

## DISCOURSE

DELIVERED BY

## APOSTLE MOSES THATCHER,

Delivered at the General Conference, Saturday, April 8th, 1882.

REPORTED BY G. F. GIBBS.

I have been very happy in attending the meeting of this Conference, I have rejoiced in listening to the remarks of brethren who have spoken; and earnestly hope that I may be influenced and guided in the remarks I may make, by the same spirit and power which has actuated them. Realizing as I do, that God is working in the hearts of the Saints and is, at the same time, holding as in His hands the destiny of nations, I have seen no happier day than this. And, while proscribing, *ex post-facto* laws abridging the liberties of the people have been, and others may hereafter be enacted by the law-makers of the nation, till the honest and good, the meek and pure in heart rejoice in the Holy One of Israel, who while preserving their lips from uttering guile makes steadfast their feet in Zion, that they slip not.

I am not aware that we, as a people, have any policy marked out by which to meet the issues or overcome the annoyances which may be forced upon us, but with those who merit the constant companionship of the Holy Ghost, all will be well. The sight of the eye, the hearing of the ear, the touch of the hand may each and all be deceived, but the instructions of the spirit are in all things correct. The combined senses may misguide or fail, but he who happily secures the companionship of the Holy Spirit, walks in the ways of life and neither fears, becomes weary nor faints by the way-side. Christ as the author of human redemption—himself a willing sacrificer—comprehending by His divine nature, the fulness of this great truth, commanded His disciples to tarry at Jerusalem until endowed with power from on high—until He should send the Comforter whose mission it was to show them things to come, bring all things which He had taught, to their remembrance and lead them into all truth.

They had listened to the words of life and light as the marvelous sermon on the Mount came from the divine lips of their Lord and Master: they had seen Him touch the eyes of the blind, making them to see again, the ears of the deaf to hear, and had witnessed His power quicken into life, the decomposing body of the dead; they had traveled throughout the land of Judea with, and perhaps watched many weary nights to keep Him from the injury of those who desired to harm Him; they had eaten and drank with, and slept by Him, listening by night and day to the inspired instructions; but, notwithstanding all the experience thus gained during years of unsurpassed opportunity for learning the truth as it was in Him, they were not yet fully qualified and authorized to preach that perfect law of liberty—the Gospel of their Redeemer. Hence the command "Tarry ye in the City of Jerusalem until ye be endowed with power from on high."

The Comforter which came to them, is the same that has come to us, and His mission then, as we have demonstrated it now to be, was to bring things to the remembrance, show things to come and lead into all truth. No man has authority to preach the Gospel and administer its ordinances without a commission from Jesus Christ; and the seal of such commission has always been, and always will be the gifts, blessings and endorsement of the Holy Ghost, which, not only leads to the form, but also to the power of godliness.

It is this, that cheers the hearts of the Latter-day Saints, brings knowledge of things past, present and to come, unites and makes them in their testimony, hopes and aspirations, distinct from all the world—a peculiar people.

The Elders of Israel acting under the authority of an endless priesthood bear the message of peace, of life and salvation to the inhabitants of a fallen world. Without money and without price they visit the ends of the earth and, while warning the wicked of the judgments to come they urge the honest and good to gather, before the coming of the great and dreadful day when Babylon shall fall. Bearing a faithful

testimony, they speak of that which they know and testify of that which they have experienced, saying "do the will of the Father and you shall know whether the doctrine is true or false." In this, their testimony differs from that of the ministers of all other religious denominations, and they not only speak as having authority, but they have it. Where, outside of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, is there a man authorized to make the promises of the knowledge of God by revelation as the reward of obedience to the principles of the Gospel? Who, beside the Elders of this Church, are commissioned to perform ordinances in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost through which, and by which the Comforter comes to the obedient penitent, leading him into all truth and showing him things to come? Who, beside them are authorized by God, commissioned by Jesus and endorsed by the Holy Spirit to preach repentance, baptism and the laying on of hands, saying to the inhabitants of the earth "believe in the doctrines of Jesus Christ, repent of all sins, be immersed in water for their remission and have hands laid upon you for the reception of the Holy Ghost and you shall know these things to be true, for, through obedience to the law of life, comes the testimony of Jesus, which is the spirit of prophecy."

