

DISCOURSE BY ELDER H. W. NAISBITT.

DELIVERED

In the Tabernacle, Salt Lake City,
Sunday Afternoon, May
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REPORTED BY JOHN IRVINE.

HOWEVER disagreeable it may be to my personal feeling to stand before a congregation, the consciousness which the Elders of this Church possess that they have had committed to them the authority of the Holy Priesthood, and that they are entitled to the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, and that they possess the faith and prayers of the Saints who are their associates in the Church—those who understand their needs—is enough, I think, to buoy up an individual when he is called upon suddenly to address the people; indeed it is these thoughts alone which give me courage at the present time; I count upon a measure of the Holy Spirit; I count upon the faith and prayers of the Saints; and while I take up a little time I hope that that which may be said will be profitable and advantageous to all who listen and to the speaker himself.

Numerous have been the methods and channels through which the human family from time to time have received intelligence. Preaching is as old as history. Men have learned from each other. The results of individual experience have been transmitted to those who had less opportunity, and in this way knowledge has been increased in one from the resources of another.

But Christians believe, I think, as a rule, that men have not always been dependent upon those who dwell in the flesh for the intelligence which they have acquired. Those who have accepted the Bible, the Old and New Testament, will understand that there have been in past ages other methods by which intelligence was communicated than simply through men who dwell in the flesh. Spiritual communication is one of the corner stones of the old book. It is filled with instances where intelligences not directly of earth have visited members of the human family and communicated with them from time to time. Abraham, whom Christians look upon as "the father of the faithful," was one who was privileged to receive angelic visitations. Lot was another of those who had experience of this character; and so were many of the ancients, from the beginning down to the time of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, whose divine mission was announced by the visitations and communications of the angelic hosts. Whatever the character of these angels might have been, whether they were resurrected beings who had dwelt upon the earth, whether they were of higher grades—archangels, as they are called—or whether they were designed and appointed specially to minister to individual men—which of these varieties they may have belonged to, it is very evident that the scriptures are full of the history of angelic communication, and that they were the instruments in the hands of the Almighty, sent to communicate His will under certain conditions. It is quite true that in our age this has been accounted one of the lost arts; it has been numbered among the things that had been, but had fallen into disuse; something that had become obsolete or unnecessary in the advanced condition of human intelligence.

But the same scriptures which tell of such visits in ancient times also point out with remarkable distinctness that there would be periods in the history of the human family when this angelic communication would be again restored, and that messengers would again come from the heavens to communicate with the children of men and introduce a new condition of things or prepare for conditions which must and will exist in order that the economy of God might be saved. Hence we have an account in the revelations of St. John of the different angels that were to follow each other in these several epochs or dispensations of providence among mankind. We have an account of the opening of the seven seals, which according to that record is to be done by angels appointed by divine authority, for the express purpose in the unfolding of the divine program in human history. But there is mention made

there of one particular angel of whom it is said that he was seen "flying through the midst of heaven having the everlasting gospel to preach unto those that dwell upon the earth. That this was to be in the far distant future from the period when John dwelt upon the earth and was a prisoner on the Isle of Patmos, is abundantly evident to all who have been but casual readers of the sacred Scriptures; but to those who have been students of that book, to those who have sought to read it understandingly, to make it their rule of life and to be guided by it in their travels, and through its teachings to fit themselves for the future, this statement could not pass with common notice—it no doubt has arrested their attention many a time, as covering a series of interesting and important periods of events. While in the nineteenth century such an idea by religionists has been ignored, being considered unnecessary, yet the documents have come down to us from the primitive times and the assertion is not denied that such an occurrence was to take place at some period of human history, if the word was to be fulfilled. Now I think that there are advantages to be derived from this angelic communication. Whenever a man realizes who and why he is upon the earth; whenever he realizes the instincts which are implanted within him and which make him soar after something that goes beyond the reach of human life and time, I think every one will agree that there is a vast field and need also for the acquisition of intelligence that would tend to the advancement of thousands and millions of the human family.

Ideas that could be communicated in regard to the past, ideas in regard to the present, ideas in regard to the future, might thus be obtained. Those ideas are not particularly within the range of the schools, colleges and educational institutions of mankind, they must come from a source and through channels where there have been larger opportunities for the acquisition of the knowledge which pertains to the designs of the Creator. I think that all thoughtful men and thoughtful women have felt within themselves that there were a great many problems in regard to human existence upon which they would like to have light and intelligence, they would like to understand and have as surety as to whether a man was anything more than a mere animal in creation, whether it was his destiny only "to eat and to drink, for tomorrow we die," or whether his existence was of a continuous character, whether after having laid down this tabernacle of flesh he would be privileged to enjoy again the associations which have been agreeable to him on earth, whether the family circle would be burst asunder, or whether continuing to exist he would be divested in a great measure of the temptations which seem to influence him on the right hand and on the left and which appear to lead so many thousands of the human family down to degradation and death. It appears to me that there are questions in connection with all these things that thousands would like to solve and questions which really never can be solved by the ordinary wisdom and knowledge which pertain to the educational facilities of mankind. Now, in reading these prophecies concerning the future angelic visitations that are to take place in the history of mankind, I have no doubt that those who have pondered over these prophecies have thought that in these visitations they would find the key which should unlock the past, the present and the future and be of great value in the salvation of the human family—salvation from ignorance, from sin, and salvation from death. These are the things which men everywhere need. They need to be saved from themselves; they need to be saved from each other; they need to be saved in regard to the future, according to the Scriptures, and the generally received notions of the Christian world.

