

SERMON

By GEORGE A. SMITH, on the arguments of modern Christian sects against the Latter Day Saints, delivered in the Tabernacle, Sunday morning, June 24, 1855.

[REPORTED BY J. V. LONG.]

I must say, brethren and sisters, that it is with a degree of pleasure that I enjoy the privilege this morning of rising for the purpose of addressing you. However probable it may be that there are those present who might do so more to your satisfaction; yet, if the spirit of prayer and faith is exercised in the assembly, I may be able to present to your consideration some items which may not be altogether uninteresting.

I have taken a good deal of pleasure in preaching in the different settlements of this territory, wherever I have had the opportunity of meeting with the saints; but it is seldom I arise in this stand for that purpose, for it requires a voice rather if anything beyond the strength of my lungs to speak in this large congregation, any length of time, and consequently I do not appear in this stand as often as I otherwise would.

There are many subjects which I take pleasure in discussing in the presence of the saints. I have felt ever since I received my ordination, a great desire to preach upon the first principles of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the world; and to spend my time in proclaiming to the saints those doctrines of obedience, faith, and charity, which are so generally understood, and which by a great many persons are neglected to their own injury. There is not a person, of common intelligence among the saints, who has resided in this valley for the past three years who has not heard enough of the principles of salvation as to know perfectly what to do to be saved, if they had given that attention to the subject which they ought to have done, if such persons desire to carry out the views and sentiments which have been from time to time proclaimed from this stand.

To be sure we frequently hear inferences drawn which do not comport altogether with our former sentiments, sentiments and opinions which we have formed by tradition, or which have been the result of circumstances by which we have been surrounded.

I suppose no person will take exceptions if I should in the continuation of my remarks take a text, which will be found recorded in the 4th chapter of the Gospel according to St. Mark. "And he said, so is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground; and should sleep and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how. For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself, first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear. But when the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come." If such a passage as this does not occur in the 4th chapter of Mark, then I will acknowledge myself mistaken. But whether there is or not, the subject that presents itself to my mind is illustrated by the words of this text.

I remember twenty-four years ago when the doctrines of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints were first being proclaimed to the inhabitants of the earth, we were told that we were to participate in the same blessings, and would be subject to the same kind of persecutions, as was the common lot of all former-day saints; that the same gifts that were enjoyed in the days of our Saviour and his Apostles, were, and should be in the last days; and that if these things did not follow, it was for want of obedience to the will of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. It was this spirit of revelation that pointed out the only way; and because the different churches did not have in their midst the same offices, gifts, and blessings, and the same privileges; the reason assigned was plainly and simply that they had not been faithful in their obedience to the principles which had been revealed, and had thereby lost the spirit of revelation, had slid from the original platform; and had fallen back to principles of folly, teaching for doctrine the precepts of men. The Christian world, as we shall denominate it, being then composed of several hundred different denominations, who all professed to form portions of the Church of Christ, and separately professed to have the only true church, and the only true doctrines that were upon the earth. Each one of them claimed to have the only true plan of salvation that was upon God's footstool, and to disclaim all others as being heretical, erroneous, and corrupt; and yet each and all were differing on some principles. This division of principle had unquestionably, for many centuries, been the cause of bloody war, and millions of people had been slain in consequence; the quantity of blood spilt, and amount of human suffering produced were immense. These same Christian divisions, which had been so thirsty for human blood, so tenacious to their peculiar doctrines, and that had been so fruitful in producing creeds and systems which they maintained by the edge of the sword, almost invariably, as they would use every means that came within their power to build up themselves, and the more they had of subdivisions the more new schisms; new, because a new division had been made; the whole may be considered a practical illustration of the sentiment of the Irish Poet:

"Who can believe it? the cause is rather odd,
They hate one another, for the love of God!"

