

God's Presence with our Army at Manassas!

A SERMON,

PREACHED IN

CHRIST CHURCH, SAVANNAH,

On Sunday, July 28<sup>th</sup>,

BEING THE DAY RECOMMENDED BY THE

Congress of the Confederate States,

TO BE OBSERVED AS

A DAY OF THANKSGIVING,

IN COMMEMORATION OF THE

**VICTORY AT MANASSAS JUNCTION,**

On Sunday the 21<sup>st</sup> of July, 1861.

BY THE

**RT. REV. STEPHEN ELLIOTT, D. D.,**

RECTOR OF CHRIST CHURCH

And Joseph called the name of the first born Manasseh: For God, he said, hath  
made

Me forget all my toil, and all my Father's house.—Gen. XLI. 51

**SAVANNAH:**

W. THORNE WILLIAMS.

**1861**

## To the Clergy of the Diocese of Georgia

The Congress of the Confederate States, on the day after the signal victory at Manassas Junction, adopted the following resolution:

*Resolved*, That we recognize the hand of the Most High God, the King of Kings, and Lord of Lords, in the glorious victory with which He has crowned our armies at Manassas; and that the people of these Confederate States are invited, by appropriate services on the ensuing Sabbath, to offer up their united thanksgiving and praise for this might deliverance.

Now, therefore, I, STEPHEN ELLIOTT, Bishop of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Georgia, sympathizing fully with this resolution of the Congress of the Confederate States, and feeling, even amid the sorrow which weighs down our State, because of the many gallant sons whom she has been called upon to offer up as a sacrifice upon the altar of their country, that we should 'rejoice evermore and in every thing give thanks,' do direct the Clergy of said Diocese to use on Sunday, the 28<sup>th</sup> July, the following service of Thanksgiving and Praise, in place of the regular service of the day:

[...]

### A SERMON.

[...]

No words could express more entirely our feelings upon this day of National Thanksgiving for an almost unparalleled victory, than these opening verses of the song which Moses and the children of Israel sang when God had delivered them from the cruel hands of Pharaoh. They embody all the ideas which are most appropriate to an occasion like this, and indicate all the acts which we should be glad to perform out of gratitude for so glorious a triumph. They place God in the foreground of the picture, and ascribe all the glory to him, "I will sing unto the Lord, for He hath triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea." They arrange in proper order our past and our present relations to that supreme Ruler of the Universe, "The Lord is my strength and song, and he is become my salvation." They announce the willing gratitude of hearts overflowing with thanksgiving for an unspeakable mercy, "He is my God and I will prepare him an habitation; my father's God, and I will exalt him;" and together they form the keynote of the song of exultation which was poured out over the discomfited Egyptians. And these words are signally the words for this occasion, because God himself, through the Spirit which guides the Church, placed them in our mouths at the very moment when our victorious hosts were driving before them their vanquished enemies. Sunday last was the day of battle and of victory, and from all the Episcopal Churches of the Confederate States were read—as if God was speaking to us from the very altar of the sanctuary and cheering us on with words of prophecy—the chapters of Exodus which contain a detailed account of the preparations of the haughty Pharaoh, which describe the hardening of his heart as shown by that insolent

question, “Why have we done this, that we have let Israel go from serving us?” and which wind up with this magnificent hymn of exultant praise, which Moses and the children of Israel sang, and which Miriam and the women answered with timbrels and with dances. At the very moment when these chapters were reading in the Churches of the living God, parallel scenes were enacting upon the banks of the Potomac, and God was singing for us, before man knew the result, our song of triumph and of praise. It is the crowning token of his love—the most wonderful of all the manifestations of his divine presence with us. Let us repeat, to-day, with our imperfect echo, God’s own song of victory and thanksgiving.

[...]

