

## DISCOURSE

BY

PREST. GEORGE Q. CANNON,

DELIVERED

In the Tabernacle, Salt Lake City,  
Sunday afternoon, Nov. 9th, 1884.

REPORTED BY JOHN IRVINE.

I will read a portion of the 3rd chapter of the first epistle of St. Peter, and a portion of the 4th chapter; commencing at the 12th verse of the 3rd chapter.

12 For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil.

13 And who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?

14 But and if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye: and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled;

15 But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear:

16 Having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ.

17 For it is better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well doing, than for evil doing.

18 For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit:

19 By which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison;

20 Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water.

21 The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us, (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ:

22 Who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him.

1 Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin;

2 That he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God.

3 For the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries:

4 Wherein they think it strange that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you:

5 Who shall give account to him that is ready to judge the quick and the dead.

6 For, for this cause was the gospel preached also to them that are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit.

7. But the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer.

8 And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins.

These words, my brethren and sisters, embody to us to-day, though written by the Apostle Peter 1800 years ago, the Gospel of life and salvation. They are exceedingly appropriate to Latter-day Saints, as doubtless they were when written to former-day saints. The circumstances which surrounded our brethren and sisters in former days no doubt were similar in many respects to those which surround us in this our day, probably, with this difference: that we are not scattered to the same extent they were; we have been gathered together from the nations where the Gospel was preached to us, and are now living in one community in these mountains. But the same doctrines, the same principles, the same powers of evil, the same powers of good, the same Spirit of God, and the same spirit of evil, were extant then, and were experienced then by the Saints who took upon themselves the name of Christ, as they are by us who now live.

Since I have come into this stand my mind has reverted to a conversation which I had a few days ago with a minister of the Dutch Reform Church, who was passing through this city, and who was introduced to me, and had a good many inquiries to make respecting our doctrines. When I told him how God had revealed Himself in these last days, how He had restored the Everlasting Priesthood, the ordinances of life and salvation, the Gospel in its original purity and power, accompanied with the Holy Ghost and its gifts, and had organized the Church as in ancient days, and related to him what God had said concerning all the churches in Christendom, he had the question to ask, which is so frequently asked of all our Elders when they travel and declare the same message, "Why has God left the Christian world for so long a time without these blessings and these powers and these gifts that you now claim as belonging to your Church and having been restored from heaven? And what has become of those Christians whom you say died in ignorance of the fulness of the Gospel of salvation?"

These are very pertinent questions. They are questions frequently asked of all our Elders. They are questions which suggest themselves to the minds of every thinking man when he is told that God has restored the truth in its original purity, with the power and authority of the Priesthood which have been so long withdrawn. Our ancestors we may have known, at least some of them; we may have known the morality of their lives, the purity of their intentions, their exemplary conduct; and if we do not understand the principles of the Gospel when we are told the mes-

sage that the Elders have to bear, the inquiry naturally arises, "Is it possible that my grandfather, my grandmother, my uncle, or perchance my father and my mother, have not gone to heaven, that they are not in the presence of God? Why, better people I never knew, and I have always thought," says the inquirer, "that they really had gone to heaven, and now you tell me that they did not understand the Gospel, you tell me that unless I am baptized I shall be damned, and yet they are dead and have not been baptized."

I expect many feel as the heathen king once felt. He was a king of the Franks, one of the old races that invaded what is now called France. He had surrendered his old convictions sufficiently to consent to receive the rite of baptism. A Catholic Bishop from Rome was to sprinkle him. But before submitting to be sprinkled the thought suggested itself to the king to ask the question what had become of his ancestors. The Bishop, more ready than politic, said, "They have gone to hell." "Then," said the king, "I will go to hell with them; I shall not be separated from my ancestors," and he refused to receive the rite of baptism.

