

DISCOURSE

BY

ELDER ORSON PRATT,

In the Tabernacle, Salt Lake City,
Sunday Afternoon, Sept. 19th,
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REPORTED BY JOHN IRVINE.

It is with peculiar feelings that I arise to address the congregation who are assembled this afternoon. An event in regard to myself has this day happened that generally only happens once in the course of a man's life. Fifty years ago to-day I was baptized into the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Hence, it might be said that it is in reality a year of jubilee, so far as I am concerned—I mean that the past year, which is the fiftieth year of my membership in the Church, closing with to-day, has been, indeed and in truth, a year of Jubilee.

There is another thing, connected with these fifty years in the Church, that is also pleasing to your humble servant. Sixty-nine years ago to-day I was born into this world, making this day a double birthday to myself. How very thankful I ought to be for this great privilege which has been bestowed upon me. The hearing of the fulness of the everlasting gospel, yielding obedience to the same, and entering into the Church and Kingdom of God, in my early youth, certainly is a blessing that is worthy of all thanks and praise to my Father who is in heaven, who granted this privilege to me in my youth. There were many scores of millions—yes, hundreds of millions of the inhabitants of our globe that did not enjoy this privilege.

It seems that the Lord our God, some fifty years ago and a little upwards, saw proper to organize his kingdom, to establish it on the earth by the ministration of holy angels, and by the revelations of his Spirit, and by sending down authority from the heavens to minister here on the earth, and by bringing forth that great and precious record, the Book of Mormon, and causing the same to be printed for the benefit of all mankind. How great a privilege conferred on me, to come to the understanding of the contents of that book when I was but nineteen years of age! How great a privilege to live in a day and age of the world when God has again revealed himself to the children of men! There have been many periods of time since the creation in which the heavens, in an especial manner, have been favorable to the children of men, by sending communications and revelations from on high. But a long time had intervened, during which no such privilege had been granted to mortal man. So far as the nations of the Eastern Hemisphere were concerned, upwards of seventeen centuries had passed away, during which they were left in darkness, having no legally authorized ministers, no one that could legally baptize, or administer the Lord's Supper, or build the Church of God, or administer in any of the ordinances of his gospel; that was a long time for the nations to be left in darkness. So far as our Western Hemisphere is concerned, they were not left quite so long a period without information from the heavens. Some fourteen hundred years and upwards had passed away, on this Western continent, during which the people were left in darkness; hence, the whole earth for fourteen centuries, at least, had no gospel preached by divine authority, no Church of the living God in any quarter thereof—so far as we are acquainted. It is true, that during these fourteen centuries the nations had a book that contained the history of the gospel as it was preached in ancient times—a book called the Bible. But a book containing the history of the gospel is one thing, and the power and authority to administer the ordinances of the gospel is another thing; they are entirely distinct. A book, itself, authorizes no man, under the whole heavens, to build up the Church of Christ; it authorizes no man to preach the gospel. No man ever received divine authority by means of an ancient book that was given to prophets and inspired men centuries before he was born. We never knew of the Lord's calling men by ancient books. If the Lord calls any one in this day, it is by a new revelation, not a revelation given 1800 years ago. How inconsistent it would be to suppose that a man is now called to sit in the Presidential chair of the United States, because we have the history

