

DISCOURSE

By Elder ORSON PRATT, delivered in
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REPORTED BY JULIA YOUNG.

I WILL read a portion of the word of God contained in the 85th Psalm:

"Lord, thou hast been favorable unto thy land; thou hast brought back the captivity of Jacob.

"Thou hast forgiven the iniquity of thy people; thou hast covered all their sin. Selah.

"Thou hast taken away all thy wrath: thou hast turned thyself from the fierceness of thine anger.

"Turn us, O God of our salvation, and cause thine anger toward us to cease.

"Wilt thou be angry with us forever? wilt thou draw out thine anger to all generations?

"Wilt thou not revive us again: that thy people may rejoice in thee?

"Shew us thy mercy, O Lord, and grant us thy salvation.

"I will hear what God the Lord will speak: for he will speak peace unto his people, and to his saints; out let them not turn again to folly.

"Surely his salvation is nigh them that fear him; that glory may dwell in our land.

"Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other.

"Truth shall spring out of the earth; and righteousness shall look down from heaven.

"Yea, the Lord shall give that which is good; and our land shall yield her increase.

"Righteousness shall go before him; and shall set us in the way of his steps."

This was a prayer and prophecy uttered by the ancient Psalmist in relation to the house of Israel. These psalms were written by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, and most of them were prophetic in their nature. David was a man especially inspired of the Lord, not only to reign as king over the house of Israel, but to utter forth many predictions in the form of psalms to be sung in the congregations of Israel. He clearly spoke concerning the coming of the Messiah; His death, and the afflictions that should come upon Him as the Redeemer of the world, and of many events in connection with His coming, all of which were fulfilled. He also spoke in many psalms in regard to the preaching of the servants of God in all nations, declaring the wonderful works of God. He also spoke concerning the second coming of this Messiah, the great glory that would be revealed on that grand occasion; he also spoke by the spirit of prophecy concerning the downfall of the twelve tribes of Israel and the great affliction that would come upon them; also, that the Lord would remember them in the latter times, and bring them to a knowledge of the truth.

This psalm which I have just read contains a prayer, uttered by this inspired man, for the redemption of the covenant people of the Lord. That He would not be angry with them forever, that His anger might not be drawn out towards them to all generations; that He would turn Himself from the fierceness of His wrath and show mercy unto His people again.

The Lord saw proper, in answer to that prayer, to inspire the Psalmist to utter these words—"Mercy and truth are met together, righteousness and peace have kissed each other. Truth shall spring out of the earth and righteousness shall look down from heaven. Yea, the Lord shall give that which is good, and our land shall yield her increase. Righteousness shall go before Him and shall set us in the way of His steps."

The Lord did not leave David in uncertainty about the blessings that should come upon His covenant people; he was informed, in the words which I have repeated, that the Lord intended again to bestow His blessings after He had sufficiently punished Israel; that He intended to bring them back to their own land; that He intended to bless that land which was given to them as an inheritance, and that that land should again yield its increase to His people. But before He would do this He promised that truth should spring out of the earth, and that at the same time righteousness should look down from heaven; that truth should go before His face and set His people in the way of His steps.

We live, Latter-day Saints, in the age when this prophecy is being fulfilled. We have lived to behold the glorious period dawn upon this creation when God has condescended to bring forth truth out of the earth, and at the same time has manifested His righteousness from heaven—that is His law. I need not tell the Latter-day Saints that are now before me, how this prophecy was fulfilled, for they already understand it. There may be strangers, however, in our midst who do not understand these things, as we understand them; and it may be well to briefly notice the fulfillment of this prophecy as manifested in the rise and progress of this church. This church has an existence this day in consequence of the fulfillment of their words. There never would have been any such people as the church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, unless God had again manifested Himself in fulfillment of this prophecy. He has seen proper "after

so many generations have passed, to again reveal Himself to the children of men; although, it was contrary to their opinions and ideas that God would ever again speak to the inhabitants of the earth. They concluded that all communication from the eternal worlds was shut off; that, although there was a God and plenty of angels and messengers in His presence, He would never send them again to the inhabitants of our globe to reveal anything new.