Now, I expect that there are many people in the world who, in the absence, or for the want of knowledge concerning the plan of salvation, would almost feel the same when told that if they did not obey the Gospel they would be damned. But when people are enlightened concerning the plan of Jehovah, the Gospel of the Son of God, they can easily reconcile justice and mercy as being attributes of the Great Being whom we worship. As I remarked to this gentleman, "I might easily answer your question by propounding another question to you. You are a Christian minister; you preach what you believe to be the Gospel; what has become of the millions of heathen who died in ignorance of that Gospel which you profess to obey and accept as the plan of salvation—the millions of heathen who never heard the name of Jesus Christ, the only name given under heaven whereby man can be saved—what has become of them?"

"Oh," said he, "but they were not Christians."

Said I, "Do you think that God makes a distinction between the souls or the spirits of men? Is there one class of spirits for whom He has a greater respect than He has for others? Is a Christian soul more valuable, or more precious, in the sight of our Great Creator than the soul of a heathen? I do not believe it myself. I have no such idea."

But he could see a wide distinction between those who were Christians and those who were not.

Nevertheless the difficulty still remains, and it will ever remain to those who do not comprehend the plan of salvation as revealed by the Lord Jesus Christ. We must remember that God's work is not confined to this life; that God's plan of salvation extends throughout eternity; that according to our belief it began to operate in eternity, if it ever began at all—for it never really in truth began, it always operated, operated from eternity and will operate to eternity, for all the children of men, for every human soul. The plan of salvation devised by our Father and God is intended to save every human being that will be saved; to reach them all, unless, during this probation, they commit what is termed the unpardonable sin, the sin against the Holy Ghost, and become sons of perdition, in which event salvation ceases (so far as they are concerned) to operate; they put themselves outside of the pale of salvation.

There is a very interesting revelation contained in the new translation by the Prophet Joseph Smith, which is found in the Pearl of Great Price. The revelation says:

And it came to pass that the God of heaven looked upon the residue of the people, and wept; and Enoch bore record of it, saying, How is it that the heavens weep, and shed forth their tears as the rain upon the mountains? And Enoch said unto the Lord, How is it that thou canst weep, seeing thou art holy, and from all eternity to all eternity? And were it possible that man could number the particles of the earth, yea, and millions of earths like this, it would not be a beginning to the number of thy creations; and thy curtains are stretched out still; and thou art there, and thy bosom is there; and also thou art just; thou art merciful and kind forever; thou hast taken Zion to thine own bosom, from all thy creations, from all eternity to all eternity; and naught but peace, justice, and truth is the habitation of thy throne; and mercy shall go before thy face and have no end; how is it that thou canst weep?

The Lord said unto Enoch, Behold these thy brethren; they are the workmanship of mine own hands, and I gave unto them their knowledge, in the day that I created them; and in the garden of Eden, gave I unto man his agency; and unto thy brethren have I said, and also gave commandment, that they should love one another, and that they should choose me, their Father; but behold, they are without affection; and they hate their own blood; and the fire of mine indignation is kindled against them; and in my hot displeasure will I send in the floods upon them, for my fierce anger is kindled against them. Behold, I am God; Man of Holiness is my name; Man of Counsel is my name; and Endless and Eternal is my name, also. Wherefore, I can stretch forth my hands and hold all the creations which I have made; and mine eye can pierce them also; and among all the workmanship of my hands there has not been so great wickedness as among thy brethren; but behold, their sins shall be upon the heads of their fathers; Satan shall be their father, and misery shall be their doom; and the whole heavens shall weep over them, even all the workmanship of my hands; wherefore should not the heavens weep, seeing these shall suffer? But behold, these which thine eyes are upon shall perish in the flood; and behold, I will shut them up; a prison have I

prepared for them. And that which I have chosen has plead before my face. Wherefore, he suffereth for their sins, inasmuch as they will repent in the day that my Chosen shall return unto me, and until that day they shall be in torment; wherefore, for this shall the heavens weep, yea, and all the workmanship of my hands.