that Washington once sat in that chair. Would that authorize any person, among the scores of millions of the population of these States, to go and take possession of that chair, and undertake to administer in the office of a President over this great people? The thing would be so ridiculously absurd, that the people would rise up universally and condemn any such imposition. So in regard to the things of God. God is a God of order. And if mankind have an order in relation to authority to administer in governmental affairs, how much more the Lord? Has he not as much wisdom as his creatures? Is the Lord so much beneath his own creation that he would prefer illegality to legality? that he would let any one assume the authority and power without calling him to an account in the great judgment day? "But," inquires one, "how do you know, Mr. Pratt, but what the Lord has called some one during the many centuries that you say the people have lived in darkness? How do you know but what he has authorized servants and ministers, to proclaim his gospel among the children of men?" Now, this is a very important point. I do not blame those who have not considered this subject, in putting such a question. It is perfectly reasonable that they should inquire how a person may know what grounds we have for supposing that there has been no one commissioned with divine authority, during the fourteen centuries that have rolled over the heads of the people, until the Lord sent his angel, upwards of fifty years ago, and restored the authority. There are various reasons that can be advanced to prove that the earth has been destitute of any such authority. One reason is, that among the three or four hundred millions of Christendom, or those who profess to be the followers of Christ, we find one universal belief among them, and they have acted upon that belief, namely: that God gives no new revelation to the inhabitants of the earth during their day. That is enough for me; it is all the evidence that I would want, although there is an abundance of other evidence; but that is sufficient for me to know that God never sent them. "But," inquires one, "may not a person be sent of the Lord, be divinely commissioned, and yet no revelation be given in his day?" I answer, impossible, impossible. "But," you may still further inquire, "may not others who received divine revelation, in ancient times, have communicated that authority to their cotemporaries who outlived them? And may not those cotemporaries, thus receiving divine authority, have conferred it upon others still younger, and they upon others? And thus, may not the authority have been handed down by a regular succession of ordination, from the days of the apostles to our own period of time?" I will say that would be possible, just the same as the Church of God, in the first century of the Christian era, delivered the authority to preach and administer ordinances from one to another, among the various nations of the earth; it was continued along during the whole of that century—just as easily it could have continued the second century, and the third, and each succeeding century down to our own time. Here, then, arises another question—may not the authority have thus been transferred? I answer—where has there been an unbroken succession of that same authority that was administered in the first century? I will tell you where the succession was broken. In the very period that new revelation ceased to be given to the human family, no further succession could be continued. It would be impossible for any person to be ordained with divine authority, for instance, to the apostleship, unless there was some person that had authority and had really obtained divine intelligence, by new revelation, from the heavens, that such authority should be conferred upon some other person. When did divine revelation cease? Where shall we go for testimony upon this subject? So far as the inhabitants of the Eastern portions of our globe were concerned, divine authority ceased about the close of the first century of the Christian era. Why did it cease? Because we have no account of any new revelation having been given after the close of that century; and when new revelation ceased, divine callings ceased; divine authority ceased; persons ceased to confer that authority in succession; because, for this obvious reason, they, without new revelation, did not know whom to call; they did not know who

should be authorized to receive the apostleship, or any other calling. Every person, during the first century of the Christian era, who was ordained with authority and power to administer in the ordinance of the gospel, was ordained by the spirit of prophecy and revelation. Timothy was a young man, compared with many of the apostles. He only received the calling bestowed upon him through the laying on of the hands of the servants of God, or of those who were authorized, by new revelation, to administer and to confer authority upon him. Thus it is written in this good book (the Bible) that Paul, who was authorized as an apostle, called Timothy by virtue of the spirit of revelation and prophecy. "Neglect not," said Paul, "the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy with the laying of the hands of the presbytery." And when we speak of missions, in those early periods of Christianity no person assumed to go on a mission among the inhabitants of the earth, unless he was sent, unless he was set apart. Even as great a man as the Apostle Paul had no authority to go forth as a missionary, only by the laying on of the hands of the persons who administered to him. Hence, it is written in the Acts of the Apostles, that the Holy Ghost said unto certain prophets that were in the Church at Antioch, "Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them." Here is a new revelation. Saul could not be separated and set apart to any work of the ministry, only as the Lord called him; and that calling was made known to the prophets that were in the Church at Antioch. If, peradventure, a man had been called by the spirit of revelation and prophecy, and set apart by the laying of the hands of a prophet or apostle, to be an especial minister to the nations of the earth, there would arise still another great question to be solved, in regard to whether that man, thus set apart, could fulfil the object of his mission without new revelation? I say that it would be utterly impossible. No man can fill a mission acceptably before the heavens, unless God should give to him revelation, from time to time, to direct him in all his missionary labors. We have abundant testimony in the New Testament concerning this matter. Even when some of the very greatest revelators that we have any record of, undertook to do things of their own accord, they were led directly different from their own judgments, in regard to their missionary labors. Paul had, at a certain time, a great desire to visit a certain place; such desire arose from his own natural judgment; but the Holy Ghost forbade him. Here it required a new revelation to know whether his own inclinations should be followed or not. Again, we find that the revelations of the Most High were very necessary, in the case of the travels of these missionaries, among the inhabitants of the earth. Philip had done a great work in the city of Samaria. He had succeeded in convincing large numbers, concerning Jesus, and had baptized them, and organized a great church in the city of Samaria. One would have thought, that after having performed labors of such magnitude, he would have been required to stay among that people, and administer to them; but no; the Lord gave a new revelation to the man Philip. He said, "Arise and go toward the south, unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert." In other words, "leave your present field of labor; you can do more good somewhere else." Now, a man left to his own judgment, without new revelation, would not want to go somewhere else; his own inclinations would be to stay where so many had received his testimony. But no; the Spirit of God thought differently. "Arise, Philip, go unto the south country." He was not told what he should do in the south country, but he started off according to the new revelation. And after journeying a short distance, he saw a chariot before him, probably driving along at a slow pace, and it required another revelation. The old one that he got awhile before, requiring him to go to the south, he had already begun to fulfil. But while he yet journeyed, he did not know his further duty; and if God had not given him new revelations, he would have gone forth blindly in his missionary labor. But another revelation came, "Go near and join thyself to this chariot." He therefore obeyed, and when he arrived at the chariot, he found a man reading—not the new Testament, but the law and the prophets. Philip, being

