

A Festival Kept to the Lord.

by Edward Payson

We should observe festivals to the Lord with a view to please and honor him, and to spend the day in contemplating and praising his perfections.

Scripture: Psalm 51:17, Isaiah 1:18, Luke 5:32, Ephesians 2:8, Philippians 2:10

Topics: "Repentance And Faith", "Redemption Through Christ"

Description

Edward Payson preaches about the importance of observing religious festivals unto the Lord, emphasizing the need for sincere reconciliation, repentance, and faith in Christ for sinful creatures under a dispensation of mercy. He describes the ideal manner in which a community, once sinless but now fallen, would observe a feast unto the Lord, highlighting the impact of sin on their relationship with God and the necessity of faith in the Redeemer. Payson urges the congregation to approach the festival with penitence, contrition, and deep humility, acknowledging the grace and mercy offered through Christ's sacrifice and intercession.

Transcript

"When ye have gathered in the fruit of the land, ye shall keep a feast unto the Lord"

Leviticus 23:39

we review attentively the religious ordinances which God has appointed, we can scarcely fail to perceive, that he has usually passed by all the inventions of men, and adopted institutions which were exclusively his own; institutions which human wisdom would never have devised, and which, in her view, are too often little better than foolishness. In this, as in many other cases, his ways have not been like our ways, nor his thoughts like our thoughts. These remarks we may see verified in the appointment of circumcision, of sacrifices, of baptism, and of the Lord's Supper.

In some few instances however, God has condescended to pursue a different course. He has selected some significant action, or ceremony, by which men had been previously accustomed to express strong emotion; and by commanding them to make use of it as an expression of religious feeling, has invested it with the dignity and sacredness of a religious ordinance. An instance of this kind may be found in the appointment of religious fasting. Fasting is a natural expression, because it is a natural effect, of extreme sorrow; for the emotion, when felt in a very high degree, takes away the appetite for food, and renders the reception of it not only disagreeable, but almost impracticable.

Hence, God prescribed religious fasting as a proper expression of godly sorrow for sin; and were we affected by our sins as we ought to be, we should feel constrained to fast much more frequently, and should fast much more acceptably, than we do. Another instance of the same kind may be found in the institution of religious feasts, or, to use a more proper term, festivals. From the earliest ages, of which any records remain, mankind have been accustomed to commemorate joyful events, and to express the joy and gratitude which such events excited, by the observance of anniversary festivals.

As the all wise God well knew how difficult it would be to wean men from the observance of such festivals, and as they were capable of being rendered subservient to his own gracious designs, he saw fit under the ancient dispensation to give them a religious character, by directing his people to observe them in commemoration of the favors, which they had received from his hand, and as an expression of their gratitude for those favors. Of these divinely appointed festivals, several are mentioned in the Levitical law, but our only concern at present is with that which is prescribed in our text; When ye have gathered in the fruit of the land, ye shall keep a feast unto the Lord.

We do not lead your attention to this command because we suppose it is still in force. It was a part not of the moral, but of the ceremonial law, which was designed to continue only till the coming of Christ, and it has long since been annulled, with the other precepts of that law, by the same authority which imposed it. There can scarcely be a doubt however, that it was this command which led the fathers of New England to establish the custom of annually observing, at the close of harvest, a day of thanksgiving and praise.

But though they established this custom without any express command or warrant from God, the propriety of continuing it cannot well be questioned. To offer praise and thanksgiving to God, is a duty which we find frequently enjoined, not in the Old Testament only, but in the New. It is highly desirable that whole communities should sometimes unite in the performance of this duty; and no season seems so proper for this purpose, as that which succeeds the gathering in of the fruits of the earth, the gifts of our heavenly benefactor.

In support of this custom we may remark farther, that besides the festivals which God had established, the Jews were accustomed to observe several festivals of human appointment, such as the feast of dedication, and the feast of Purim; and that our Savior while on earth, sanctioned this custom by uniting with them in the observance of these festivals. We cannot doubt therefore, that were he now residing among us he would unite with us in observing this day, though it is a festival of human appointment.