The Lord sent his servant Joseph Smith to proclaim to the world the original principles of the gospel, and the very moment they heard him calling upon them to come back to the original principles, and partake of the blessings of the gospel of Jesus Christ as they were originally preached by those whom Jesus himself sent to preach; all those different sects and denominations began to call for authority! On being told that it was revealed from heaven, and that the foundation was revelation from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, authority given by him, and that he had commanded the re-establishment of

his church, or of laying the foundation of his church upon its primitive or original foundation; they all exclaimed, "there is to be no more revelation, there is to be no more prophesying, no more visions, no more ministering of angels. Hard as it is to believe, and strange as it may appear, these religionists who had read and professed to believe the New Testament, and knew that John did declare, more than sixty years after Christ, that he saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven having the everlasting gospel to preach to them that dwell on the earth, to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people, see Rev. 14 ch. 6 v. These same men would rise up and declare that such a thing never was to take place, and although John plainly declares that what he saw was to come to pass hereafter; yet they believed it not, and said all such manifestations had an end when the apostles, or fathers, fell asleep.

Thus they commenced a persecution, an untiring crusade against the Latter Day Saints, and by every means in their power endeavored to stop the progress of the work.

Why said they, we have authority direct from Jesus Christ. I remember a circumstance of a certain learned Baptist preacher rising in a congregation where I had been preaching, and stating that the Baptists had all the authority of the gospel priesthood that was required in the Baptist church, and that it had come to them from the Apostles, pure and unadulterated, by the way of the Waldenses, and that he was prepared to prove the channel through which it had come. I do not know but his congregation believed what he said; but at any rate, the gentleman declined to produce his evidence when I called upon him to do so, and all the evidence that he could have adduced was, that about the year 1160 in Lyons, a man named Peter Waldo, hired a catholic priest to translate the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John; and they formed a church which took the name of its mercantile founder. And this is as far as the authority can be traced by the Baptists; this method of tracing authority is of no use, unless they adopt the authority of the Pope, and if the Catholic church be taken as authority, then when the Catholic church brings out the edict of expulsion, it certainly deprives those whom it expels of all their authority, for it is impossible for a stream to rise higher than its fountain.

If the pope and his church be corrupt, the authority of no other church can be of any value that has descended from it, and is built upon the validity of its priesthood.

The Presbyterians consider that they can trace the matter a little further back. They consider that their authority originated somewhere else, but after spending their time and toil they can only get back to the Catholic church, for they renounced its principles and came out from it, set up a new set of doctrines, part of them borrowed and part of their own manufacture. They denied the spirit of revelation, and consequently had no knowledge from the eternal world, and with the exception of those doctrines which they had picked up, they had no priesthood but that which they had borrowed from the mother church, and the mother church having pronounced an edict of expulsion against them, which must have been valid if she had possessed any authority to confer.

Perhaps a Wesleyan might tell us that in their church they had authority from God. Then we ask where did it come from? From Mr. John Wesley they will reply. And where did he get it? Why he was a minister of the Church of England. And where did the Church of England get the authority from? From Henry the Eighth, who is designated among English kings as the wife killer. And where did he get it? Why when the Romish church refused to sanction the divorce of his lawful wife, without any just cause, and refused to grant him his wishes; he put away his wife, rebelled against the church, which he had acknowledged, and from which he had received the title of defender of the faith, from the Roman pontiff; but yet he came out, excommunicated the pope, and declared the Catholic church to be heretical and abominable, and declared himself to be the head of the church. He enforced his title by military power, seized the revenues of all religious establishments, used them for his own aggrandizement, created new ones upon his own authority, and established the Church of England priesthood. And this is as far as the matter can be traced, and there is the extent of their authority, the idol of their hearts, and the head of the Church of England excommunicated from the Church of Rome for his own corruption. This is a pretty seat of authority! Some persons will tell us that God has never intended to give any more revelations, notwithstanding they read that God set in his church, apostles and prophets, pastors and teachers, and that they had gifts, prophecies, and revelations, and that they were placed in the church for the express purpose of the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, and that they might be no more children tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine, by the slight of men and the cunning craftiness whereby they lie in wait to deceive.

This is plainly and clearly illustrated before any persons who believe the New Testament, and yet the principles and doctrines, when set forth in boldness and simplicity, have been rejected by them.