These have been the ideas of our fathers for many generations that are past.

The whole christian world were deluded with these ideas for some 17 or 18 centuries.

The idea took its rise in the apostate church that sprang up in the days of the apostles; a church which denied the spirit of revelation and had the wickedness and audacity to proclaim in the face and eyes of the Bible, that it needed no new revelation; that it had sufficient. The councils that were called towards the close of the third and fourth centuries of the christian era concluded to introduce laws and rules among the church. The Greek and Catholic churches excommunicated all persons that would believe in the God of revelation.

They collected together various manuscripts which they had picked up in various parts of the earth, which they called the fullness of the canon of scripture; then they passed a decree that if any person should be found believing anything except that which was contained in their canon, that he should not be permitted full fellowship in the church; that he should be disfellowshipped and anathematized. This wicked and abominable doctrine was handed down for a great many generations in the Greek and Roman Catholic churches, and will be found throughout all their writings—the writings of their most noted Archbishops.

They declare that they neither received nor believed in any new revelation; that their rule of faith and practice was ancient scripture; that the church must be guided by those ancient laws, and by the traditions of their fathers—traditions handed down from the days of the apostles to their day. Thus you see all communication from the heavens was cut off by their own decree; they were worse than the heathen. Nebuchadnezzar, a great heathen king accustomed to worship idols all his days, had not apostatized from the true God as those professed christians had, for he believed in the God that gave revelation. We have an account in the Book of Daniel how the Lord did reveal himself to that heathen king in a dream. But he forgot the dream and sent a proclamation to all the wise men of Babylon to see if he could find out an interpreter. He, at length, found one in the person of Daniel the prophet, who gave the king the dream that the God of heaven had given him, also the interpretation, and we have many instances on record where ancient heathen kings had not so far strayed from the God of heaven but what they could believe in new revelation; but we have the example before us for many generations where people who have assumed the name of Christ disbelieved in new revelation, and persecuted those who believe in receiving any new communication.

Some two or three centuries ago there was a great reformation in Europe—a protestation against this wicked, corrupt and abominable power that had held sway under the name of christian.

They did reform from many of their corrupt practices, and they had power given to them, although perhaps they did not understand it fully, and the God of heaven did give power to these reformers to bring about more liberal principles; but they had to do it through great persecution. They succeeded, however, in building up denominations which they called christian, that had forsaken, in some measure, the corruption of the mother church. These reformers followed the mother church in regard to limiting their faith to ancient scripture; they would tell the people that there was to be no more revelation. John Calvin and Martin Luther held the view, that there was to be no more revelation from heaven; that the canon of scripture was full. They received this false dogma from the mother church; they could not find it in the New Testament; but it was a tradition handed down by the mother church that such was the fact.

Now, the devil did not particularly care how many good principles people retained, so long as they should deny one of the most important principles of heaven. Cut off communication from the Lord, shut up the heavens, keep angels out of the question concerning any more new communication to be given to the children of men, and the devil has accomplished his object. These falsehoods were handed down, after the reformers came out, in all the various denominations until the present day, until the time when the Lord, by the mouth of His holy angels, called Joseph Smith and gave unto him a knowledge by vision of the place where the ancient records of a portion of the Israelitish nation were deposited. At that period of time there was scarcely a people on the face of the whole earth but what were more or less under the delusion of this apostate doctrine. Mr. Smith, however, was uncontaminated by these traditions, as he was not a member of any church; this is manifest in the prayer offered by this young man at the time when the Lord first revealed himself to him.

He went out to pray, being then a

little over fourteen years of age, in a little grove not far from his father's house. The great object which he had in praying was to learn some few principles, which he saw were absolutely necessary to know, according to his understanding, in order to serve the true and living God. He desired to know which, among all the denominations with which he was surrounded, was the true church.