But whatever opinions any may entertain with respect to the propriety of observing this day, we presume all will agree, that if it be observed at all it ought to be observed in a proper manner; which we have reason to believe will be acceptable to God. If it is not observed in such a manner, the day will be much worse than lost. It will serve no other purpose than to increase our guilt, excite God's displeasure, and provoke him to express it by sending judgments upon us. He will regard it as he regarded the festivals of the Jews when they ceased to observe them in the manner which he had prescribed; and will in effect, say to us, as he did to them, Your appointed feasts my soul hateth; they are a trouble to me, I am weary to bear them.

What then, we may and ought to inquire, what is it to observe this day in a right and acceptable manner? The best answer, which I can give to this question, is furnished by our text. It is to keep or observe it, as a festival unto the Lord. The necessity of thus observing it may be inferred from the answer which God gave his ancient people, when they inquired whether they should continue to fast on certain days which had long been set apart for that purpose. When ye fasted, says he, did ye fast at all unto me, even unto me?

And when ye ate and drank, did ye not eat for yourselves, and drink for yourselves? As if he had said, Whether you have fasted, or feasted, ye have done it not unto me, but to please yourselves. Why then do you inquire of me whether you shall continue to observe days for these purposes? So long as you observe them for yourselves and not unto me, what is it to me, whether you do, or do not observe them? It is then most evident, that if we mean to observe this day in a manner which shall be acceptable to God, we must keep it as a festival unto him.

But still the question returns, What is it to keep, or what is implied in keeping a festival unto God? To this question we may reply, in general terms, that to keep a festival unto God is to observe it with a view, not to please ourselves, but to please and honor him; to regard it as a day sacred to his special service; and to spend it in contemplating and praising his perfections, recollecting and thanking him for his favors, rejoicing before him in his existence, his character, his government, and his works, and thus giving him the glory which is due to his name.

But the question before us demands on this occasion, a more particular and expanded answer; and such an answer we shall attempt to give it, not however altogether in a dry didactic form, nor by a long enumeration of particulars, but by exhibiting two views of the subject, from which we may learn every thing that it is necessary for us to know respecting it. We shall attempt, I. To give you a view of the manner in which this festival should be observed by us, considered simply as God's intelligent creatures; and II.

Of the manner in which we should observe it, considered as sinful, guilty creatures, to whom his grace and mercy are offered through a Redeemer. I. That the first of these proposed views, may be placed before you in the clearest and most interesting light, let me request you to suppose, that our first parents, instead of falling as they did, almost immediately, from their holy and happy state, had continued in it, until they were surrounded by a numerous family like themselves, and that in these circumstances they had set apart a day to be observed as a festival to their Creator and Benefactor.

It is evident, that if we can conceive of the manner in which they would have observed such a day, we shall learn in what manner this day ought to be observed by us, considered simply as God's intelligent creatures; for as such our rule of duty is the same which was given to them: we are commanded, as they were, to love God with all our hearts, and as they were perfectly holy, they would render perfect obedience to this command, and, spend the day in a perfectly holy manner, as we should aim to spend this, and indeed every other day.

Let us then endeavor to conceive of it. Let us suppose the morning of their appointed festival to have just dawned, and before they wake from their peaceful slumbers let us draw near and take a position favorable for observing their conduct, and becoming acquainted with their views and feelings. No sooner do they wake to a returning consciousness of existence, than a recollection of the Author, Preserver, and Sustainer of that existence, and of their numberless obligations to his goodness, rushes upon, and fully possesses their minds.

No sooner do their eyes open, than they are raised to heaven with a look expressive, in the highest degree, of every holy, affectionate emotion. Each one perceives, with clear intuitive certainty, that he is indebted to God for every thing--that God is his life, his happiness, his all. These views fill his heart with adoring gratitude; gratitude, not like ours, a comparatively cold and half selfish emotion, but a gratitude pure, fervent and operative, which carries out the whole soul in a rapturous burst of thankfulness, and renewed self dedication to God.

