

## DISCOURSE

BY

ELDER ORSON PRATT,

DELIVERED IN THE

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REPORTED BY JAMES TAYLOR.

I HAVE been called upon, but a few minutes ago, to address the congregation, who are here assembled; which I desire to do, through your united faith and prayers in my behalf. Without the assistance of the Spirit of the Lord it is impossible for any person, in a religious capacity, to edify and instruct his fellow beings. But, if we have the Spirit of the Lord, however imperfect our abilities may be, we are sure to edify and enlighten the people; and the person also who speaks will be edified. For it is written in the Book of Doctrine and Covenants, "He that speaketh, as well as those who hear will be mutually edified together," if the Spirit of the Lord is poured out from on high upon us. It is said in another revelation that "the Spirit of the Lord is given by the prayer of faith." Faith is required on the part of the people to obtain all blessings of a spiritual nature. And in order to have faith it is important that we should do the will of God, otherwise our faith will be very weak indeed. He that doeth his master's will, and has within him the desire to work righteousness, can approach the Lord in faith; but if we do not keep his commandments, and have not this desire, and do not do his will, our faith becomes exceedingly small indeed.

It is, in my estimation, very similar to what we see transpire here on the earth, between parents and children. When children become rebellious, and do not perform the will of their parents, it is with a very small degree of confidence that they come before their parents and seek for any kind of favor or blessing. They come trembling, doubting. They know that their conduct has been such as to prevent them from receiving favors which they especially desire. Sometimes, perhaps, the father will grant the petition of a rebellious son, when he has sufficient confidence to offer up a petition to his parent. But if that rebellious son has so far strayed from the parent that he has no confidence to approach him, and does not offer up any petition to the parent, it is very doubtful about the parent's taking into consideration his wants, in some respects, and bestowing the favors which he really desires. So it is between us and our Heavenly Father.

Sometimes people, through their transgressions, through their disobedience, through their rebellion to the principles that God has revealed, may have lost their faith to that degree that they will not go before their Father, will not pretend to ask him for a favor, thinking that their transgressions are too great, and that the Lord will not favor them. In this condition it is doubtful indeed if the Lord takes into consideration their peculiar wants, and the especial blessings which they would be glad to receive.

How many are the commandments and instructions which God has given to this people? We have been blest in this generation with an abundance of the manifestations of the spiritual blessings of the kingdom. Perhaps there never was a people since the world began that have had as much information, in so short a period of time, from their organization, as what the Church of the Latter-day Saints have had. When we take into consideration this one book, the Book of Mormon, which God has, in mercy, brought forth, and the information that is contained therein, and combine this information with the Jewish record of the Old and New Testament, and then in connection with these two books, the revelations that are contained in the Book of Doctrine and Covenants; all the information that is, and that has been given from time to time in that book. Then, in addition to these three books, all the revelations that God has delivered to us by the mouths of his servants from time to time, some of which have been published, others have not been published, but are still considered by this people as sacred as the things that are published. I say when we take into consideration this flood of light and intelligence that has burst forth upon the world,

in the period of about forty years, we may say that we have been blest so far as light and information are concerned, far beyond any other people with which we are acquainted. It is true we have not the full history of all the various dispensations, and all the manifestations of the mercy and goodness and power of God among those different peoples and nations in ages past. We could not say of a certainty how much information God may have imparted in those dispensations. We read in some revelations what God has given about the organization of ancient Zion. In the seventh generation from the creation—from the days of Adam—we read about the preaching of Enoch. How he went forth and prophesied to the nations. How he built up the church among the various nations. How they built up Zion. In the history of this ancient Zion, we find that Enoch continued his preaching in righteousness, three hundred and sixty-five years, before Zion was prepared for a translation. How much was revealed during that time we do not know, no doubt much was given; but I doubt whether there was one hundredth part of the information communicated, during the first forty years of the existence of ancient Zion, which has been communicated to us, as a people, in our day.

