

DISCOURSE

By Elder ORSON PRATT, Delivered
in the 13th Ward Assembly Rooms,
November 24, 1872.

REPORTED BY DAVID W. EVANS.

I have, through upwards of forty years' experience in the public ministry, learned some few lessons in regard to public speaking. In the first place I know that the wisdom of man avails but very little, and that our own judgment, thoughts and reflections are not what the Lord requires; but he does require, and has required, ever since the rise of this church, that his servants should speak by the power of the Holy Ghost. A revelation given to the elders of this church in the year 1831, says, "My servants shall be sent forth to the east and to the west, and to the north and to the south, and they shall lift up their voices and speak and prophecy, as seemeth me good; but if you receive not the Spirit you shall not teach." This is a commandment that the Lord gave to his servants over forty years ago. I have seen a few times from the commencement of my ministry, when my mind seemed to be entirely closed up, and when what few words I could stammer forth before a congregation, were altogether unsatisfactory to my own mind, and I presume to those who heard me. But I do feel thankful to God that latterly, from year to year, he has favored me with a liberty of utterance and with the power and gift of the Holy Ghost. I acknowledge his hand in this, for I know it has come from him, and having experienced the two conditions of mind I know the difference. I know that, not only as public speakers, but as individual members of the church of the living God, there are many things pertaining to our everyday duties, which if we clearly understood by the light of the Spirit, we would escape many things which cause unhappiness. It is for the want of clearly understanding the will of the Lord under all circumstances that causes us to fall into many of the evils that we pass through in life. I can look back on my past life and can speak from experience in these matters. I can remember many times when, if I had been guided by the Spirit of the Lord in regard to temporal matters, it would have been well with me; but not altogether understanding what the mind of the Spirit was, the course I have taken at times has been very disadvantageous to me. I will relate one circumstance of this kind as a sample. Some few years ago, I had a few hundred dollars in goods and property, and I expended all that I had in a store. Not one of these co-operative stores, but in a store kept at Fillmore. Being requested by the merchants in that place, to purchase a bill of goods for them, and to give my own note until they could settle it; and being anxious that their business should go on and prosper, I was foolish enough to do as they wished, by which I brought myself into great difficulties, and lost over two thousand dollars by the transaction. I had the bill of goods to pay for, and lost all I put in besides. If I had understood the teachings of the Spirit—and I did have some impressions in relation to the matter, but if I had fully understood them I should not have fallen into these unpleasant circumstances. I have no doubt that there are many others among the people of God, who can see where they have erred, because they did not have the Spirit of God upon them at the time.

I can see, also, many times when the Spirit of the Lord whispered to me, and I scarcely knew whether it was my own thoughts and imaginations or whether it was the revelations of the Spirit; yet it seemed to be the Spirit of the Lord, and I followed the teachings, and was prospered in so doing.

If we, as a people, would live up to our privileges, how many difficulties might be avoided! How many Latter-day Saints would constantly live in the light of revelation! This puts me in mind of a text which I have often heard quoted, but I do not know that I have said much in relation to it. Neither do I know where it is recorded, but I think it is somewhere in the writings of Solomon. The passage I refer to says that there is a spirit in man and the Spirit or candle of the Lord, I do not remember which, giveth it understanding. The idea is that in these tabernacles of ours we have an intelligent spirit which God has placed there, and he has ordained that the Spirit of the Lord shall light up these human spirits of ours, that we may follow in the paths of light, truth and righteousness and obtain eternal life.

This text also puts me in mind of one that is recorded somewhere in the Book of Doctrine and Covenants, in which the Lord, speaking directly to this people, says that the word of the Lord is truth, and whatsoever is truth is light, and whatsoever is light is Spirit, even the spirit of Jesus Christ, and the spirit giveth light to every man that cometh into the world; and the Spirit enlighteneth every man through the world that hearkeneth to the voice of the Spirit. I can not tell you on what page nor in what section of the Book of Covenants this can be found; but you who are in the habit of reading that book will find these words, as I have quoted them.