At the same times his various perfections, displayed in his works, are reflected to their view from every thing around them. Or, as the apostle expresses it, the invisible things of God, even his eternal power and godhead, are clearly seen by the things which he has made. The whole creation is to them like one vast mirror, which reflects the glory of God, as an unruffled lake reflects the image of the noonday sun. Not more instantaneously, not more powerfully, nor with such a cheering, animating influence, does the light of the sun pour itself upon their opening eyes, as the light of God's glory, shining in all his works, pours itself upon the eye of their mind, illuminating and warming, with its vivid celestial beams, every recess of the soul, and filling that little interior world with unclouded day.

And while all the works of God thus reflect his glories to the eye, they seem to proclaim his praises to the ear of their mind. To them every object has a voice, and every voice, in language that they well understand, tells them something of the perfections of their Creator. The heavens declare to them his glory, and every leaf and every flower whispers his praise. In fine, to them every place is full of God, every object speaks of God; every thing shines with the glory of God; and as a recollection of his favors awakened their gratitude, so a view of his glories excites their reverence, their admiration, their love, and joy, and gradually raises their affections to such a height, that it becomes impossible not to express them.

Their eyes, their countenances, have indeed already expressed them, and rendered even their silence eloquent, for while they were musing the fire of devotion burned within. But they can be silent no longer, and in strains no less pure, and little less sweet and powerful, than those of the angelic choirs, they begin to pour forth the emotions of their swelling, almost bursting hearts, and with humble, but rapturous thanksgivings and praises, acknowledge the favors and celebrate the perfections of their adorable Creator.

And while they thus address to him their thanks, and their praises, they feel that they are addressing not an absent, but a present God. though invisible to their bodily eyes, he is not so to the eye of their minds; they perceive, they feel his presence; they feel that his all-pervading, all-enfolding Spirit pervades and embraces their souls, breathing into them love, and joy, and peace, unutterable, and wrapping them up, as it were, in himself. Thus each individual apart, commences the observance of their festal day, and enjoys intimate, and sweet, and ennobling communion with the Father of spirits in solitary devotion.

But man is a social being, and the social principle which God has implanted in his nature prompts him to wish for associates in his religious pleasures and pursuits. It is proper that he should wish for them, and if possible obtain them; for when a festival is to be kept unto the Lord, when thanksgiving and praise are to be offered, two are better than one. United flames rise higher towards heaven, impart more heat, and shine with brighter luster, than while they remained separated.

If private, solitary devotion be the melody of religion, united devotions constitute its harmony; and without harmony the music is not perfect and complete. What, comparatively, would the songs of heaven be, were they sung by a single voice, even though it were the voice of an archangel? Let us then now contemplate the scattered members of this holy and happy community assembling from their solitary walks, and places of retirement, to rejoice, and praise, and give thanks together, and thus unite the flames and the incense of individual devotion in the blaze of one grand, combined sacrifice.

Mark the feelings with which they approach and meet. Every eye sparkles with delight; every countenance beams with affection; there is but one heart, and one soul among them all, and that heart, and that soul is filled with holy gratitude and love, tempered by adoring admiration, reverence, and awe. Fresh

excitements to the increase of these emotions are furnished by their meeting. Each one sees in his rational, immortal fellow creatures, a nobler work of God, a brighter exhibition of his moral perfections, than the whole inanimate creation could afford.

In each of them he sees that image of God, which consists in knowledge, and righteousness, and holiness; for in this image man was created, and we are supposing him not as yet to have lost it. And while each one contemplates this image of God in his fellow creatures, he is ready to exclaim, If these miniature images of God are so lovely, how infinitely worthy of love must the great original be? If there is so much to admire in the streams, what admiration does the fountain deserve?

