions, had never conceived, are brought to light by the gospel. Nay, for this purpose, your salvation, Sinai thunders, hell roars and throws its devouring flames, even to warn a stupid world not to plunge themselves into that place of torment. In short, the kind designs of redeeming love run through the whole economy of Providence towards our world. Heaven and earth, and in the sense mentioned, hell itself, are striving to save you. The strongholds of sin and Satan, in which you are held prisoners, are attacked in kindness to you from all quarters. What beneficent efforts, what heroic exploits of divine goodness are these! And, blessed be God, these efforts are not in vain.

The celestial regions are fast peopling, though, alas! not so fast as the land of darkness, with numerous colonies from our guilty globe. Even in these dregs of time, when iniquity abounds, and the love of many waxes cold, Jesus is gaining many hearts and saving many souls, in the various apartments of his church. Though you and thousands more should be left, and continue to neglect, yet such excellency shall not want admirers, such a physician shall not want employ in our dying world. No, *he shall see of the*



*travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied; and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand.* Isa. liii. 11. And I doubt not but there are some among you who are the trophies of his victorious love—of his victorious love, I say: for it is by the force of love he sweetly conquers.

Now you, my brethren, are the subjects of this administration of grace; with you, these means are used for your salvation: to you Jesus is offered as a Saviour; and heaven and earth are striving to lodge you safe in his arms. You should not rejoice in the wants of others; but certainly it may make you the more sensible of your peculiar obligations, to reflect that your lot, in this respect, is singular. It is but a very small part of mankind that enjoy these great advantages for a happy immortality. You live under the gospel, whilst the most of the nations of the earth are sunk in heathen idolatry, groaning under Popish tyranny, seduced by Mahometan imposture, or hardened in Jewish infidelity.

And what peculiar obligations of gratitude result from such peculiar distinguishing favours? Men have obliged you, and you feel the obligation. But can men, can angels, can the whole created universe bestow such gifts upon you, and make such provisions for you, as those which have been mentioned! Gifts of infinite value, dear to the Giver; provisions for an everlasting state; an everlasting state of as complete happiness as your nature, in its highest improvements, is capable of. These are favours worthy of God; favours that bespeak him God. And must he not then be the object of your supreme gratitude? Can anything in the world be more reasonable?

And yet—hear, O earth, with horror; be astonished, O ye heavens, at this: be ye horribly afraid! how little gratitude does God receive from our world after all! How little gratitude from you, on whom these favours are showered down with distinguished profusion! Do not many of you neglect the unspeakable gift of God, Jesus Christ, as well as that salvation which he bought with his blood? Do you not ungratefully neglect the means of your salvation, and resist the generous efforts that are used, from all quarters, to save you? O! the mountainous load of ingratitude that lies upon you! enough to sink the whole world into the depth of hell.

But I must now address such of you, who are still more deeply obliged to your divine Benefactor, and whose ingratitude therefore is black and horrid; I mean such of you who not only have shared in the blessings and deliverances of life, and lived under the advantages of a dispensation of grace, but have experimentally known the love of God to your souls in a manner peculiar to yourselves, and are actually entitled to all the unknown blessings prepared for those that love him. If I am so happy as to belong to your number, I am sure I am so unhappy as to share deeply with you in the guilt, the black guilt of ingratitude. When you were dead in trespasses and sins, God quickened you, out of his great love wherewith he loved you. When