Whatsoever is truth is light, whatsoever

is light is spirit," consequently, if we could always follow in the light, instead of following in the channel of darkness, we would always follow in the path that would lead to peace and happiness, and we would avoid ten thousand difficulties which beset our pathway.

Another revelation that agrees with this will be found in the Book of Doctrine and Covenants, in a very lengthy communication made by the Lord to this church, which shows very plainly that light is the principle and law by which everything is governed. I will quote the revelation as near as I can remember it. Speaking of his presence, he says, "As he is in the sun, and is the light thereof, and the power thereof by which it is governed; and as he is also in the moon, and is the light and the power thereof; and in the stars; and the light which now shineth is the same light which quickeneth your eyes, which is the same light which quickeneth your understandings, the light which is in all things, and which giveth life to all things, and which is the law by which all things are governed, even the power of God who sits upon his throne, who is in the bosom of eternity, who is in the midst of all things, which light proceedeth forth from his presence to fill the immensity of space." When we put all these texts together, we find that this great principle of light which should enlighten the mind of man, and by which he should be led continually, is something that is not confined to one little part of space; it not only lights the sun, moon and stars and all the heavenly bodies, but it is in and surrounds all things, and gives life to all things.

Here is something that we do not perfectly understand. The principle of life by which we are able to move, think and reason; the principle of motion and of power is a principle of light. And there seems to be a connection or relation between these principles that govern the motion of living beings and the light that proceeds forth from the sun. But we do not understand that relation. God has told us that it is the law by which everything is governed; and we can not find a law throughout universal space, but what light has something to do with it. But we do not know in all cases how it operates. We do not know, for instance, how light operates in making a blade of grass grow out of the earth. We can not understand how particle comes to its particle, how it is organized in a certain form, and finally produces the complete blade of grass. We do not know how this is carried on, but the Lord has told us that it is done by the principle of light. We do not know, either, how it is that we can communicate with different and distinct parts of the earth almost instantaneously through the medium of the electric wires. We understand that this phenomenon exists, but we do not know the cause of it; if we did we should find, according to the revelation which God has given, that it is accomplished through the medium of light. How that light operates we do not know, God has not revealed that. He has only told us that light is the cause and the power by which everything is governed.

We see a stone, and when we hold it in our hands and let go of it, it does not stand still, neither does it fall upwards, neither does it go horizontally, but it falls downwards to the surface of the earth. We have named this gravitation. But what is the cause? No one knows. No person can tell why that stone does not stand still. We see it fall and we see all terrestrial bodies fall to the surface of the earth, but we cannot tell why this is so. The cause, however, is light, but how that light operates we do not know.

We see the sun shine, and we know that it illuminates the face of this world and of many other worlds. Its light proceeds forth from that centre and radiates to immense distances. We see all this, but what connection is there between this and the understanding or light that is in man, that assists him in his power of thought and motion? What connection is there between the shining of that light and the light that is within us? We do not know, and yet God has said that the light which proceeds forth from these heavenly bodies is the same light that quickens the understanding of man and that gives life to all things. We do not understand all these things which God has spoken and given. For instance we see a candle set on a table; we apply a match to that, and immediately there is light where before existed darkness. Chemists tell us that this is a chemical operation; that the light proceeds not from the tallow, but from a principle called oxygen—a certain portion of the atmospheric air which we breathe; that that principle has a great tendency to unite with the materials of the candle, and in so doing it gives out its light. But how this light is produced and sustained by a combination of the elements of the candle and the oxygen of the atmosphere we do not know, only we know that it is the power of God, we know that it is the light which is in all things. But what I term knowledge, and what we should all term knowledge, is to understand not only the phenomena but the cause of these things. We endeavor to distinguish between the natural and the spiritual light, but is there any such thing as drawing a line of distinction between the two? Who can do it? Where is that man or philosopher that can tell the distinction, and where one ends and the other begins? They can not do it. If we take the revelation which God has