A most important revelation, this, to Enoch, showing unto him the fate of the wicked after his city should be translated and taken to heaven. The inhabitants of the earth should grow worse and worse, more abandoned than ever in their wickedness, until the time should come for the Lord to send forth His floods and drown the inhabitants of the earth except Noah and those who received his testimony. All this was shown unto Enoch; and he was shown that those who had thus acted, or who should thus act, would be consigned to prison, they would be consigned to a place of torment, and because of their sufferings, because of that which they should have to pass through the heavens themselves wept over their fate. Enoch was told that they should remain there until the day of the Lord Jesus Christ, or in these words: "And that which I have chosen has plead before my face. Wherefore, He suffereth for their sins, inasmuch as they will repent in the day that my Chosen shall return unto me."

That is, after the Savior's advent in the flesh, after He has suffered for their sins; until then, when He should return unto the Father, they should remain in this prison and in this condition of torment. "Wherefore, for this shall the heavens weep, yea, and all the workmanship of my hands."

Those millions of spirits who had thus committed sin and iniquity until it could be borne no longer, until the earth groaned under their wickedness, and cried aloud as with a human voice against the wickedness upon its surface of which those inhabitants had been guilty—those millions of spirits were swept off with a flood, the whole family of man was destroyed, except Noah and those seven souls who received his testimony, a part of his family, and a part only, for there were children that Noah had who rejected his testimony and who also shared in the destruction that came upon the inhabitants of the earth. But those eight, including Noah, were the sole surviving remnant of the entire family of man. The antediluvian world numbered millions doubtless; millions were swept away from the face of the earth, and consigned to a place of torment, or to a prison. In this prison they were immured, doubtless in utter darkness—in the condition that is so expressly described by the Savior Himself when upon the earth—in outer darkness, where there is weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth, a place of torment, where they were kept until the Savior Himself came in the flesh and proclaimed unto the children of men the Gospel of life and salvation.

Jesus himself on one occasion went into the synagogue after His baptism by John the Baptist, and there was handed to Him a book containing the prophecy of Isaiah, or as it is written in the New Testament Isaiah. He took it and read these words: "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; He hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord." He there proclaimed in the words of the Prophet Isaiah the exact character of the mission that had been assigned Him by His Father in heaven. He was not only commanded to preach good tidings unto the meek, and to bind up the brokenhearted, but He was sent to proclaim liberty to the captives and the opening of the prison to them that were bound. Thus was a part of His mission foretold by the Prophet Isaiah a long time before His birth. He Himself confirmed the correctness of the prediction by reading it in the ears of the people; and when He left the earth, after having established His Gospel upon it, after having commenced the work of salvation here, after having ordained men to the authority of the everlasting Priesthood which He held, the Priesthood of Melchisedec—after having done this and was slain by wicked men, suffered for the sins of humanity in the flesh, He then went, in the words that I have read in your hearing from this epistle of Peter, and preached to the spirits in prison which sometime were disobedient when once the long-suffering of God waited in the days of Noah. He went and proclaimed liberty to the captive; He went to open the prison doors to them that were bound. He alone could do this. No Prophet that preceded Him had the authority, for none of the Prophets that had preceded Him had this mission assigned them. It was His duty as the Son of God, as the Redeemer of the world, after, as I have said, committing the Gospel to men in the flesh, after ordaining men to preach that Gospel and administer its ordinances in the power and authority of the everlasting Priesthood, to preach to those spirits in prison. It did not take a great while to commence the work; for He was crucified on Friday, and was resurrected on Sunday; but in the interim, while His body laid in the tomb, His spirit, as is correctly stated in one catechism—"descended into hell," and, according to the mission that had been assigned Him, according to the revelation that God gave to Enoch before the floods descended upon the wicked world, according to the predic-

tion of Isaiah, and according to the power and authority which He exercised as the Son of God, He went and opened the prison doors to them that were bound, preached to them the everlasting Gospel once more, and gave unto them the privilege of receiving it in the spirit even as though they were in the flesh. Therefore says Peter "by which also He went and preached unto the spirits in prison which sometime were disobedient when once the long-suffering of God waited in the days of Noah while the ark was a preparing." Then he goes on and he says—after telling the saints how they should live, how the wicked should act, and how they should be treated—he says: "For this cause was the Gospel preached also to them that are dead that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit."