you were rushing on towards destruction, in the enchanting paths of sin, he checked your mad career, and turned your faces heavenward. When you were sunk into sorrows, borne down with a sense of guilt, and trembling every moment with the fears of immediate execution, he relieved you, led you to Jesus, and, as it were, lodged you safe in his arms. When dismal glooms have again gathered upon your minds, and overwhelming fears rushed again upon you like a deluge, he has relieved you again by leading you to the same almighty and ever-constant Saviour. When your graces and virtues have withered in the absence of the Sun of righteousness, he has again risen upon you with healing in his wings, and revived your languishing souls. He has shed abroad his love in your hearts, which has made this wretched wilderness a paradise to you. He has, at times, afforded you, as you humbly hoped, joy and peace in believing; yea, even caused you to rejoice with *joy unspeakable, and full of glory*. He has met you in your retirements, and allowed you to converse with him in his ordinances, with the heart of a friend. He has, as it were, unlocked his peculiar treasures to enrich you, and given you an unshaken title to the most glorious inheritance of the saints of light. He has made you his own, his own in a peculiar sense; his people, his friends, his children. You are indeed his favourites: you were even so, long before time began. He loved you with an everlasting love, therefore with loving kindness has he drawn you: and having loved you once, he will love you always, and he will continue in his love to all eternity. *Neither life, nor death, things present, nor things to come, shall ever be able to separate you from his love.* Rom. viii. 38, 39. His love to you is an unbounded ocean, that spreads over eternity, and makes it, as it were, the channel of the ocean of your happiness. In you he intends to show to all worlds what glorious creatures he can form of the dust, and of the polluted fragments of degenerate human nature. What is all the profession of kings to their favourites? what are all the benefactions of creatures, nay, what are all the bounties of the divine hand itself within the compass of time, when compared to these astonishing, unparalleled, immortal, infinite, God-like favours? They all dwindle into obscurity, like the stars of night in the blaze of noon.

And now I am almost afraid to turn your thoughts to inquire, what return you have made for all these favours, lest you should not be able to bear the shock. You know you have a thousand times repeated Hezekiah's offence. I need not be particular. Your conscience accuses you, and points out the particulars; and I shall only join the cry of conscience against you. O! the ingratitude! O! the base, vile, unnatural, horrid, unprecedented ingratitude! From you your God might have expected better things; from you, whom he has so peculiarly, so infinitely obliged, and whose hearts he has made capable of generous sensations. But O! the shocking, horrid ingrati-

tude!—Let our hearts burst into a flood of sorrows at the thought. They may be justly too full to allow us to speak much upon it; but, O! they can never be too full of shame, confusion, and tender relentings for the crime. Methinks the thought must break the hardest heart among us.

Let me now add a consideration, that gives an astonishing emphasis to all that has been said. All this profusion of mercy, personal and relative, temporal and spiritual, is bestowed upon creatures that deserve not the least mercy; creatures that deserve to be stripped naked of every mercy; nay, that deserve to be made miserable in time and eternity; creatures that deserve not to breathe this vital air, to tread the ground, or drink the stream that runs waste through the wilderness, much less to enjoy all the blessings which the infinite merit of Jesus could purchase, or the infinite goodness of God can bestow; creatures that are so far from deserving to be delivered from the calamities of life, that they deserve to have them all heightened and multiplied, till they convey them to the more intolerable punishments of hell; creatures that are so far from making adequate returns, that they are perpetually offending their God to his face; and every day receiving blessings from him, and every day sinning against him. O! astonishing! most astonishing! This wonder is pointed out by Jesus Christ himself, who best knows what is truly marvellous. *The Most High*,” says he, “*is kind to the unthankful and to the evil*. Luke vi. 35. *Your heavenly Father maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust*. Matt. v. 45.

It need afford you no surprise, if my subject so overwhelms me, as to disable me from making a formal application of it. I leave you to your own thoughts upon it. And I am apt to think they will constrain you to cry out in a consternation with me, “O! the amazing, horrid, base, unprecedented ingratitude of man! and O! the amazing, free, rich, overflowing, infinite, unprecedented goodness of God! Let these two miracles be the wonder of the whole universe!”

One prayer, and I have done. May your divine Benefactor, among his other blessings, bestow upon us that of a thankful heart, and enable us to give sincere, fervent, and perpetual praise to his name, through Jesus Christ, his unspeakable gift! Amen.