Charity Fischer

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History 101

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**Summary**

This is a sermon given by Absalom Jones, a black clergyman, on January 1st, 1808 after the abolition of the international slave trade. He begins with a small preface where he implies that the goodness given by God must be reciprocated. He gives examples of this, such as sacrifice, that will not do. He states that, in light of their current celebrations, there are five duties now given to them by which they may acknowledge to God what he had done for them. The first being thanksgiving. He urges that their thankfulness should not be limited to the past or the present, to individual hearts or homes, but that it should be taken on in joy and praise for their religious freedom and many other things.

The Second duty he states is prayer to Almighty God. He urges his congregation to bring their thanksgiving to God in prayer of supplication for the freedom of all their brothers of Africa to be recognized and protected by all nations. Jones also begs of his congregation prayers for the Lord’s further will in the hearts of law-makers, for better conditions of those still in slavery, and for the Lord to give slave holders and masters the will to treat those they hold in bondage with kindness. This last, to Jones, includes the permitted means for education of the slaves which will allow them to read the scriptures. Thirdly, he calls churchgoers to turn away from pride and embrace humility and faithfulness. He says that as the Israelites, when freed from slavery, turned in remembrance to the Lord and to their forefather Abraham, thus should he and his people act in humble remembrance of their heritage.

The fourth thing he lists as a duty is gratitude to activists of the time who effectively brought about the end of the slave trade. He says in this point that without the publications and remonstrances by those abolition societies and individual abolitionists this event would have never come about. He also makes mention of his hopes for the eternal souls of those past and those yet living. Fifthly, and lastly, he states his hopes for January 1st to be remembered in public thanksgiving so that all future generations would be reminded of the sufferings of their brethren and their deliverance given to them by the Lord.

**Evaluation**

Jones’ tone in this sermon is one of celebration and praise through his own natural and dutiful thankfulness. Jones himself was a slave from his birth in 1746 until he was nearly forty years old. Though he was given allowance to earn an education in his teens, he was forced to buy his wife’s freedom before his own for the sake of the children they may have. After being twenty-two years in the ownership of a man by the name of Mr. Wynkoop, he was finally freed in 1784. He calls those still in slavery his brothers, as they share a similar history --and ancestral past-- of slavery, and mourns their affliction while simultaneously urging his congregation to pray for further reprieve for their sufferings as that is the most effective and most available action that they may take while still in Philadelphia.

At every turn in this relatively short sermon Jones point his listeners again and again towards inner reflection and thanksgiving. Such is his second point where he states that it is the duty of them all to turn their thanksgiving for the freedoms now in law in America and Britain into supplication and bring it before God “for the completion of his begun goodness to our brethren in Africa.” (Jones.)

Jones takes his role seriously in his repeated urging towards humility, thanksgiving, and praise. Readers today can understand by this sermon that Jones, as a former slave, was not a stranger to the sufferings of those still in it. While modern readers may think of praise and celebrations as a selfish or superfluous thing, in his fifth point he calls it a duty. Though these may seem contradictory in the minds of readers today it calls to attention our positions in the sight of legislature and our own future population. He says in this point that by outwardly expressing thanksgiving through celebrations, then the completion of what they still yet desire may be furthered by educating their children and continuing in remembrance of their heritage.

An apathetic understanding can be observed in this population today about what slavery was. It’s easy to take a brief look at American history and see the sins committed in our history one can see America’s dark history through a clear lens and call that part of American history all of American history. Indeed, there is much to look at when that’s what you want to see, Jones is an example of this in his own captivity, though relatively benevolent, he was a slave for the majority of his life. Jones gives us a reminder today of what many stood for. Breaking the establishment was an active and arduous process completed by many, not an accepted practice enacted by all. By calling his congregation to action through remembrance, thanksgiving, celebration, and prayer he urges his listeners and readers not to passively allow abhorrent action to continue, but to take an active part in ending what they knew as a hideous mark on their country and an extreme violation of their God-given rights to freedom.