A little more than a month since, and the people of the Confederate States humbled themselves before God and mingled together, as became a nation who had received mercies which were altogether undeserved, thanksgiving and humiliation. We then prayed, as a nation, that God would accept our confessions, would hear our supplications, and would continue towards us His merciful favor and protection. We truly believed that our cause was his cause; that we were defending a condition of society which He had established as one of the links in the chain of his Providence, and that we should be successful, not because of any merits or righteousness of our own—for God knows that we have sins enough to bring upon us any chastisement—but because we were instruments in his hands for the fulfillment of an important part of the economy of his grace. We maintained that this conflict was not one of the ordinary and ever recurring struggles for independence, but that it wore many of the features of a sacred war, involving in its issues not human rights only, but sound religion, and the maintenance of the truth in philosophy, in morals and in government. It has been forced upon us most unwillingly and we had been compelled to break many long cherished associations and to crush many of our noblest feelings, ere we would engage in it. As it went on, we had perceived, more and more clearly, its necessity and its righteousness, and such wonderful manifestations of God’s presence with us had accompanied it, that we felt satisfied he was acting as our counsellor and leader. If any doubt remained upon the mind of any man—if any faithlessness still lingered around the heart and the spirit—God has now so signally displayed himself to our wondering eyes, that the pillar of cloud by day and of fire by night was not more plain to the children of Israel. Putting man altogether aside, truly may we sing to-day the song of Moses—“He hath triumphed gloriously; the horse And his rider hath He thrown into the sea.”

The more in detail that we receive the accounts of this victory; the more that the smoke clears away from the scene of slaughter and of triumph, the more clearly do we perceive that this is God’s victory. There are circumstances connected with it which mark His immediate interposition and which indicate a spiritual meaning too plain to be misunderstood. God has a purpose in every thing he does and He permits his children, when the event is over, when the blow has fallen, to read that purpose and to learn from it lessons which shall discipline the heart and regulate the conduct. Man learns but little so long as he is rushing forward in the pursuit of objects which fill in his eye and absorb his soul. It is only when some great stroke has descended upon him from God’s hand, that he is sufficiently sobered to consider his ways and to understand the dealings of the Lord. Such a stroke has come, like a bolt from Heaven,

from the hand of the Almighty, filling the one army and the one nation with defeat and humiliation, and the other army and the other nation with sorrow and lamentation. He has smitten our enemies in their most tender and sensitive point, their invincible power, and he has taken from us the pride of our victory by giving it to us wrapped up in the funeral shroud of the brave and of the young.

[...]

What was to hinder a complete and decisive victory? Is it possible that those beardless boys can stand the well directed fire of those terrific batteries, which have so often scattered, under like circumstances, the veterans of other armies? Is it within the bounds of possibility that those young men, trained up in the lap of luxury and known at home, many of them, only as the idlers of fashion, can turn back, even with their undoubted valour, the onset of those stalwart men, who, having labored all their days with the hammer and the axe and every tool of iron, amid furnaces and forges, have made their muscles like brass and their sinews as cords of steel? Can it be that those backwoodsmen, who have rushed so gallantly to the way with no preparation save the few weeks drilling of a disorderly camp, can roll the tide of battle back upon that haughty host whose movements were but yesterday the admiration of the Capital, satisfying even the critical eye of SCOTT? 'Tis true those boys and youths and countrymen are led by the flower of the old army, who had disdainfully cast aside the trappings of a government which was calling upon them to subjugate their countrymen and overthrow the constitution of their country; 'tis true that they are inspired by a holy determination to die upon their ground or else march on to victory; 'tis true, as PERICLES said of the Athenians, "they place not so great a confidence in the preparatives and artifices of war as in the native warmth of their souls impelling them to action"; 'tis true, above all, that a nation's prayers are with them in the battle instead of a nation's boastings, but nevertheless the odds are fearful, and even the most confident tremble as the armies meet in deadly conflict. The eyes of two nations are on them and the hearts of two people are throbbing responsive to every stroke.

[...]

[...]