Now, this angel that was to come in the latter times was declared to be one who was to bring the everlasting gospel in order that it might be preached among all nations. Now, the everlasting gospel, whatever that may mean, is something that is divine in its character. It is not conjured up by cunning and designing men. God was its author; in fact the Scriptures say that His Son Jesus was the "author and finisher" of the Christian faith on earth. Whenever, therefore, the revelation of that gospel comes it

must give man an account of his origin, of the necessity of the circumstances of the present, and something of his future. There is one thing which strikes the reader as being very peculiar in regard to this angel coming to the human family. It is implied upon the surface, and in its depths also, that there would be no necessity of sending the gospel if the children of man had the gospel already, this would be superfluous. Then when this angel comes is he to come to Christendom, or is he to come to heathendom? Is he to come to men that have not heard of Jesus, know nothing of God, know nothing of the way of salvation, or is he to come to the Christian world. If he is to come to heathendom it of course would be to bring salvation, the redemption of the soul and body of man; but if he is to come to Christendom it would almost seem to imply that amid them even the gospel of redemption was unpreached or misunderstood, for in all the creations of our God there does not appear to be anything of an unnecessary character, there are no steps taken in His government that are inapplicable to the existing condition of things; but the fact that an angel was to come in "the dispensation of the fullness of times" naturally implies that the gospel would not be at that time preached on the face of the earth. Now this is rather an awkward conclusion to arrive at when all Christendom is said to be doing so much in regard to the building of churches, the teaching of religion, the payment of ministers, the sending of the so-called gospel to the heathen, and the furnishing Bibles to all the nations of the earth. And on reflecting upon the visits of this angel a man would naturally enquire, if this angel is going to bring the Gospel, in what does the Gospel consist, and as a necessary consequence he would also begin to enquire as to what the records say which have come down to us from ancient times. He would look into the New Testament; he would read the sayings of those whose names have become historic; he would read the sayings of the Great Teacher, who was sent from heaven, even Jesus Christ the righteous; and he would read the acts and doings in that book, of His successors the Apostles, and of the primitive church, and from this record he would endeavor to find out what the Gospel was as preached in ancient times, and after he had done this he would begin to contrast the Christian organizations with which he was surrounded, the theories which Christians hold, the doctrines which they teach and put them side by side in parallel columns with the teachings of the ancient church he would institute comparisons and so would show a desire to understand the necessity for this angel coming expressly from heaven to "preach" the everlasting Gospel unto them that dwell upon the earth, and to every nation and kindred and tongue and people." And in taking the New Testament for his guide, in pondering the acts and teachings of Jesus and His Apostles, he would begin to understand that there was method and order in connection with that gospel; that it consisted of a series of principles, of ideas, and thoughts and practices, which were intended to work out some desired end. Hence it was said that the Gospel in ancient times "was the power of God unto salvation." It was an important thing, it was something of value, it was something calculated to effect a man's interests in time and in eternity, it was "the power of God unto salvation," and I do not think that in any other recognized record are we so likely to find a portrayal of that Gospel in its purity and original simplicity as in the record called the New Testament. When we come to search that, we realize that Jesus professed to be the Son of God. He encouraged His followers to exercise faith in His Father, and in regard to His works He told them that He "did nothing of Himself, but that which He had seen the Father do that did He," and that which He did before His Apostles, and which He commanded them to do, was according to the commandments which He had received of the Father. I think the Christian world will be willing to acknowledge that this faith in God was a principle which was calculated to enhance the welfare of the human family. It was calculated to infuse high and lofty thoughts into the man or woman who accepted it; faith in the existence of God, faith that they were His children; faith that He was alive to their interests;

faith that He was able to teach them the purpose of their existence, and the design that He had in their creation, faith that he was able to hear and answer their prayers. And the man who enjoyed this faith in God after he had been taught it was a man who was likely not only to feel higher conceptions in regard to humanity, so far as he himself was concerned, but there would be bound to spring up in his heart feelings, growing out of this, in regard to his brother-man, and to his sister, woman; he would be bound to look upon them with more regard for their interests, well-being and salvation upon the earth, than he would have done without this conception. He would be interested in the moral, mental and spiritual condition of his neighbor; he would be interested in imparting to his neighbor the truth, and thus the spirit of faith in God would begin to spread and exercise a salutary influence wherever it was felt among those who received it.