Sometimes we find it to be the case, that God manifests his goodness and mercy to a people, not in the way of revelation, but in the way of power, without much information. We find this to be the case among ancient Israel. They had been slaves in Egypt for a long period. They had been taught from their childhood up, to work mortar and make brick, and toil and labor for the Egyptians—their taskmasters. During this period of time they had not the opportunity of learning much. There must be a little leisure granted that the mind may be taught, instructed, and educated; but it seems that their whole education for two or three generations, or for a long time after they were brought into bondage was given to them by their taskmasters—how to form bricks or adobies, or whatever it might be—hard labor. If they had a little leisure, instead of using it in treasuring up the knowledge of God, they needed it to recuperate their physical systems, that they might rest from their labors, and go again and drudge on the morrow.

This seems to have been the condition of Israel in the land of Goshen, in Egypt. Consequently, when Moses went down to Egypt, he found an ignorant people. It is true they kept up the form of the priesthood among them. Before the Priesthood of Aaron was confined to that particular tribe, we have an account of this priesthood being in existence. After they were led through the Red Sea before the Lord set apart Aaron and his sons, before he confined the Priesthood to Levi, when the children of Israel came and camped before Mount Sinai, we recollect that there was a strict law given. The Lord told them that he was about to descend on Mount Sinai, and he charged the people that they should not break over certain bounds lest they should perish, for if any person or beast should touch the Mount, they should be stoned to death. The people, being ignorant and not fully acquainted with the strictness of the commandments of the Most High, a curiosity was excited, and some of the congregation, when Moses went up to Mount Sinai, wanted to draw near, and the Lord sent Moses down to charge the people again a second time. And the priests were commanded that they should not break through lest they should perish. What priesthood? Not a priesthood that was confined to Levi, or to the descendants of Aaron, or to Aaron himself; but it was a priesthood that existed among Israel. That same priesthood that is mentioned in one of the revelations in the Book of Doctrine and Covenants, where in speaking of the two priesthoods, it says that they continue together in the church of God, in all generations, when God has a people upon the face of the earth; not confined to any special lineage, so far as the priesthood is concerned. Go down and charge the PRIESTS, that they do not break through. This organization may have existed through all the period of the slavery of the children of Israel, for several generations, although we cannot suppose that they had been fully instructed. They had no printed records as we have.

They had not a large collection of books, in the form of Jewish Bibles, to which to refer for information. They had not a large collection of books similar to the Book of Mormon, for printing was not then known. If any of their scribes found a little leisure to write off some of the revelations, it would be only a stray copy or two that would be in the hands of the children of Israel. We can therefore see the difference between them and the Latter-day Saints. They were permitted to enjoy, in a special manner, the power of the Almighty in their midst. This shows that in some of the dealings of God, he manifests his power, if he does not manifest his revelations.

There is a great deal of danger when the people see a great deal of power existing in their midst. For the want of experience and information, for the want of more knowledge, there is a liability to sin against all of this power that may be made manifest in their midst; and this would bring sudden destruction. This is no doubt the reason why God did, in so short a time, send forth such swift judgments upon the heads of the children of Israel. They had seen the manifestations of his power while they were in Egypt; they passed through the Red Sea, and then beheld the glory of God upon Mount Sinai. If they would suffer themselves to reject this power thus made manifest, it brought speedy destruction upon them.

When Moses was on the Mount, they made a golden calf. We no doubt are led to wonder why it was, while the glory of God rested on the Mount, and while the Lord was thus showing forth his omnipotent power—we are led to wonder why it was—that they should build golden calves, and fall down and worship them. It was because of their ignorance. This glory appeared to them on the Mount like a natural phenomenon. Some natural cause, perhaps, was assigned. They saw the clouds as we see clouds upon our mountains. They might have thought that there was a volcanic eruption on the Mount, and concluded that there was no God in it. And therefore, that they needed to make gods of their own finger rings, and fall down and worship them.