given we learn that there is no difference: it is the same light that produces both effects, and the light which darts along the electric wire is the same as that which comes from the distant bodies of the universe, only it has a different name, and operates a little differently. The time will come when the Latter-day Saints, if faithful, will have an understanding of all these things. We have made a commencement in the right channel; we have placed ourselves in an attitude to learn the first principles in this great divine university called the Kingdom of God. God has given us his Holy Spirit, which is the commencement of knowledge, light and intelligence. But unless we walk according to the light and the mind of that Spirit, wherein are we benefitted? We are not benefitted at all. "If my words abide in you," says Jesus, "you shall ask whatever you will, and it shall be given unto you." This promise is given unto every Latter-day Saint. The Book of Mormon, however, qualifies this saying a little. It says, "Whatsoever we ask in faith, which is right, believing that we shall receive, it shall be given unto us." These words—"which is right"—greatly qualify the promise. The Lord has not bound himself by promise to give to the children of men whatsoever they ask for, unless it is absolutely right that they should ask for that thing. If what we ask for in faith is right, then he is bound.

This puts me in mind of a passage in the revelations contained in the Book of Doctrine and Covenants in relation to prayer. He says "You shall receive whatever you ask for in prayer which it is expedient for you to receive; but if any among you shall ask for that which it is not expedient for him to receive it shall turn to his condemnation." We must, in the first place, try to have light enough to discern what is right or expedient for us; in the second place, to ask God the Eternal Father in the name of his son Jesus Christ, for the things which we know he is willing to bestow upon us. Then we can ask in faith, for we have the promise that we shall receive.

The great difficulty with me, and I presume it is also the experience of almost every man and woman in the church of the living God, is, we are not so faithful as some of the servants of God have been in former days. Some of them were so faithful that they lived constantly in the light of revelation. Their minds were opened to it, and scarcely a thing could transpire but what they understood it beforehand. They did not need the news or intelligence to be brought to them from a distance, but there was a spirit within them and the candle of the Lord gave that spirit understanding in regard to things that were transpiring thousands of miles distant. They lived for this; they walked before the Lord so faithfully that they were entitled to know, not only things that were present with and that would benefit themselves and the people among whom they dwelt, but also things in the future—ages and ages to come were opened up to their minds, and their minds comprehended them by permitting this candle of the Lord to shine upon and illuminate them.

It is my most earnest desire to live so as to discern under every condition and circumstance in life precisely what would be most pleasing in the sight of God for me to do, and when I comprehend this I can act as a person who does not grope in the dark, like the blind man who gropes for the wall; but if I live for it, the path in which I should walk will be plain, the Spirit of God being as it were a lamp to my feet, and my guide and instructor by day and by night. Do you not desire Latter-day Saints to be instructed in this way? Every honest hearted person will answer yes. Every one who hungers and thirsts after righteousness, and who desires eternal life will acknowledge that he does desire to be thus guided and led.

But now having spoken so much about the benefits of this light, and how good it would be to be continually guided and instructed by the spirit of revelation, there is another thing connected with it which we perhaps do not all fully understand. Supposing a person were thus guided all the time, from waking in the morning until they retired to rest at night; and then when asleep if his dreams were given by the same spirit, and this should be his uninterrupted condition of an individual, I ask, where would be his trials? This would lead us to ask, Is it not absolutely necessary that God should in some measure, withhold even from those who walk before him in purity and integrity, a portion of his Spirit, that they may prove to themselves, their families and neighbors, and to the heavens whether they are full of integrity even in times when they have not so much of the Spirit to guide and influence them? I think that this is really necessary, consequently I do not know that we have any reason to complain of the darkness which occasionally hovers over the mind. I recollect that Lehi had a very great and important dream communicated to him, and his son Nephi had the same renewed to him. While Lehi was on his way to this country he dreamed that he wandered many hours in darkness; that there was a certain rod of iron, notwithstanding this darkness that seemed to gather around him, on which the old man leaned steadfastly. So great was the darkness that he was fearful he should lose his way if he let go the rod of iron; but he clung to it,

