

**A SERMON PREACHED AT THE TRIENNIAL  
VISITATION OF THE RIGHT REVEREND  
FATHER IN GOD THOMAS LORD BISHOP  
OF SARUM, HELD AT READING, ON  
THURSDAY, AUGUST 30TH, 1744**

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A Sermon Preached at the Triennial Visitation of the Right Reverend Father in God Thomas  
Lord Bishop of Sarum, Held at Reading, on thursday, august 30th, 1744 by William Dodwell

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**WILLIAM DODWELL**

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Faith illustrated and applied.

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S E R M O N

Preached at the

Triennial Visitation

OF THE

Right Reverend FATHER in GOD

T H O M A S

LORD BISHOP of SARUM,

Held at READING,

On Thursday, August 30th. 1744.

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By WILLIAM DODWELL M. A.  
Rector of *Shottesbrook, Berks.*

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Published at the Request of his LORDSHIP.

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I P E T. I. 8.

*In whom, tho' now. Ye see Him not,  
yet Believing, Ye rejoyce with Joy  
unspeakable and full of Glory.*

**T**HE Desire of Happiness is so strongly implanted in Us, It has so deep a Foundation both in Nature and Reason, that One should be apt, under a close and unprejudiced Attention to it, to imagine, that the best and noblest Prospect of it should almost necessarily influence Mens Faith and Practice; that They should be desirous of believing a System, which promises an Eternal Happiness, and equally studious to perform the Conditions of attaining it. But if We descend from Contemplation to Fact, if, from what We might reasonably expect, We turn our Thoughts to what we actually see; The Principles and Practices of Mankind give Us a very different, a very melancholy Prospect. Their Defects however and Miscarriages in Practice, tho' far from defensible, are yet easy enough to be accounted for. The

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same urgent Desire of Happiness makes them either overlook or wilfully neglect a more important future Interest for the Sake of a present and more immediate Pleasure. There is some Temptation at least, some imaginary Appearance of Satisfaction in these Cases, and They are far from chusing Evil as such, or for its own Sake. But our Speculative Infidels seem to have arisen even to this unaccountable unnatural Pitch, and to triumph seriously in such a deplorable Scheme, as, One would think, must terrify all serious considerate Persons. Our glorious Faith is renounced, and with an Appearance too of great Satisfaction, for a Perswasion full of real Horror and Mortification, and the Professors of Christianity are even insulted and ridiculed, for being willing to acknowledge their own Title to an happy Immortality. Yet if This be not a Truth, It is such an Error, as We have certainly a natural Prejudice in Favour of, and therefore were the Advocates for unassisted Reason guided in Earnest even by That only, yet the least They could impartially have done, had been to express with Concern, that They could not acquiesce in the Evidence of so desirable a Creed, as We Christians profess. But on the contrary, Infidelity is made Matter of Mirth and



and Triumph. They rejoyce, or at least profess to do so, in having, as They think, discerned the insufficient Foundations of that Revelation, on which the Pardon of all our Sins, the Security of all our Hopes and our Title to everlasting Happiness depend. But is This at the lowest, on their own Principles, if I may call them such, a Matter of Sport and Satisfaction? or when considered by a Christian, Does It call for our Pity rather, or our Indignation, to see Men taking Pleasure in such miserable Principles, and exulting as if They had made a Discovery of great Consequence to the Benefit and Welfare of Mankind? The Illustration of our better Hopes will be both an agreeable and a profitable Subject of Meditation, for in the Result the Whole Strength of Infidelity depends on the contrary Supposition. It is not by mere Speculation and Argument, that We can expect to recover Those to our Holy Faith, who were never tempted and seduced from it by any Strength of Argument. The Evidences of Religion have been a thousand Times proved and demonstrated, and do and ever will stand unanswered by them. Their Cavils at Scripture Difficulties have received distinct and satisfactory Solutions, and have indeed been answered to a surprising

prizing Degree of Clearness, considering the Distance of Time We stand at from their Original Promulgation. The only real Temptation therefore to Loose Principles lies in this, that Men flatter Themselves, that the Disbelief of Religion is a comfortable Thought, and that They may enjoy Themselves and their Pleasures more truly and satisfactorily under this Refuge, than under the Acknowledgment of the Christian Faith. It cannot therefore be an unserviceable Work to detect this Error also; to shew that our Religion is as well an amiable System as a certain Truth, and that the Delight and Comfort even of our present Station may and can only be provided for by the Influence of the Precepts and Promises of the Gospel. And We cannot take Occasion to represent this from a more emphatical Expression, or more convincing Exigence, than That which the Text sets before Us, *In whom* says St. Peter, Speaking of the Author and Finisher of our Faith, *In whom, tho' now Ye see Him not, yet Believing, Ye rejoyce with Joy unspeakable and full of Glory.*

It was addressed by the Apostle to Those, who were under the trying Circumstances of Persecution for this very Profession, and yet even here He represents it as the Foundation  
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of such Joy, as could not be equalled either in Kind or Degree by any other Perswasion. The Christian Faith in the ordinary Course of Things did plainly provide for their better Security from all Dangers, and by the beneficial Virtues, which It prescribed, was calculated for Social and Personal Prosperity and Delight; and where extraordinary Violence and Calamities interrupted the natural Good Effects of such Heavenly Duties, there its future Felicities were applicable with greater Force, would enable Them to triumph under Affliction, and convert their heaviest Sorrows into a Subject of Joy and Consolation.

The Whole Passage is full of this grateful Spirit of Triumph and Exultation on a View of the Blessings of the Evangelical Dispensation, and that best Support, which It would afford them in the worst Circumstances. *Blessed, says the Apostle, be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant Mercy hath begotten Us again unto a lively Hope, by the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the Dead, To an Inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in Heaven for You; Who are kept by the Power of God thro' Faith unto Salvation, ready to be revealed in the last Time. Wherein Ye greatly rejoyce*