wrought upon by the Holy Ghost, said unto this man, "Understandest thou what thou readest?" "How can I," said the man in the chariot, "except some man should guide me?" And Philip began to explain unto him, the things that he happened to be reading from the prophecies of Isaiah, concerning Jesus, and Philip was invited into the chariot. They rode along until they came to where there was water of sufficient depth to attend to baptism, for it seems that Philip had converted, or, in other words, had proved by his arguments that Jesus was the very Christ, and the man desired baptism, and the chariot stood still, and Philip went down into the water and baptized him. Now Philip had no authority to confirm, by the laying on of the hands, as is evident, in the case of those who were baptized in the great city of Samaria. There was great rejoicing there, because Philip had baptized them, but none had received the Holy Ghost, till another authority, higher than that of Philip, came and laid hands upon them for the reception of the Holy Ghost; having baptized these people, he could go no further; he could not administer the blessing of the Holy Ghost; and hence, having fulfilled the object of the two revelations on this subject, the Lord had another place for him. He did not go there of his own accord, but it required a very powerful manifestation to get him away from that water; the scripture testifies that "the spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more; and he went on his way rejoicing." Have you ever heard anything of the kind in these days, where men, in fulfilling their missions, have been caught away to some other place? "But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with the wings of eagles," says the prophet Isaiah. Philip must have been borne, as it were, upon eagles' wings. Now, if a person—a man light enough, I mean—could get on an eagle's wings and be carried through the air, it would be a very good representation of some of those that wait upon the Lord.

I mention these various circumstances—and might mention scores of others—to show, that without the spirit of the living God, to impart revelations, no man could administer to his fellow man, no man would have the authority to administer. This brings me back to the statement I have already made. You recollect the question is, can it be proved, or is there any evidence that there has been any man called to the ministry among all the nations during the long period to which I have referred? We take their own testimony. They say that there has been no revelations since the first century of the Christian era. Who says so? The whole Catholic Church to begin with, and the Greek Church, another branch of the Christian church, so-called, and then the Protestants that protested against those two branches, and came out from among them, have continued the same false traditions, that no new revelation is needed—that the last revelation which was intended for the human family, was given towards the close of the first century of the Christian era. They do not seem to know how such an expression, if admitted, cuts them off from all authority and power which are divine; they do not seem to know that they cannot possibly be called and cannot possibly be ordained by proper authority, unless God speaks again; they do not seem to know that the writings of men who are dead and gone, centuries ago, do not authorize them to preach the gospel, nor give them any divine authority to administer its ordinances. Hence, you see the impossibility of there being a regular succession from generation to generation, because of the want of new revelation. A great many other testimonies might be brought to prove this fact, but this one is sufficient. "Well then," says one, "if your arguments be true, if your belief be correct, there has been no Christian church on the earth for many generations. We can come to no other conclusion; there is no half way business about it. We come to testify that there has been no church on the earth that God has recognized as his church for the last fourteen centuries, at least; and among the European nations and the nations of Asia and Africa there has been none since the close of the second century of the Christian era. What a woeful condition it is for the inhabitants of the earth to be in. We would be in the same condition that