It is not often that boys of this age would be so exercised, but this was the fact in regard to Joseph Smith. He was uneducated; he had not been to college; he was not trained in the vices of all large cities; but merely a country boy accustomed to hard work with his father. Probably one reason why his mind was thus exercised, was in consequence of the religious excitement existing in that neighborhood at the time; some of his own relatives had joined the Presbyterian Church, and he was earnestly sought after to join himself with some church, and his mind being somewhat wrought upon, seeing many of his young acquaintances turn to the Lord, he greatly desired to know which was the true church. It was a great question; he knew not how to satisfy his mind, for he had not read the Bible much. He heard a great many different doctrines advocated by ministers respecting the different denominations, which caused him to read the Bible. He happened to fall upon a certain passage contained in the book of James: "If any man lack wisdom let him ask of God who giveth liberally and upbraideth not." This passage, when he read it, seemed to sink with great weight upon his mind. He thought it was his privilege to go to the Lord and ask Him respecting the desired information. As I told you before, he had not been trained up in any of the creeds of the existing denominations, and, therefore, he was confiding enough to believe what was here written: "If any man lack wisdom," &c. He thought to himself that he did lack wisdom, for he did desire to know which was the true church. He went into the grove with a determination to claim this promise.

When he was thus praying he saw a light which appeared to be approaching him from the heavens. As it came nearer it seemed to grow brighter until it settled upon the tops of the trees. He thought it would consume the leaves of the trees; but it gradually descended and rested upon him. His mind was immediately caught away. He saw in this light two glorious personages, one of whom spoke to him, pointing to the other saying, "This is my beloved Son, hear ye him." This was a glorious vision given to this boy. When these persons interrogated him to know what he desired, he answered and said, "Lord show me which is the true church." He was then informed by one of these personages, that there was no true church upon the face of the whole earth; that the whole christian world, for many generations had been in apostacy; that they had denied communication and revelation from heaven; denied the administration of angels; denied the power that was in the ancient church that comes through the gift of the Holy Ghost, and gave him much instruction upon this point, but did not see proper upon that occasion to give him a full knowledge of the gospel, and what was necessary to constitute a true church, and gave him some few commandments to govern him in future time, with a promise that if he would abide the same and call upon His name, that the day would come when the Lord would reveal to him still further, making manifest what was necessary to the constitution of the true church. The vision withdrew; the personages attending and the light withdrew. He returned to his father's house, and told the vision, not only to his parents and neighbors, but to some of the preachers of the religious denominations in that place. He was expressly commanded in the vision to unite himself to none of these churches. When he related that which he had received in this vision, the ministers immediately made light of it, and said to him "God does not reveal anything in our days; He revealed all that was necessary in ancient times; He has not spoken for 1800 years to any one." From that time forth he was persecuted, not only by ministers, but all denominations in that region persecuted him. "There goes that visionary boy." This seemed to be the feeling manifested, not only by professors, but by all; but yet he knew that God had manifested himself to him; he could not be persuaded to the contrary, any more than Paul could when he heard Jesus in his first vision.

When about four years had elapsed, he retired to his bed one Sunday evening, reflecting upon the former vision, praying to the Lord that he might receive a fulfillment of the promise; namely, that if he was faithful, the true order of the Church of the Son of God should be revealed to him. While he lay thus praying, all at once the chamber was lighted up; this light continued to grow brighter and brighter until he saw a glorious personage, and this personage revealed to him the condition of the world, the apostacy of the christian nations, and the darkness that reigned; also revealed to him what the Lord intended to accomplish upon the face of the whole earth preparatory to His coming. He informed him that this continent had once been occupied by a religious people, who understood the law of Moses and the gospel; that they kept sacred records among them, and wrote them upon plates of gold, which were deposited in a certain hill about three miles from his father's house. At

the same time this angel was telling him about these plates, the vision of his mind was opened so that he could see the place of their deposit. After the angel had given many instructions he withdrew. Joseph Smith continued to pray; the angel came a second time, related the same things over again, and gave him the same view of the plates, and still further information concerning the work of the last days, and then withdrew a second time. He continued to pray; the angel came the third time, gave him some further knowledge and information, opening still further the prophecies concerning the grand events that must be fulfilled in the latter-days. When the angel withdrew from him the third time, instead of going to sleep, he arose and it was day-break. He had been conversing with this angel nearly the whole night.