Nor is this all. In the various relations and ties, which bind them together, they see new proofs of all-wise benevolence, new reasons why they should love and thank him, who established these relations, and formed these ties. The husband and the wife meet with that perfect mutual affection which God enjoins, and a recollection of the happiness which has resulted from their union, leads them, with simultaneous emotion, to bless the Being who gave them to each other. Parents and children meet in the perfect exercise of holy, parental, and filial affection; and while the parents see in their children the gifts of God, and the children see in their parents those whom he appointed to be the protectors of their infancy, the instructors of their childhood, and the guide of their youth, they unite to bless him together.

Thus, instead of idolizing children and friends, or putting them in the place of God, they love and enjoy God in them, and make use of them to excite their gratitude, and lead their affections to him. Under the influence of these affections, the yet stammering child is taught the name of its Creator and Benefactor; while to the attentive ear of those who are a little farther advanced in life, the history of the creation and of all that God has done for his creatures, is recounted; his commands, and their obligations to obey them, are stated; the nature and design of the festival, which they are observing, are explained; and they are taught to perform their humble part in its appropriate services.

In these services all now join; and O, with what perfect union of heart! with what self annihilating humility, --with what seraphic purity and fervency of affection, --do they present their combined offering of thanksgiving and praise! Suffice it to say that the ear of Omniscience itself can discern no shade of difference, between the language of their lips and that of their hearts, unless it be this, that their hearts feel more than their lips can express. These sacred and delightful services being ended, they prepare to feast before their Benefactor; but this preparation is made, and the feast itself is participated with the same feelings which animated their devotions; for whether they eat, or drink, or whatever they do, they do all to the glory of God.

On such an occasion they may, perhaps, place upon their board a greater variety than usual, of the fruits of Paradise; but if so, it is not so much with a view to gratify their appetites, as to exhibit more fully the various and ample provision which God has made for them; and thus, through the medium of their senses, to affect their hearts; for man has not yet begun to consume the bounty of heaven upon his lusts. He has not yet yielded himself a willing, but ignoble slave to his corporeal appetites; nor, we may add, has he yet learned, as too many of his posterity have since done, to sit down to the table of Providence, and rise from it refreshed, without acknowledging the hand that feeds him.

No, the blessing of God is implored and his presence desired, as the crowning joy of their feast, without which even the fruits of Paradise would be insipid, and the society of Paradise uninteresting. And while they sit around his table, the viands which nourish their bodies, furnish their minds with new food for

devotional feeling; for in every fruit before them they see the power, wisdom, and goodness of their Benefactor, embodied and made perceptible to their senses; they see that his goodness prompted him to give them that gratification, that his wisdom devised it, and that his power gave it existence.

Thus while they feast upon the fruits of his bounty their souls feast upon the perfections which those fruits display. Thus God is seen and enjoyed in every thing, and every thing leads up their thoughts and affections to him, while he sits unseen in the midst of them, shedding abroad his love through all their hearts, and rejoicing with benevolent delight in the happiness which he at once imparts and witnesses. Meanwhile their conversation is such as the attending angels, who hover around, would not be ashamed to utter, nay such as God himself is well pleased to hear.

The law of kindness is on all their lips, for the law of love is in all their hearts. But we can pursue this part of our subject no farther. This must suffice as a specimen of the manner, in which sinless creatures would keep a feast unto the Lord, indeed, of the manner in which all their days would be spent. And if so, may we not well exclaim, O sin, what hast thou done! What beauty, what glory, what happiness hast thou destroyed! How hast thou embittered our food, poisoned our cup, darkened the eye which once saw God in all his works; polluted and rendered insensible the heart, which once bore his image and was filled with his love, and by one fatal, accursed blow, murdered both the body and the soul of man!

Who can wonder that God hates--who can refrain from hating--the destroyer of so much good, the cause of so much evil! Were it not for sin, we should observe this day in a manner as holy and as happy, as has now been described. We have the same powers and faculties, which were possessed by our first parents in Paradise. And if we may believe the declarations of scripture, or the testimony of good men, God's glory still shines as brightly in his works, as it did then. There is nothing but our own sinfulness to prevent us from seeing it as clearly, as it was seen by our first parents, and from being affected by the sight as they were affected.