When the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints was first founded, you could see persons rise up and ask what sign will you show us that we may be made to believe. I recollect a Campbellite preacher who came to Joseph Smith, I think his name was Hayden. He came in and made himself known to Joseph, and said that he had come a considerable distance to be convinced of the truth. "Why," said he, "Mr. Smith I want to know the truth, and when I am convinced I will spend all my talents and time in defending and spreading the doctrines of your religion, and I will give you to understand that to convince me, is equivalent to convincing all my

society, amounting to several hundreds." Well, Joseph commenced laying before him the coming forth of the work, and the first principles of the gospel, when Mr. Hayden exclaimed "O this is not the evidence I want, the evidence that I wish to have, is a notable miracle; I want to see some powerful manifestation of the power of God, I want to see a notable miracle performed, and if you perform such a one, then I will believe with all my heart and soul, and will exert all my power and all my extensive influence to convince others; and if you will not perform a miracle of this kind, then I am your worst and bitterest enemy." "Well," said Joseph, "what will you have done? will you be struck blind, or dumb, will you be paralysed, or will you have one hand withered. Take your choice, choose which you please, and in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ it shall be done." "That is not the kind of miracle I want," said the preacher. "Then sir," replied Joseph, "I can perform none, I am not going to bring any trouble upon any body else, sir, to convince you. I will tell you what you make me think of, the very first person who asked a sign of the Savior, for it is written in the New Testament, that Satan came to the Savior in the desert, when he was hungry with forty days fasting, and said 'if you be the son of God command these stones to be made bread.' And now said Joseph the children of the devil and his servants have been asking for signs ever since, and when the people in that day continued asking him for signs to prove the truth of the gospel which he preached, the Savior replied, 'it is a wicked and an adulterous generation that seeketh a sign,' &c.

But the poor preacher had so much faith in the power of the prophet that he dared not risk being struck blind, lame, dumb, or having one hand withered, or any thing of the kind. We have frequently heard men calling for signs without knowing actually what they did want. Could he not have tested the principles, and thus have ascertained the truth? But this is not the disposition of men of the religious world. To be sure, I have seen those who would get up and reason that Christ built his church upon the rock—for say such men Jesus promised and said, "upon this rock will I build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." From this declaration they claim that the church being built upon a rock would always remain upon the earth in its purity, and the priesthood and authority be preserved, and this argument would be produced with a degree of triumph. How say they, if Mormonism be true, and the pure priesthood had been lost, and the true church had therefore become extinct upon the earth, the gates of hell would have prevailed against it, or the Savior's words failed. If this conclusion be correct, what was the cause of Mr. Wesley beginning a reformation in his day? the church had got into darkness, and the devil had got such power that it was necessary that a reform should be got up.

Where was the necessity of Waldo beginning a new church in his day? The power of the devil, the great adversary, had entirely overcome the church; and hence, it was necessary to begin anew. Now suppose we were to read the passage and see what it was that the Savior did say upon the subject. The Savior said on a certain occasion, addressing his apostles, "whom do men say that I the Son of Man am?" His disciples say, "they have different opinions about you, some say thou art John the Baptist, some Elias, and others Jeremias, or one of the old prophets has risen from the dead." But says the Savior, "whom do ye say that I am?" Why says Peter, "thou art Christ the Son of the living God." The Savior replied, "blessed art thou Simon Barjona for flesh and blood hath not revealed this unto thee but my Father who is in heaven; I say unto thee thou art Peter, and upon this rock will I build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

This argument would be introduced by those who believe that Christ built his church upon St. Peter, and you then come to read the passage, and what do you learn by it? You simply learn that Peter had made the discovery, by revelation, that Jesus was the Son of the living God, and that upon the rock (revelation) he (Christ) would build his church, and upon nothing else, and that the gates of hell should not prevail against it. Not being a linguist like my Brother behind me, I shall say that the common accepted meaning of word "hell," is a place of miserable departed spirits, and hence the Savior told Peter that the gates of departed miserable spirits should never prevail against his church. This is the principle here illustrated, and consequently whenever a reformation becomes necessary in the Church of God, it must be founded upon the rock, revelation, and whenever the church left the principles of revelation they ceased to be the Church of God; and nothing could bring them back again, or re-establish them but being replaced upon the same foundation, and by the same authority.