Ask the members of the so-called Christian sects if their ministers come to them offering such a test of their authority to speak in the name of Him who descended beneath all things—ask them for the testimony of Him who led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men, what gifts they have to offer, what promises of godly knowledge they have to make? Ask them for the testimony of Jesus and to show the plan of Salvation built upon the rock of revelation against which the gates of hell cannot prevail, and you will be made painfully to feel that they have none of these things. A form of godliness they may exhibit, but the power, they do not have.

"Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned. And these signs shall follow them that believe. In my name they shall cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents, and if they drink any deadly thing it shall not hurt them."

Such was the commission given to the Apostles anciently, and the gifts and blessings, some of which I have enumerated, following the believer whose faith led to works, were evidences of the authority of the Lord's disciples who bore that commission. Their testimony being true and faithful, received the endorsement of the Holy Spirit.

Unlike ministers of the various Christian denominations the Elders of this Church claim no part of the commission given by the Lord to His ancient Apostles, but they do claim, and do have authority from Jesus Christ to preach His Gospel, and the signs that followed believers then follow them now, as thousands can testify. Most so-called Christians have long since discarded the idea of works, holding that salvation coming only by grace, belief alone, is essential.

Now, I hold that they have not only discarded all works, but belief as well. My reason for so doing is I think logical and conclusive. Jesus declared that certain signs should follow them that believe, but modern divines do not even pretend that any one of the signs enumerated follow those that accept their teachings. Therefore, relying upon the words of the Lord, we must, we are bound to conclude that they do not even believe the Gospel, or if they do the promise of Christ certainly fails. I am aware that such a conclusion gives a choice between but two horns of a disagreeable dilemma, but we had nothing to do in the arrangement of matters which have brought it about; we only speak of facts as they exist. Again, ask the ministers of any of the Protestant churches where they get their authority to preach? They will tell you from the Roman Mother Church which claims Apostolic succession from Peter, but they will refer you I think, in most instances, to the words of Jesus already quoted wherein He instructed His disciples to go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature, etc. They will tell you that here is where they get their authority, and they claim that commission is to them as well as to those to whom it was di-

rectly given. Let us submit the test and see how this claim stands. Those who anciently had the commission and authority were endorsed by the spirit and power of God which caused certain heavenly gifts and blessings to follow those who believed their testimony and teachings. Do any of those gifts and blessings follow the believers in the teachings of modern divines who claim the same authority and commission? No, not one. They the ministers themselves hold them non-essential, and hence done away. They are, indeed, done away so far as our Christian friends are concerned, and so is the authority and commission of their ministers done away, so far as the endorsement of their teaching by the Holy Ghost is concerned.

I desire here to bear my testimony that the gifts and blessing enumerated by the Savior as those that should follow believers, do follow in this day, the authoritative preaching and administration of the ordinances of the Gospel, and that the Elders of this Church are clothed with authority from God. It did not come from the Roman Mother Church, nor from any of her Protestant daughters, but was restored to earth in our day by Peter, James and John to whom Jesus Himself gave it. In their charge it was authority that bore fruit as testimony of its efficacy and divine power; committed to the charge of God's servants it does likewise in this age among this people.

Lacking the revelations of the Holy Ghost, men and self-constituted ministers are not led into all truth but teach, instead thereof, opinions and vain imaginings. As an instance I refer to a sermon preached not long since by an eminent divine in the East for whose liberal views and outspoken advocacy of them in many respects I entertain admiration, for they had, in my opinion, a tendency to liberalize the ideas of some who otherwise would have inclined to religious bigotry or, on the other hand, to infidelity. In seeking to illustrate how the various Christian sects were moving heavenward this divine compared the kingdom of God to the city of Philadelphia which has numerous railway connections leading from almost every direction but all centering in that city. Upon these numerous railways daily move many trains composed of numerous cars containing many people traveling from various directions on different roads but all bound for the city of Philadelphia. Now this doctrine being broad and liberal would certainly commend itself to every thoughtful and charitable Christian did it not, when tested by the Master's perfect standard, reveal a defect—a fatal one too, which all who rely upon it must eventually find to their disappointment and sorrow. The doctrine however attractive, is absolutely untrue, for Jesus Himself has declared that there is but one way, "Straight is the gate and narrow is the way, (not many ways like the roads leading to the city of Philadelphia), and few there be that find it."