and continued to wander on until, by and by, he was brought out into a large and spacious field, and he also was brought out to a place where it was lighter, and he saw a certain tree which bore very precious fruit. And he went forth and partook of the fruit of this tree, which was the most precious and desirable of any fruit that he had ever tasted; and it seemed to enlighten him and fill him with joy and happiness. Lehi was a good old man—a man who had been raised up as a great prophet in the midst of Jerusalem. He had prophesied in the midst of all that wickedness which surrounded the Jews; and they sought to take away his life, because of his prophecy. But notwithstanding this gift of prophecy, and the gifts of the Spirit which he enjoyed, the Lord showed him by this dream that there would be seasons of darkness through which he would have to pass, and that even then there was a guide. If he did not all the time have the Spirit of God upon him to any great extent, there was the word of God, represented by an iron rod, to guide him; and if he would hold fast to that in his hours of darkness and trial, when everything seemed to go against him, and not several therefrom, it would finally bring him where he could partake of the fruit of the precious tree—the Tree of Life. Consequently I am not so sure, that it is intended for men of God to enjoy all the time a great measure of his Spirit.

I will refer to another example—one that I have often quoted. It will be found in the "Pearl of Great Price." It is a revelation that was given renewedly to Joseph Smith, concerning what God revealed to Moses, before he was permitted to go down and be a deliverer to the children of Israel. The Lord severely tried Moses, as well as enlightened him. He had to pass through both conditions of experience—a condition of great light, truth, knowledge and understanding in the ways of God, and a condition of darkness and great temptation. Hence we find that on a certain occasion God called Moses up into a very high mount, where he bowed down before the Lord and cried mightily unto him, and the Lord heard his prayer, and the glory of God descended and rested upon him, and he beheld many great and wonderful things. His mind was opened to things that he never had understood before—things that were great and marvelous. Yet the Lord showed him but very few of his works, for he told Moses on that occasion that no man could behold all his works except he beheld all his glory; and no man could behold all his glory and afterwards remain in the flesh. To behold all the works of God was more than any mortal man could endure.

Moses, after receiving this remarkable vision, had such great knowledge and intelligence unfolded unto him that he marvelled exceedingly, and while gazing upon the works of God the Spirit of God withdrew from him and he was left unto himself, and he fell to the earth, for his natural strength departed from him. "Now," said Moses, "I know for this once that man is nothing, which thing I never had supposed." But he had learned by the contrast that man, in and of himself, was as nothing, and comparatively speaking, less than the dust of the earth, which moves hither and thither by the command of the great God; but that man, being an agent unto himself, and God not having a disposition to control this agent contrary to certain laws and principles, when this agent was left to himself he found that he was nothing. The Lord then permitted Satan to appear in a personal form and visit this great man of God. Here, now, was a contest. Satan came up before Moses, not in all his ugliness and maliciousness, but assuming the form of an angel of light, Satan said, "Moses, son of man, worship me!" Moses looked upon Satan and said, "Who art thou, that I should worship thee? For I could not look upon God except his glory should come upon me, but I can look upon those as a natural man." Here was the difference. He could look upon this individual who came to him pretending to be an angel of goodness and light, and have none of the glorious feelings that he had before. Hence said Moses, "I can discern the difference between God and thee. Get thee hence, Satan!" Satan did not feel disposed to give up the attack, and he commanded him again to worship him, and he exerted a great power and the earth shook and trembled, and Moses was filled with fear and trembling, but he nevertheless called upon God, for he was convinced in his own mind that his visitor was one from the infernal regions, a personage of darkness, and he felt to rebuke him, and in his fear, he saw the bitterness of hell, that is, the fear and trembling that came upon him and the darkness that surrounded him gave him an experience of the bitterness and misery of those who are in torment. After a certain period of time in which Satan tried to overpower him, Moses gained strength from God, and commanded Satan in the name of Jesus Christ to depart, and he departed. Moses then received strength, and he continued to call upon God, and the glory of God again rested upon him so that he beheld the works of the Creator, and he began to inquire very diligently concerning the earth upon which he dwelt. The Lord saw proper on that occasion, after severely testing Moses with the opposite power, to show to him the whole earth. Not merely portions of its surface, but he showed the whole of the inside as well as the outside, for the revel-