The consequence was that the Lord sent Moses down out of the Mount again. And he threatened that he would destroy the whole nation, and make of Moses a great nation. But Moses quoted the promises that the Lord had made to their fathers, and the Lord concluded to hearken to the words of Moses, and spare the people. Moses went down, and as he drew near, he heard a great noise, and he saw them dancing around a golden calf, and they were stripped naked. And thus they had turned their hearts away from the Lord.

Now instead of bearing all this, the Lord inspired Moses to say to the people, let those who are on the Lord's side come forth; put every man his sword by his side, and go in and out from gate to gate throughout the camp, and slay every man his brother, and every man his companion, and every man his neighbor. And there fell of the people that day about three thousand men. On this occasion great destruction came on them, because of their transgression. It was among a people that had been enlightened only by miracles, signs and wonders. We find this to be the case throughout all the sojourn of the children of Israel in the wilderness. They would become rebellious; and the Lord had to send forth judgments, miraculous judgments upon them from time to time. Their carcasses fell in the wilderness. Sometimes a terrible plague would break out, and the only way that Aaron could stay the plague was to get between them and the plague, and offer up sacrifices. The flying serpents that infested that great wilderness would destroy them, and the only way there was to be healed, was to look upon a brazen serpent. And, after all, what was their information? What was their knowledge concerning the things of the kingdom of God? The very knowledge that they had when they came forth out of Egypt, the knowledge of the gospel, of its first principles—even that knowledge seems to have been taken from them, and a law of carnal commandments given to them instead.

The Lord, in this dispensation, is beginning to operate a little differently from what he has done in former ages. In the first place he

performs some small miracles, such as unstopping the ears of the deaf, and causing the lame to walk, the dumb to speak, some fevers to be rebuked, some plagues to be stayed, and devils and unclean spirits to be cast out. Instead of coming down upon a mountain, and causing the earth to shake by his power; and instead of showing forth a pillar of fire by night, and a cloud by day, he has taken a different course. "First give the people knowledge, give them understanding, show unto them the principles of my gospel, the principles of my law, make them strong in the knowledge of God, and show forth but very little power in their midst." This seems to be wisdom, that we may have knowledge proportionate to the power that is made manifest, that when he does show forth his power, we may turn not our hearts away from him. In the beginning of this work it seemed to be necessary that certain persons should be raised up to bear witness to the Book of Mormon—of its divinity, that the work might be commenced. But did the Lord continue to send forth his angels? Oh no. After he had raised up three witnesses in 1829, angels' visits became more scarce, because the people were not prepared for them. Even these three witnesses were not prepared for a day of trial; for they turned from the Lord, and fell into transgression, and did not keep the commandments of God. What was the matter with them? They had greater power made manifest in their midst than they had knowledge to keep them in the faith. If they had had more knowledge, it would not have overthrown them. We find that Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer, and Martin Harris beheld the plates that were translated, and heard the voice of the Lord, out of heaven, proclaiming in their ears that the translation had been performed by the gift and power of God. And they put their testimony in writing, and it went forth. But this was too great a power for the little knowledge that they had. And the consequences were that they had trials, and these trials overpowered them. But we never have heard that these witnesses have denied their testimony. Because they were not all the time beholding the power of God made manifest, they fell away. Now this should be a lesson to the Latter-day Saints, that when we do see some small miracles wrought, we should strive to strengthen ourselves up in the spirit of our religion, with light and knowledge and information—to gain all that we possibly can, that we may be spiritually strengthened; a miracle is external to the senses, and has only an exciting effect upon the mind. Unless it is accompanied by the Spirit of the living God in the heart, what are we benefited? We are able to bear testimony to what our eyes have seen, but where are we benefitted, unless the Holy Ghost is shed forth in our hearts?

Moreover, God has determined that in our day he will manifest his power again. When I say our day, I ought to say in the days of this last dispensation of the fullness of times. Before it closes up, it will turn out to be one of the most magnificent eras ever manifested to the world, so far as power is concerned. The Lord has taken this method for forty years past, to prepare us for what is coming. And if we will treasure up what the Lord has given, and suffer his will to be written in our hearts, and printed on our thoughts, and give heed to the teachings and counsel of the living oracles in our own midst, we will be prepared, that when the day of power does come, we shall not be overthrown.