But to return--If such is the manner, in which innocent creatures would keep a feast unto the Lord, then such is the manner in which we should aim to keep this annual festival. We should desire and aim to exercise the same feelings, to worship God with the same sincerity, fervency, and unity of affection, and to converse and partake of his bounty in the same manner. I do not say we shall perfectly succeed in such an attempt, but I do say that we ought to make it. He who does not make it, he who does not desire and aim to serve God with his whole heart, and feel dissatisfied with himself in proportion as he comes short of it, is as far from Christian sincerity, as he is from sinless perfection.

But though we all ought to be perfectly holy, it is but too evident that we are not so. We have all sinned; we still sin; we must all have perished in our sins, had not God graciously interposed to prevent it. He has revealed a new dispensation, a dispensation, in which grace and mercy are offered us through a Redeemer. Through this Redeemer, the Lord Jesus Christ, he has also revealed to us a new way of approaching him, of serving him acceptably, and of obtaining everlasting life.

These all-important facts and truths connected with them, must by no means be forgotten or neglected by us, when keeping a feast unto the Lord. They must evidently modify, in a very great degree, the manner in which we observe it, and the views and feelings with which its services are performed. This remark we shall illustrate more fully. Having shown how we ought to keep this festival, considered simply as God's intelligent creatures, we shall now, as was proposed, II. Attempt to show how we should keep it, considered as sinful creatures, under a dispensation of mercy.

In attempting this we shall pursue the same course, which has been pursued in the former part of the discourse. We will suppose that the holy and happy community, whose festival we have been contemplating, fall from their original state, and become sinners like ourselves. In other words, they transgress the law of God, the sanction of which is death. In consequence, sentence of death is immediately passed upon them, to be executed they know not when, but just when it shall please their offended judge.

Meanwhile, they are banished from Paradise, excluded from the favor and presence of God, and from the tree of life which was the sacramental pledge of their immortality, and see a flaming sword blazing behind them, and turning every way, to prevent them from again entering their forfeited Eden. Nor is the change in their outward situation greater than that, which they find in their character and feelings. They have lost the image of God, they have lost all love to God, they no longer regard or address him with filial affection as a Father and a friend, but view him, so far as they view him at all, as an offended sovereign, whose law they have transgressed, and by whose law they are inexorably doomed to destruction.

Indeed, God seems almost to have disappeared from their view. Their intellectual eyes darkened by sin, no longer see his glory in all his works; he no longer seems to sit enthroned on the universe which he had made, nor do they, in the daily gifts of Providence, see proofs of his bounty or incitements to gratitude. The immense void which his disappearance has left in the heart, is filled by self love, and an inordinate, idolatrous attachment to creatures; and to the great idol self; and other subordinate idols, is transferred that homage and those affections, which were once rendered to God alone.

In fine, they are become spiritually dead, dead to God, to goodness, and to the end for which they were created, dead in trespasses and sins. Still however, conscience retains a place in their breasts, and at times it will speak; but it speaks nothing except reproach, condemnation, and terror. The only words which it has heard from the mouth of God, are, Thou shalt surely die; and these therefore are the only words which it will repeat. And when roused by these words they look forward, it is without hope of mercy, it is to death and the blackness of darkness, to judgment and fiery indignation.

Then they wish in vain, that they had never existed, they curse, at once, their existence and its author, and feel all those terrible, unaccountable emotions, which agitate with more than a tempest's fury, a heart at enmity towards God, whenever it is forced to contemplate its great enemy. Now suppose that these creatures, in this sinful, guilty, wretched, despairing state, are placed under a dispensation, in which the grace and mercy of God are offered them through a Redeemer, and that just such a revelation is made to them, as has been made to us in the New Testament.

Suppose farther, that after they are placed under the new dispensation they resolve to observe a religious festival. What would be necessary, what would be implied in their keeping it as a feast unto the Lord? I answer, the first thing necessary would evidently be a cordial reconciliation to God. Until such reconciliation took place, they could neither observe a religious festival, nor perform any other religious duty, in a right and acceptable manner. Indeed, they would have no disposition to do it, nor any of the feelings which it implies and demands.