[...] Hitherto our successes had been ascribed to numbers, as at Sumter—to treachery, as in Texas—to the inexperience of officers, as at Bethel. In this fight we were acknowledged to be inferior, both in numbers and in arms. The enemy was led by officers of high reputation, under the experienced eye of the great Captain himself, and there was no room for any other fraud than such as stands connected with the legitimate stratagems of war. The eye of the civilized world was upon this battle—of statesmen, to understand how to conduct their negotiations—of bankers, how to regulate their loans—of merchants, in what channels to float their commerce—of timid and doubting men, how to decide their politics. Much depended upon it for ourselves. For strange to say, imperceptibly to ourselves, our confidence in ourselves had been seriously impaired by the imbecile dependence upon the North for all the material comforts of life unto which we had permitted ourselves to fall. Even while we were guiding the Union by our statesmanship and illustrating it by our valor—even while we were giving it its Presidents, its Generals, its Admirals—even while we were furnishing it by our well-directed and well-managed labor with its great staple of exchange, we were permitting the North to take all the credit of

advancement to itself, to absorb, into its great centres of commerce, wealth, literature, science, fashion, and to call it all its own, no matter whence it came or whose brain or pocket produced it, and to persuade even ourselves that we were a helpless race, who were dependent upon it for all we were and all we might hope to be. They provided the historians, and so the battle-fields of the North were the only ones which were known to the world; they did all the criticism, and so the science and the literature of the South were buried under the mass of charlatans and poetasters and scribblers who claimed to be heard because of their birth-place, and who were willing to buy a fame which they could not otherwise produce; they furnished Europe with all her information of our affairs, and so we were as much unknown as if we had been mere dependencies, or if known, known only as uncivilized frontiersmen who were hewing down the forests and preparing the way for the educated North to come in and refine us. All the sins of the nation were heaped upon us; we were the pirates, the slave-traders, the filibusters, the repudiators, the demagogues. All the vulgar bullying of the European powers which has been disgracing our country for the last thirty years, was laid—the bastard bantling—at our doors, and not only Europe and the North, but we ourselves, were getting fast to be persuaded that there was no wisdom, no leaning, no virtue, no power in the South. In this battle, then, we were upon trial; trial not only by the world, but trial by and for ourselves. A defeat would have riveted upon us all this false opinion and false character, and it would have required many fields of blood to break the chains of prejudice and calumny, and would have produced upon ourselves an effect which might have hung, for long years, as a crushing weight upon all our efforts. Honor then to the noble spirits who have achieved this victory for us! Others may die upon the battle-field, but none can die so gloriously as they! Others may rise up and be baptized for the dead, but none can ever supplant her first martyrs in the admiration of their countrymen. Whatever illustrious deeds may be done in the future—whatever glorious victories may inspire hereafter new songs of thanksgiving and of praise, none can ever eclipse the fame of these deeds and of this victory. They will ever be the first who cast themselves before the insulted form of their mother and received in their young hearts the wounds that were intended for her; they will ever be the first who gave their blood to wash out before the world the stains that had been slanderously cast upon her honor and her virtue; they will ever be the first who have offered up upon the altar of justice and of truth, a hecatomb of victims to soothe her insulted spirit. Boys many of them were in years, but lions in heart! They have died young, but they have lived long enough to gain an enviable place in history, to entwine their names with the independence and glory of the South. But, above all, honor to the noble spirit who led them to the battle-field; who, having taught them by his virtue, his integrity, his unspotted character, how to live, was now about to teach them how to die! Before he left his home, he wrapped the Confederate flag around him and said that it should be his winding sheet, and all through that bloody day he courted the fulfilment of his prophecy. Wherever the storm of war was fiercest, there was he; wherever death was busiest in his bloody work, there raged he, the very impersonation of a hero. Even that cruel tyrant seemed loth to take away so grand a soul, and it was not until victory was about to perch upon his crest and snatch him from his grasp, that he struck the fatal blow! And when his gallant boys surrounded him, even while his tongue was faltering in death, he uttered words that will be as

memorable as the battle-field—“*I am killed, but don't give up the fight.*” Like NELSON, he died in the very arms of victory, and his blood, like the dragon's teeth which were sown by CADMUS, sprang up armed men who hurled back the cruel invaders! Mourn for such a life and such a death as his was! We cannot mourn, and even his widowed mother should say with the noble ORMOND, “I would rather have my dead son, than any living son in Christendom.”