Now why do eminent, educated, influential men, who have chosen the ministry as a profession, and who pretend to teach the Gospel to others, advocate as doctrine ideas so diametrically opposed to the eternal truths advanced by Christ Himself? The answer is simple, lacking the inspiration and revelations of the Holy Spirit—having no Comforter to lead them into all truth, bring things to their remembrance and show them things to come, they teach for doctrine the opinions of men. Being filled with worldly wisdom but not the power of God, "They divine for money and preach for hire." Again Christ prayed that His disciples might be one with Him as He was with the Father, and that all should believe the words of the disciples that they might be one with Him, as He was one with the Father. Are Christians claiming belief in these words one? No, the various denominations are not only divided against each other, but in some instances are divided among themselves. During the late civil war, as was stated yesterday, members of the same church south of the Mason and Dixon line were praying for the destruction of their brethren of the same church north of it, while, on the other hand, those north were making a like petition to the same God against their brethren south of that line. According, however, to their own ideas of God, He could hardly have heard and answered either party; for, having no body He could not hear and having no

passions He would have been indifferent, had He been able to hear. Notwithstanding this, however, many, very many on both sides were destroyed and, as we believe, needlessly. Of one thing we may be certain, and that is the members of the various Christian denominations are not one. Therefore there is but one of two conclusions it which the reasoning and thoughtful can arrive. Either God has ceased to answer the prayer of His Son or the various conflicting religious sects are not believers in the Gospel. And as they put great stress upon faith or belief, I have endeavored and think I have not failed to show that they are not even true believers, for they are certainly not united and one with Christ as He is one with the Father, nor as His ancient disciples were one with Him.

In mentioning these matters I have tried to do so in a respectful manner, having regard for the feelings of those who differ from us in religious affairs. There are many people in the world who do not believe as we do, but for whom I entertain a high personal regard; for according to the light they have, they are moral, honest and just, and are as devoted to what they believe to be right as we possibly can be. Thousands and hundreds of thousands of people in the world are just as sincere as we are; but to be sincere in a matter does not make that matter true.

While at the City of Mexico recently I saw many exhibitions of religious devotion and sincerity. On certain feast days people there do strange things. I have seen women walk upon their knees three miles over rough stony roads, being rewarded at the end of their painful journey with a platted crown of thorns placed upon their heads, while being carried upon the shoulders of strong men, amid the cheering multitude, who praised them for having accomplished what they believed to be a saintly, meritorious task. Again, I have seen ladies of refinement, wealth and influence trail their rich satin and velvet robes through the dirt and filth accumulated upon the floors of the great cathedral, while for hours they would kneel in adoration before an image, while being jostled by ignorant, degraded, vermin-covered Indians worshipping at the same shrine. On other occasions I have witnessed for weeks together the revelry of Catholic maskers who frequented the streets, theatres and balls, night and day. At some of those masked balls it was said scenes were enacted that were so immoral in their tendency that the general of the Mexican army issued orders prohibiting officers and men of the army from attending them. And yet, at the termination of the thirty days' dissipation, religious sincerity caused those poor, ignorant people to feel free from sin after confessing to their priests and receiving absolution for all their abominations and securing a great black mark in the form of a cross in their foreheads. Now, while these things, and many others which I have not time to mention, appeared very repugnant, immoral and debasing in their practice and tendency, yet I respected those people in their religious belief, customs and ceremonies as I desire to respect the people of other creeds so long as they do not infringe upon the rights and liberties of others. For God intends that all should be absolutely free in such matters. When Adam and Eve were placed in the Garden, the doctrine of free agency was fully established and endorsed by the Creator, for He there gave a conditional commandment, obedience to which was to perpetuate life, disobedience was to bring death, but the choice was left with the man and woman, and from that day to this He has intended that man should act upon his own agency; that he should be permitted to receive the truth, choosing the path that leads back to the presence of God and the knowledge that comes from above; or, on the other hand, to reject it, following in the path which lead to ruin and destruction.