The feelings, proper to be exercised on a religious festival, are holy love, joy and gratitude. But they could exercise no love to God, unless they were previously reconciled to him, to his character, his government, and law. Nor could they exercise holy joy; for how could they rejoice in the existence, or in the perfections, or in the government of a being, whom they did not love? Nor could they sincerely offer thanksgiving and

praise; for who can sincerely praise a being, or offer thanks to a being, whose character and conduct he dislikes?

Can a self-justifying criminal, under sentence of death, rejoice and feast with proper feelings before the Judge who has condemned him; or a servant, under the eye of a master, whom he regards with mingled dread and aversion; or a rebel, in the presence of a sovereign, whose character and laws he dislikes, and whose power he dreads? Or could the prodigal son, had he been taken by force and placed at his father's table, while under the full influence of those feelings which led him to forsake his father's house, have enjoyed that situation, or relished the feast before him?

But let the criminal be reconciled to his judge and receive pardon; let the servant love his master, and the rebel submit to his sovereign; let the prodigal come to himself; and exercise right feelings towards his father, and the difficulty would in each case be removed, and love, and joy, and gratitude be felt. Cordial reconciliation to God then, is indispensably necessary to enable sinful creatures to keep a feast unto the Lord. But reconciliation to God necessarily involves hatred of sin, and self-condemnation, sorrow and shame on account of it.

No sinner can feel cordially reconciled to God, until he sees that his character and all his proceedings are perfectly holy, and just and good; for if they are not so, we ought not to be reconciled to them. But among God's proceedings, is the sentence of condemnation which he has pronounced upon every sinner. This therefore, the sinner must see and feel to be right, or he will not be reconciled to it. Now if a sinner sees it to be right that God should condemn him, he will of course condemn himself.

He will say, God has been right, and I have been wrong; and in view of the wrong which he has done, he will feel remorse, sorrow and shame, or, in one word, he will repent. Without unfeigned repentance then, no sinner can keep a feast to the Lord for every one who is impenitent is most certainly unreconciled to God. He justifies himself and thus condemns the Almighty. The exercise of faith in the Redeemer, through whom grace and mercy are offered, is also indispensably necessary to the right observance of a feast unto the Lord.

The sinner who has just views of God and of himself; as in some degree every penitent sinner has, is unable to see how his own salvation can be reconciled with the holiness, justice, and truth of God. He feels himself to be a sinner; he hears God's law say, The soul that sinneth shall die; and he sees that God's holiness, justice, and truth, all demand the execution of this sentence. How then dare he hope for salvation? And unless he dare hope for it, how can he keep a feast unto the Lord?

How can he pour out from a happy, grateful, exulting heart, accents of thanksgiving and praise? He will rather wish to fast, to weep and lament, and scarcely will he dare ask his offended God to pardon and save him, lest it should be asking him to sacrifice his perfections for the sake of a sinful worm of the dust. But show him the Redeemer, set before him his atonement and intercession, and let him exercise faith in them, and all his difficulties, doubts and fears are removed; he sees that God can be just, and yet justify and save every sinner who believes in Jesus; and now he can hope, and rejoice, and exult; now he feels indeed prepared to keep a feast unto the Lord; now he can cry, O Lord, I will praise thee, for though thou wast angry with me, thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortest me.

Now he can feel and obey the exhortation, Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, for God now accepteth thy works. But these are not the only reasons, why the exercise of faith in the Redeemer is necessary, in the case of sinful creatures, to the acceptable observance of a religious festival. When God prescribes a way

in which sinners shall approach him and present their services, they must on all occasions approach him in that way, and in no other; or instead of finding acceptance, they will only excite his displeasure.

All the Jewish sacrifices, for instance, were to be offered, all their religious services performed, and all their festivals observed, with reference to the tabernacle or temple, where God manifested his gracious presence, and through the medium of those typical mediators, or priests, whom he had appointed. If any Jew presumed to disregard these injunctions, to worship God on a high place of his own creating, or to offer his sacrifice with his own hands, instead of applying to the priests, he drew upon himself a curse, instead of a blessing.