The effects of this victory will be, for the present, more moral than material. For the moment, it will only exasperate the North and spur the leaders on from wounded vanity to redouble their exertions. But it will be as a leaven working among the people, and teaching them, slowly but surely, how hopeless is the task of subjugation which they have taken in hand. When the first excitement is over, and the shrewd citizens of the North begin to look to the end of all this, and to see before them inevitable failure, they will take the matter into their own hands and call to a terrible account all who have deceived them and led them into their present distress. So long as they were made to believe that their armies could rapidly overrun the South and bring back to their allegiance their most profitable customers, they were ready and willing to hale on the war, but when they shall discover that all their efforts must be unavailing, that an enormous debt will have to be incurred that they themselves must pay, that there is no hope of succor from any of the sources whence they anticipated help, and that nothing is before them but a series of bloody fields to end in discomfiture and disgrace, then may we look for a change of counsels and the rainbow of peace. This victory is the first step towards such a result, and through its blood and carnage may we see a glimmering of hope for returning reason among those who have suffered themselves to be deluded into the belief that the South would fall an easy prey into their hands. [...]

[...]

Its effect upon ourselves is what I most fear. If we continue humble and give the glory to God, we shall go on from victory to victory, until our independence shall be acknowledged and our homes be left to us in peace. But if we suffer ourselves to be elated and to ascribe our success to ourselves—if our heart be lifted up and we forget the Lord our God and say in our heart, “My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this victory,” then shall our peril be imminent, for the Lord hateth the proud and smiteth those who would rob him of his glory. The victory is, we firmly believe, an answer to prayer, and while we would detract nothing from the skill of our leaders or the bravery of our troops, which are the secondary causes of success, we can yet see enough in its circumstances to satisfy us of the presence of God. [...]

The triumphant song of Moses was accompanied by a determination to show forth his gratitude to God by a thank-offering. The Lord had always been the strength and the song of the children of Israel, but now he had become their salvation. He had bared his mighty arm in the face of the nations and had delivered them from bondage and from destruction. This was a new relationship which had been established between them, and he determined to acknowledge it by preparing an habitation for God. “The Lord is my strength and my song and he is become my salvation: he is my God and I will prepare him an habitation; my Father's God and I will exalt him.” Moses and the children of Israel were not satisfied with an empty-handed thanksgiving. They were determined that God should perceive that they valued His

protection and truly rejoiced in His presence and their earliest resolution was to keep him with them by building an habitation for him in midst of them. They courted His presence. They did every thing they could do to keep Him near to them in the national struggle which had been ushered in by the glorious victory over Pharoah. Theirs was not a day of thanksgiving and then a cold dismissal of their God until such time as they should need his services again, but they determined, in the exuberance of their joy, to make it a thanksgiving forever; to bring God into their camp and keep him there forever. [...] What an assurance of success would it give us! What a triumphant march to victory would it seem to shape out before us! And shall we not endeavor to keep on our side an ally as much greater than these, as the Lord is greater than his servant? [...]

[...] It [the Church] wields the most powerful instruments for good or for evil at a moment like this. It carries the prayers of the people to the mercy seat of Christ, and brings back blessings upon its wings—it guides the sentiments of the people in the channels of duty and of devotion—it works upon conscience, upon heart, upon spirit—it sends the soldier to the battle inspired with more than animal courage, and it ministers comfort to those who remain behind to endure the terrible anxiety of suspense, and to bear the misery of the heart's desolation. Prepare, then, habitations for the Lord that he may be induced to dwell among us; give him, for your own and for your country's sake, a glorius and exulting welcome. Exalt him, whose is "the earth and all that therein is, the compass of the world and they that dwell therein." Say unto your homes, unto your temples, unto your hearts. "Lift up your heads, O ye Gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors, and the King of Glory shall come in."