they are, if God had not condescended again to give new revelation; and this brings me to the subject of the Book of Mormon.

Fifty-three years will have passed away, next Wednesday morning, the 22nd day of September, since the gold plates of the Book of Mormon were delivered into the hands of a boy, by the name of Joseph Smith, a farmer's boy, an illiterate boy, uneducated in the higher branches of learning, uneducated in regard to what is contained in the Old and New Testament, uneducated in the dogmas and creeds of men, uneducated in all branches of science, except it be some of the first principles, the rudiments of education, as taught in the common schools of the State of New York. I say, fifty-three years have almost expired since this great, this marvellous, this wonderful event happened; since an angel of God delivered sacred records into the hands of an illiterate, common youth, not yet twenty-two years of age. Such was the beginning, as it were, of a great revelation. I will not say the precise time of the beginning; for God, prior to this time, had given revelation to this youth, on many occasions. The first one that he gave to him was in the spring of 1820, before Joseph Smith was of the age of fifteen. Then a wonderful revelation was given to him, the first one he ever received. In a great and glorious open vision, in answer to his prayers, there was the manifestation of two of the great personages in the heavens—not angels, not messengers, but two persons that hold the keys of authority over all the creations of the universe. Who were they? God the Eternal Father and his son Jesus Christ, through whom God the Father made the world! Two glorious personages descended from heaven; two personages whose countenances outshone the sun at noonday; two personages clothed with a pillar of light round about them, descended, stood before this lad, and revealed themselves to him. He saw their countenances; he saw the glory of their personages; he heard the glorious words that proceeded from the Father, as he pointed to his Son, and said, to Joseph, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." This was a new revelation; something different from what had been made manifest for a great many centuries, according to the declarations of the articles and creeds of men. How often I have read the declaration of King James' translators of the Bible, wherein King James is represented as the head of the church, and wherein the Bible, as translated by those that were chosen and appointed for that purpose, was intended for the light and benefit of the children of men; and for fear that mankind would cavil on the subject these uninspired men, the translators, in connection with those who were in their council, concluded to tell the people that this was the whole canon of scripture; in other words, we have translated sixty-six books, and they are compiled, or about to be compiled and printed for the benefit of mankind; and these sixty-six books of the Old and New Testament are the only books that Christians should receive, the only revelation that they should have to guide them in all their future lives. The people were just simple enough to believe what they said,—just simple enough to take it for granted, because learned men, that were not inspired of God, had made this unqualified, unproved declaration. Now, "we, the Church of England, must get up, besides these 66 books, some 'Articles of Faith'—some thirty-nine Articles we will invent. We have got no prophets among us to write these Articles,—no inspired revelator sent from God; and therefore, we will originate out of our own hearts something that will prevent the people from receiving any new revelation. We will cunningly tell them that these sixty-six books, called the Bible, contain all the revelation that God ever gave to man." What further have you to say in your thirty-nine articles? "We say that every person that does not limit and confine his faith to the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testament, or if he undertakes to receive any other revelation, he is to be expelled from our church. That is what is said—not directly, but indirectly. In other words, every person who pretends to be a prophet, he is not to be a person considered worthy of belonging to our church." Has any other church but the Church of England adopted these false, soul-destroying delusions? Yes, a great many others. They have invented articles—not exactly thirty-nine, but