Now, say some, "Oh, this means when men are dead in their sins. This is what Peter means—dead in their sins."

It does not mean any such thing. That is not the meaning of it. It means just what it says. It means that the Gospel shall be preached to them that are dead; that the Savior should carry the glad tidings of salvation to them, and not only to those who were disobedient in the days of Noah, but to all the spirit world, to every soul of Adam's race that had up to that time died who had not received the Gospel in the flesh. He commenced the work there just as He did here. He commenced, as I have said, by preaching the Gospel, by revealing it to His disciples, by giving them the authority to preach it, and then He descended into Hades or hell, and there, doubtless, chose His ministers, the men who had the authority of the Holy Priesthood and set them to the same labor that was commenced on the earth, the labor of preaching His everlasting Gospel to all the spirit world, to the millions of spirits who had died either in disobedience to the Gospel of Christ or in ignorance of that Gospel, never having heard the sound of it. The Gospel was sent to the entire spirit world, except, as I have before stated, to those sons of perdition who had committed the unpardonable sin, or the sin against the Holy Ghost, and the labor has doubtless continued from that day until the present time in the spirit world. In the authority and power of the everlasting Priesthood the servants of God have been calling upon the inhabitants of that world to repent and believe in Jesus: first to repent of their sins and be willing to receive the Gospel of the Son of God in its fulness and in its purity, just as men would receive it in the flesh—that is, be willing to comply as far as possible with all its requirements, and also to have this further willingness, that if they were in the flesh they would submit to and receive every ordinance of the Gospel of life and salvation. They must not only believe in Jesus, as I have said, and repent of their sins; not only be willing to go that far, but be willing to go to the full extent of the requirements of the Gospel, be willing to obey every ordinance and every law that is necessary, and say in the spirit, "Oh, if I were in the flesh I would be baptized for the remission of my sins; I would have hands laid upon me for the reception of the Holy Ghost; I would be willing to obey every law of God, my Eternal Father, if I had the opportunity in the flesh of doing so."

Jesus illustrated this principle and the work which lay before Him very beautifully in the case of the thief on the cross. One of the thieves reviled Him. The other turned and rebuked his companion for reviling the Savior, and asked the Savior to remember him when He came into His kingdom; for you must understand that the idea had become prevalent then that Jesus was a king, and they had written over His cross in three languages, "Jesus, King of the Jews," partly in derision, doubtless; but it was the truth. Pilate asked Him if He was not a king, and this robber, doubtless, shared in the feeling that Jesus was a king. Therefore he besought Him to remember him when He came into His Kingdom. Jesus said to him: "To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise." "There I can speak to you," He might have said, "more fully than I can now. This is our dying hour, and I am not in a position to preach to you or explain to you the plan of salvation that I have; but wait awhile, before this day ends you will be with me in paradise, and there I can make full explanations to you concerning all that you desire to know."

And this in reality was the case. That day they were in paradise together. Jesus was in a position to preach to him in the spirit as He had done to men in the flesh. And you will remember—although it seems almost unnecessary to repeat it to this congregation who are so well instructed; but there are young people who are not so familiar with these doctrines, and, therefore, for their benefit I quote the Scriptures. You will remember when Mary, after she missed the body from the sepulchre, rushed forward to a man, supposing him to be the gardener, and asked him where he had laid the body. She did not recognize Him at first, but as soon as He made Himself known she essayed to clasp Him in womanly affection. He, however, told her to stand back, not to touch him. You must not put your hands on me, Mary. Whatever your relations may be to me, you must not touch me now. "Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to

my God and your God." This was His expression when His body had been resurrected from the tomb. He had not yet been to His Father—that is, directly to the immediate presence of His Father. Therefore it was not fit that any mortal should put hands upon Him. It was not the privilege even of Mary, closely connected as she was with Him—it was not her privilege to put her hand upon her resurrected Lord. He had not yet ascended to the Father.