And Jesus was not satisfied only with teaching this faith in God, but He realized that there would grow out of it these or similarly certain principles of action with regard to the conduct of those who received it. A man would begin to realize thatasmuch as he was a child of God that he had in many respects been unworthy of that position, that he had been guilty of many acts both of commission and omission that were derogatory to such origin, and he would naturally begin to repent, to be sorry for having committed himself in this way and not to be sorry only, but to lay everything of this character aside in order that he might stand approved of God His heavenly father. Hence there would grow out of faith the spirit of repentance for past sins, and then it was found that there was an ordinance in the gospel by which, through divine appointment, a man was enabled to receive the "remission of his sins," consequent on the sacrifice that was to be offered on Calvary. That ordinance of the Church, as established by Jesus, was the ordinance of water baptism for the remission of sins. This was one of the principles of the Gospel, one of the principles of salvation, one of the steps in the educational process of those who submitted themselves to the authority of the Great Teacher, Jesus Christ. Now there is a vast diversity of opinion in the Christian world in regard to baptism, but this diversity we need not stop to consider. We can take the New Testament and see what is laid down there upon the subject. Some think baptism unimportant. Christ, however, evidently thought it important. In speaking to Nicodemus, He said, "Except a man be born of water and the spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." And when He commissioned His Apostles to preach the Gospel, they went forth among the people, "baptizing them in water, confessing their sins." Indeed, there are illustrations in abundance of this fact, that will be familiar to all the students of the New Testament. The great Apostle Peter, who appeared to have been the master spirit of the Church on the day of Pentecost, when men began to inquire what they should do to be saved, answered the inquirers in this way, "Repent and be baptized every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." This was the ancient order; this was the order established by Jesus, and the presumption is beyond dispute that if it was necessary for any one single member of that primitive church, or for any of the Apostles, or for Jesus himself to be baptized in water, it was necessary for the whole. Hence the irresistible conclusion is, that every member of the primitive church was baptized, "buried with Him by baptism unto death, that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." This was one of the doctrines of the ancient church, and the next doctrine that followed it in the program and system of the gospel was the "giving of the Holy Ghost. Now the scriptures tell us that "the manifestation of the spirit is given to every man to profit withal." In every land and clime, in all conditions of the human family, of every color, among the most highly civilized as among the most degraded, there is given to every man this measure of the spirit of God to profit withal, and it is in accordance with his obedience to the measure received of that spirit that he will be rewarded

in the future. But in the Christian church there appears to have been an order that went in advance of this universal gift of the spirit. It was called "the gift of the Holy Ghost by the laying on of hands." Hence those who are familiar with the New Testament will realize that when men were baptized they were afterwards confirmed by "the laying on of hands," and upon that confirmation they received the Holy Ghost. This Holy Ghost in them was the power of God. It opened up their minds, it informed their reason, enlarged their capacity, and enabled them to comprehend, as the scriptures say, the past, present and future. It was a grand gift, and one essential to salvation. To one man it gave the spirit of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge; to another faith; to another the gift of healing; to another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues, etc. It was to them the fountain of divine intelligence and power. And these manifestations followed the believer everywhere. It harmonized all the conflicting thoughts and ideas that they might have had in regard to God, in regard to the institutions with which they were surrounded, in regard to the duties devolving upon them, in regard to their destiny in the future. It made them one in Christ Jesus. They were baptized by one baptism, and they enjoyed one spirit. They were rich in the unity of the faith. And when men were thus baptized and received this spirit it was not expected that they should stand strictly upon their own individuality. They were not left to wander abroad to the right and to the left, but there appeared to have been in the primitive times a good deal of what we see in our own day. An organization grew up. They formed what was called a church. It is called in the New Testament, in some places "the Church of God," in other places it is called "the Church of Christ." It was a church composed of those who had thus been baptized, and thus received of the Holy Ghost. They were united together for self defense. They were united in order that they might be taught by the authorities of that church. They were not taught by strangers or by men who had never passed through the same gateway and received the same spirit as themselves, but according to the New Testament they were taught by Apostles, Prophets, Pastors, Teachers and Evangelists, men who were engaged in the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. These officers were "set in the church," according to the New Testament, for the edifying of the body, for the training of the members, until they all came to the unity of the faith and to the full stature of men and women in Christ. Now, that was a glorious age. I have heard good men and women, ever since I heard anything wish that they had lived in those primitive times. They have said how glad they would have been to have the privilege of even touching the hem of the Savior's garment, witnessed His miracles, heard His teachings, and to have been obedient to the principles which He taught. Men and women have said that they would have been glad to have lived in the Apostolic age; that they would have belonged to the primitive church; that they would have been in their glory to share in its trials and persecutions, to have enjoyed its spirit, to have received of its blessings, and to have acquired the knowledge and intelligence which accompanied the Priesthood that had control of that special church. I believe there are thousands everywhere to-day—men who are Elders, Deacons, Superintendents of Sunday Schools, teachers in Sunday Schools—who, on reading the history of the past feel that they would have been glad to have lived in the primitive times and seen the leaders and apostles of that church. Well, now, these feelings are natural. We realize the glory and blessing which belong to that ancient order. But it appears that this order in a great measure has become obsolete; it has passed away, it is not to be found anywhere in the form in which it existed anciently. There may be a church that has faith in God; there may be many churches that include repentance, that practice baptism; some may have faith in baptism for the remission of sins; there may be here and there men who believe in the reception of the Holy Ghost by the laying on of hands; but in its beautiful primitive order it is nowhere to be found among the children of men.