In this great American government a man should be free to worship the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost; he should be equally free to worship a mountain, a stream, the sun, moon, or anything or not to worship at all; so long as his practice and belief do not interfere with the inalienable rights guaranteed to man, so long should he be absolutely free.

From the time when God gave to man and woman their free agency in the Garden of Eden, mak-

ing the law and defining the penalty for breaking that law, I can find nothing in the revelations that would bind or fetter the soul or the body of the children of men. There was, however, one unconditional command; it was given in the generation of the heavens, when God created man and women in His own image; and that command still rests upon the fishes of the sea, upon the fowls of the air, upon the beasts of the field, and all beating throbbing nature naturally obeys the edict, "multiply and replenish the earth." This great unconditional, unrepelled law is still in force. The Roman Catholic church, as it has done heretofore, may issue edicts binding certain members of that church to celibacy, making the union of man and woman obnoxious, but that great command is nevertheless still binding. The Roman church and our own Government, in their blind efforts to defeat the purposes of God, may continue to forbid marriage, and thus fulfill ancient prophecy, but their efforts should not surprise us. Is there anything occurring in the midst of the Nation to day that we have not anticipated? I have recently returned from the east, and I rejoice exceedingly in what I saw manifested there. Does God hold the members of Congress responsible for their acts as he does the Elders of this Church? No. They will be judged by the light they have and no more. They are, many of them, educated, and are men of influence, possessing, however, but little genuine moral courage. Notwithstanding the evident disregard for principle manifested by some of them touching affairs in which we are interested, I confess that I lose confidence in them with the deepest regret, and find it most difficult to withdraw the faith formerly reposed in the law makers of our great nation. I still desire and hope to be able to continue praying for them and for the President and cabinet, that they may honor the positions to which the people have called them. We will uphold, sustain and pray for them at least until God rejects and condemns their works. There is salt in the nation yet. I try to comprehend the feelings of faithful Abraham when pleading for Sodom and Gomorrah; which, had they contained five righteous men might have been spared.

Now, I think there are a great many more than five righteous men righteous according to the light they have, in the United States; good men too, who, while they cannot see as we see, and while they cannot endorse our peculiar ideas in regard to the plan of human salvation, love liberty, cherish the memory of our forefathers, and regard the foundations of this great government so highly that they could not even under the pressure of public opinion, vote for a measure so radically wrong, a measure so thoroughly unconstitutional as every lawyer must know the Edmunds law to be. There were a few honorable members of Congress whose high regard for the labors and sacrifices of our forefathers precluded them from advocating that infamous measure which strikes with deep intent and a spirit born of hatred, at the very foundation upon which our government and the liberties of the people rest. Those honorable gentlemen, in opposing the bill, counted the cost by realizing that their course in the matter might offend their constituents, who by reason thereof, might retire there forever from the walks of public political life.

Now I must admit that it would have required nerve and genuine moral courage to enable members of the Republican party to vote against the passage of that bill when the party lash was being swung around them as I have never before seen a party lash used. To overcome the fear arising from the contemplated action of constituents at home, and the cut and sting of the party leaders in Congress, required more courage than we could reasonably expect from members of the dominant party. Moral courage is a virtue possessed by few men in this gilded age in which ambition, rather than principle, too frequently is the moving cause which prompts to action. When, therefore, party leaders, sarcastic and unscrupulous, shake their fists under the noses of their timid followers daring them to place themselves upon record as advocates of "Mormonism" by opposing measures intended for the bondage of "Mormons," it is indeed difficult, and we ought not to expect weak men,