Thus you see the Scriptures corroborate that which I have said in this respect. His body had lain, as I before remarked, from Friday until Sunday in the tomb, and then it was resurrected. But during that period His spirit had been engaged preaching to the spirits in prison; they heard the glad tidings of salvation from the Savior. His voice penetrated the depths of hell, the gloom of darkness, and it awakened hope within their hearts. He proclaimed liberty to the captive, He opened the prison doors to those that were bound. He preached unto them the acceptable year of the Lord; for the time had come for them to be redeemed from their prison house in which they had been so long incarcerated for the sins committed in the flesh.

This is the Gospel of salvation that God has revealed. Every human being that has ever been born upon the face of the earth, every human being that ever will be born will hear these glad tidings of salvation proclaimed by those who have authority to administer it unto fallen man, whether they lived before Jesus, whether they lived at the time of or since Jesus, or whether they will live yet in the future. They must hear the Gospel. They cannot be judged until they do hear it. Every principle of salvation will be proclaimed to those who have died without the privilege of hearing it in the flesh—they must hear it in the spirit world as well as those who hear it in the flesh. Therefore, we need not be in any anxiety concerning our ancestors; we need not puzzle ourselves with questions as to the fate of the heathen; we need not be disturbed in our feelings to reconcile the justice of God with His mercy, or His mercy with His justice, to the children of men. None of these questions need trouble us, for the reason that by the revelation of these glorious principles God's mercy is reconcilable in the most perfect manner with His justice. We see by this that God will not consign any soul to endless torment without first giving him an opportunity of receiving or rejecting the Gospel. If he be consigned to torment it will be as a punishment for violating law. Where there is no law there is no transgression of the law. There can be therefore no punishment if a man does not comprehend the law. If it is not made plain to him, its binding force does not operate upon him; but when he understands it, when his mind comprehends it, when it is declared to him, then it begins to operate upon him, and if he reject it, then the penalty begins to operate also, and unless he repents and obeys that law he will receive severe condemnation. Therefore in the spirit world there are grades of punishment just as there are grades of spirits. Some are ignorant. Some men who never heard the name of Jesus have lived according to the light that God gave them; for God has given to every man that is born into the world, according to the revelations we have received, His Spirit. He has given unto every man and woman His Spirit, not the gift of the Holy Ghost, but His Spirit by which they are led and guided. Some call it the light of conscience, the voice of conscience. No man ever committed a wrong that listened to that voice without being chided for it, whether he be Christian or heathen, whether he has lived according to the light of the Gospel or been in entire ignorance of it. Every man has within him a spirit which comes from our Great Creator, and if we grieve it not it leads us, guides us, though we may not know the Gospel, as has been the case with many thousands and millions of human beings. It leads all the children of men when they listen to it; it leads them in the path of peace, in the path of virtue, in the path of happiness; but if they violate that spirit or grieve it, if they go contrary to its monitions, if they harden their hearts against and sin against it, then it departs, and another spirit takes its place, namely, the spirit of the evil one.

Thus it is that the heathen, many of them have lived lives most exemplary, lives which are the admiration of posterity. Men not confined to one race, not to one nationality, but men of every race, men of every clime, men of every language, have received the same spirit and have been enlightened by it, and their lives have been noble and admirable, and no doubt have been acceptable to God our eternal Father. Therefore, when you think about your grandparents whom you have known, when you think about your parents or some other relatives whom you have known, who died in ignorance of the Gospel, you have known their lives, you have known how good their desires were, you have known how they conformed to the law so far as they understood it, how moral they were, how exemplary, how correct in their conduct, in their conversation and in their dealings—when you think of these, you need not be afraid that they have lost anything because they died in ignorance of the Son of God. I tell you that God's providence is over all His children, and He will reward every man and every woman according to his or her