Just so under the Christian dispensation, Christ is at once the true tabernacle, in whom dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily, and the only mediator between God and man--the only way by which sinful man can have access to God. I, says he, am the way, the truth and the life, no man cometh to the Father, but by me. And again--through him we have access by one Spirit unto the Father. Hence an apostle exhorts us, whatever we do, in word or deed, to do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.

This being the case, we can neither keep a feast unto the Lord, nor offer thanks, nor perform any other religious duty acceptably, except in the name of Christ, or in the exercise of faith in his mediation. And now let us suppose the community, which we have already twice contemplated, first as perfectly holy, and then as sinful, guilty, and undone, to be a third time placed before us, reconciled to God, exercising repentance and faith in Christ, and engaged in keeping a religious festival, like that which we this day observe.

They still feel, though in an imperfect degree, the same affection which we saw them exercise toward God in their original state; but these affections are, in a considerable degree at least, excited by different objects, and variously modified by the change which has taken place in their situation. They still feel grateful to God for their existence, for their faculties, and for the various temporal blessings which surround them; but they now view all these things as blessings which they had forfeited and lost, and which had been re-purchased for them by their Redeemer, and freely bestowed upon them as the gifts of his dying love.

Hence they seem, as it were, to see his name on every blessing, and every blessing reminds them of him. They still, as formerly, see and admire God's perfections as displayed in the works of creation: but their admiration and their praises are now principally excited by the far brighter, the eclipsing display which he has made of his moral perfections, in the cross of Christ, in the wonders of redemption. If they still adore, and praise, and thank him, as the God of nature, they adore, and praise, and thank him, with incomparably more fervency, as the God of grace, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ..

If they think of him with affection, as the God who made the world, they think of him with far warmer affection, as the God who so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son to die for its redemption. Loud above all their other praises and thanksgivings may be heard the cry, Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift! Thanks be unto God and the Lamb for redeeming love! This accords with God's own prediction, that under the new dispensation, his former works should be comparatively forgotten, and come no more into mind.

And while their thanksgivings and praises are thus principally called forth by the blessings which are conferred, and the divine perfections which are displayed, in the work of redemption, Jesus Christ holds that prominent place in their affections, and in all their solitary and united devotions, which he evidently

held in the affections and devotions of the apostles, and to which their writings teach us he is entitled. If they come to God, it is as dwelling in Christ; if they see his glory, it is as shining in the face of Christ; if they rejoice in God it is as manifesting himself in Christ; if they trust in God, it is through the merits of Christ; if they pray to God, it is in reliance on Christ; if they enjoy God, they enjoy him in Christ; if they offer praise and thanksgiving to God, it is in the name of Christ; if they are constrained to holy obedience, it is the love of Christ which constrains them; if they hope to persevere and obtain the victory, it is in dependence on Christ; if they say, we live, they add, yet not we, but Christ liveth in us; and when they anticipate most confidently the happiness of heaven, they rejoice to borrow its language, and cry, Now unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, be glory and dominion forever, in fine, Christ is their wisdom, their strength, their righteousness, their life, and they cordially unite with an apostle in saying, Christ is all in all.

Without him we can do nothing; but through him we can do all things. And while their religious views and feelings and services, are all thus modified by an habitual reference to Christ, they are still farther modified by a similar recollection of the sinful, guilty, wretched state, from which he rescued them, and by a view of the sins, which still cleave to them, and defile all their duties, --the effects of these views and recollections, are penitence, contrition, and deep humiliation of soul, and by them all their religious feelings are pervaded and characterized.

When they love their God and Redeemer, it is with a penitent love; when they rejoice in him, it is with a penitent joy; when they believe in him, it is with a penitent faith; when they obey him, it is with a penitent obedience; when they offer him thanksgivings and praises, penitence mingles with them her humble confessions and contrite sighs; and the place on earth, which they most covet, in which they most delight, is that of the woman who stood weeping at the feet of Christ, washing them with her tears, and wiping them with the hairs of her head.