He went out in the morning, as usual, with his father to labor in the field, and his father, observing that he looked pale, asked him if he was ill? he replied that he did not feel very well. His father advised him to go to the house. He started to go home, and after going a certain distance from his father and before he reached the house, the angel again appeared to him—this was in day-light—and told him to turn back and tell his father what he had seen. He did so; he was also commanded by the angel in this fourth vision that he should go to the place where these plates were deposited. After relating to his father what he had seen, his father declared that it was a heavenly vision, and told him to be faithful to what had been revealed to him. He, therefore, on the morning of the 22nd of September, 1823, repaired to, and saw the place where these plates were deposited, just as he had seen in the night vision. They were deposited in a stone box not far from the summit of the hill Cumorah. The crowning stone that covered the box was oval; by taking away the turf from its edges he succeeded, by the use of a lever, in raising it from the box. When he saw the plates, he also saw an instrument that was called by the ancient Prophets a Urim and Thummim. While he was thus gazing upon the plates, the angel came again to him, and as he was about to put forth his hand to take them, forbade him, saying that he needed further experience; that they could not be entrusted with any one only with those having an eye single to the glory of God; that they were sacred records, and that no person could have them for speculative purposes; and gave him certain commandments to keep, and told him to visit that place again one year from that time when he would again meet with him. He did so at the expiration of the year, and did so until four years had passed away; and on the morning of the 22nd of September, 1827 the angel permitted him to take the plates, and also the Urim and Thummim.

Thus I have shown you how Truth sprang out of the earth: according to the words of our text. Mr. Smith being uneducated, except in the elementary branches as taught in our common schools in the east, therefore felt himself incapable, by his own learning, to perform so great a work. He was commanded of the Lord to draw off some of these characters from the plates and send them to the learned, which he did: they were sent to the city of New York by the hands of Martin Harris, the old gentleman whom you saw here last conference. That old gentleman being then a middle-aged man, went to New York to see if he could find any person among the learned that could translate the characters. He went to Professors Mitchell and Anthon, and they were exhibited to them; and Mr. Harris received a certificate, stating, that to them the translation of Joseph Smith seemed to be very correct. Martin Harris had not told Mr. Anthon how Mr. Smith came in possession of these characters. The Professor asked Mr. Harris how Mr. Smith obtained the plates from which the characters were taken; he said that he obtained them by the administration of an holy angel by obedience to the commandments of God. Mr. Anthon requested him to let him see the certificate, he did so: and without any further consultation tore it up before his eyes, and then said, if he would bring the plates to him, he thought he could assist him in the translation. We all know that some of the characters and hieroglyphics that have been discovered in some parts of America cannot be deciphered by the most learned men of our day. The Professor wrote an article some time afterwards against the Latter-day Saints, in which he corroborates that which I have just told you concerning a plain countryman coming to him with characters.

Thus we have the testimony of Professor Anthon, that such a circumstance did transpire and that such characters were handed to him. After Martin Harris returned to Joseph Smith and told him the conversation that had taken place, how that Professor Anthon could not decipher the records, Joseph inquired of the Lord, and the Lord commanded him that he should translate the records, and that he should do it through the medium of the Urim and Thummim. He commenced translating, but being a poor scribe he employed Martin Harris to write some for him; he also employed other scribes to write from his mouth, and at intervals continued to work upon the farm. Being persecuted, however, he had to leave his father's house and went down to Pennsylvania, where he was also persecuted. He continued the work of translation until it was completed,