Now, that there is a day of power coming, every Latter-day Saint, who is acquainted with the predictions of the prophets, is certain. He is expecting that it will come in the time specified in those revelations. God has said to us, in the Book of Doctrine and Covenants, that when the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled, then cometh the day of my power. "Thy people will be willing," says one of the ancient prophets, "in the day of thy power." The elders of this Church have gone forth among many nations. They rejoice in the power that is made manifest, in some measure. God has said that they should go and preach the Gospel to all nations of the earth; and that signs should follow them that believe. In my name they shall do many wonderful works. In my name they shall cast out devils, speak in other tongues; and the

eyes of the blind shall be opened. The Elders have found this to be true. As far as the people have had faith, they have seen this power, in some measure, displayed. But this can not be said, comparatively, to be the day of his power. When the day of the power of the Lord shall come, then will be a time when not only the sick, the lame and the blind, but also the very elements will be wrought upon by the power of God, as the Lord has spoken, and be subservient to the commands of his servants. Will the waters be divided? O yes. We are told, in the prophecies of Isaiah, that when the house of Israel shall return to their own country, he will strike the river Nile, in the seven great channels, by which it enters into the Mediterranean Sea. Instead of taking them above these seven different channels, he will make a road through the seven channels of the river Nile; and the people of Israel will go again dry shod, as they did anciently. In the eleventh chapter of Isaiah, and the 15th verse we read that "the Lord shall utterly destroy the tongue of the Egyptian Sea," not the main body of the sea. Those who are acquainted with the north portion of the Red Sea know there are two prongs, one is called the tongue of the Egyptian Sea; and the children of Israel shall go through dry shod, and through the seven channels of the river Nile, as did Israel in the day that they came up out of the land of Egypt.

Here will be a miracle wrought greater than that of speaking in tongues or the healing of the sick—more convincing in its nature. When this is done together with many other things, the children of Israel will no longer feel themselves under the necessity of referring to the day when the Lord wrought wonders as they came up out of the land of Egypt. You know it has been a saying with the Jews some thousands of years, that the God of Israel lives. "We do not worship the kind of god which you heathens worship. We worship that God that divided the waters, that came down on Mount Sinai." They always refer back to miracles four thousand years old, that their God is a God of miracles. This ancient proverb is to be done away, in modern Israel. Instead of referring back to ancient miracles, it will be said, "The Lord liveth that brought the children of Israel from the land of the north, and from the countries he has driven them to the land of their fathers." That will be the time when Israel will be willing. All Israel will be willing to acknowledge the power and glory of that God whom they serve. It seems that the Lord is going to enact over again, a thing that he did after they came through the Red Sea. After they came through the Red Sea, the Lord brought the children of Israel into the wilderness, and kept them there forty years, so that all the people perished except Joshua and Caleb. When the Lord brings the people of the House of Israel, in the latter days, instead of taking them direct to the land of Palestine, he brings them forth into the wilderness again, which you will find recorded in the 20th chap. Ezekiel. "I will bring you into the wilderness, and plead with you face to face." Now if the Lord did plead with them face to face in the wilderness of the land of Egypt, and gave them revelations there, if his presence, at first was with them, and was not taken from them at the first, so will he do again—he will plead with them face to face.

I do not think, however, that they will, in the latter days, so far transgress, as to bring upon themselves the curse that came on their fathers, in ancient times; for then he took from them the glories of the covenant of the gospel, and introduced another covenant, the covenant of the law. The first tables of stone, we are informed by the inspired translator, contained, not only many instructions for the government of the people, but revelations containing the gospel of the Son of God; the principles of the higher law, that were calculated to cause all who obeyed the same, to enter into his rest, which rest was the fullness of his glory. These tables were broken to pieces, because of the worship of a golden calf. The first covenant was broken. And when Moses went into the mount a second time, the ten commandments were the only things that were contained on the second tables, that were on the first. But in addition to that, was added the law of carnal commandments. Hence