Even while observing a joyful festival, tears, the fountain of which is supplied by godly sorrow for sin, and gratitude to the Redeemer; tears, which it is delightful to shed, are seen on the same countenances which glow with love and hope, and beam with holy, humble joy in God. And when they sit down to the table of Providence, to feast upon his bounty, the exercise of these emotions is not suspended. They feel there as pardoned sinners ought to feel, and as they would wish to feel at the table of Christ, for the table of Providence is become to them his table; they remember him there; they remember, that whenever their daily food was forfeited by sin, and the curse of heaven rested upon their basket and store, he redeemed the forfeiture, and turned the curse into a blessing.

Hence they feast upon his bounty with feelings resembling those which we may suppose to have filled the bosoms of Joseph's brethren, when they ate and rejoiced before him. They had, you recollect, hated him, persecuted him, conspired his death, and sold him for a slave. But by the providence of God he was exalted to power, and had the satisfaction, not only of seeing them humbled at his feet, but of saving them and their families from death. After he had made himself known to them, assured them of his forgiveness, and showed them, that though they meant evil against him, God had overruled it for good, he invited them to a feast, and richly loaded their table with provisions from his own.

We may, in some measure, conceive what their feelings must have been on such an occasion. Though they feasted and rejoiced before their highly exalted, but generous, forgiving, and affectionate brother, yet feelings of sorrow and shame could not but mingle with their joy, and they must often have felt as if they wished to rise from their table, throw themselves at his feet, and once more ask his forgiveness. Well then

may the redeemed sinner feel thus, while he feasts and rejoices before that much injured, exalted, and compassionate Savior, who is not ashamed to call him brother, and who has not only redeemed and forgiven him, but called him to share in all his possessions and glories.

And while such emotions toward the Savior fill the heart, his name cannot be absent from the tongue. Husbands and wives will speak of him to each other; parents will speak of him to their children; his person, his character, his offices, and his works, will furnish the subject of their conversations, and instructions; and a realizing apprehension of his unseen presence, far from damping their joy, will only chastise and purify and exalt it. Such then, my hearers, are the views and feelings, with which, considered as sinful creatures under the Christian dispensation, we ought to observe this sacred festival.

And now allow me to ask, is this requiring anything unreasonable? Is it requiring one emotion for which the gospel of Christ does not furnish ample cause? Is it requiring any thing more than may he justly expected from creatures situated as we are, enjoying such distinguished blessings, and privileges, and indebted for them all to a Savior's dying love? Indeed, is it requiring any thing, which would not be, in the highest degree, conducive to your own happiness? Would not this day, if spent in such a manner, be the happiest day which you ever enjoyed; a day like one of the days of heaven, and affording a rich foretaste of its happiness?

Why then should we not all spend what remains of it in this manner? Why not thus keep it as a feast to the Lord? Ah, my hearers, this question cannot be answered, at least not in a manner which will be satisfactory to God, nor even to an enlightened conscience. And why should any seek for an answer? Why should any one seek an excuse for deferring his own happiness? Suppose two persons, who have been long at variance should happen to meet today at one of your tables. Might they not become immediately reconciled, if they chose, and feast together in mutual love; and would not the happiness of the feast be heightened to each of them by the pleasure of reconciliation?

Why then may you not all become immediately reconciled to your God, and begin to love that Savior who says. I love them that love me? Why may you not all repair to your respective habitations, and there feast before God with feelings resembling these? How can you find it in your hearts to leave his house, where he entreats you to be reconciled, return to the habitation which he has prepared for you, feast upon the provision which he has made for you, which a Savior purchased for you with his blood, look upon the children and friends whom he has given you, consider the ties with which he has bound them to you, and yet refuse to love him, and still persist in employing the powers and faculties, with which he has entrusted you, in opposing him! O do not, I entreat you, be so ungrateful to him, so cruel to yourselves. As though God did beseech you by us, we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/edward-payson/a-festival-kept-to-the-lord-2/>

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