I have heard arguments brought against this church, by men endeavoring to prove that there was to be no more revelation. For instance, learned men have quoted the epistle of Paul to Timothy, to prove that all revelations ceased in the time of the apostles, for at the time Paul wrote to Timothy he made a declaration to him which the learned have endeavored to use to some advantage. Paul says, "From a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation."

Now I have heard and seen learned priests rise up against this church, and say, "there, Paul says that the holy scriptures were able to make Timothy wise unto salvation, and the 'holy scriptures' means the Bible, and that is all the scripture that is necessary now, for it is only necessary to be made wise unto salvation; and if Timothy had enough to make him wise unto salvation, why all Christians have enough who are believers." Let me here ask a question, are we sure that we have got all the scriptures that Timothy had known from his childhood? He

tells Timothy that from a child he had known the holy scriptures. Now if Timothy was a man of very mature years he might have been a child before our Savior's crucifixion; as Paul's epistle was written 30 years after that event, therefore he must have been a child before the writing of the four Gospels, for one of them was not written until years after. Then those scriptures which he was acquainted with, were those which were written previous to the New Testament, and if we can believe the testimony of the Old Testament, it is found that a great many books were acknowledged as scriptures, and as revelation, which were not by King James's translators considered to be such, and are not at the present day, as they are not incorporated in this Bible. For instance, we learn of the "Book of Enoch;" we read a reference made by Moses to "the Book of the Wars of the Lord." Now what kind of a book or what kind of scriptures those books might have been, we cannot tell; but it is probable that they were in Timothy's knowledge, for he had known the holy scriptures from a child.

This was the great knockdown argument brought by the Campbellites against the Latter Day Saints.

"That from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures." What scriptures? To be sure John's gospel was not written at that time, neither were his three epistles, or his revelations and several other books were not written at that time, altho' King James's translators considered those books necessary and inserted them in our Bible. But suppose we read the passage a little further: "2 Tim. ch. 3; 15, 16, and 17 v. From a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus." "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works."

Then you discover that those scriptures which were given were only sufficient to make even Timothy wise unto salvation, through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, and that all scripture given by inspiration was profitable and actually necessary to make the man of God perfect, and thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

Now my friends get into heaven without revelation if you can; for all scripture is given by inspiration of God, and the man of God cannot be thoroughly furnished with all good works without getting a knowledge of the scriptures. It matters not through whom, this is the principle upon which the true church is founded, and the gates of hell will never prevail against it; but when they reject revelation they adopt another religion, that is built upon another and sandy foundation, and that has another head, different from the true gospel; the clouds will come, and the winds blow and beat upon their fabric, and the fabric that has become old and venerated, will be thrown down, and great will be the fall thereof; and it will be more tolerable for the heathen than for such churches.

Well, this is the very state and position of christendom when Joseph Smith introduced the fulness of the everlasting gospel into the world.

I have narrated the facts relative to the quarrels they had with each other in the several denominations; and yet they united to destroy the little illiterate Boy, as he was called. If education were necessary to proclaim the revelations which Jesus Christ had revealed unto him, (the Boy) then we may conclude the Lord did not select the proper person. They persecuted him, (not for being wicked) burnt his houses, stole his property, tarred and feathered, scourged and imprisoned him; and his friends also shared a similar fate, they were whipped and driven from place to place, and finally when he was placed under the pledge of protection from the executive of the State in which he lived, he was treacherously murdered, almost the whole Christian world said, "it is too barbarous to kill him in that way, but then it is a good thing that he is dead."

But say some, how is it that all the power and all the miracles, and all the manifestations and blessings of the priesthood have not been manifested in the church that were manifested in the Church of God formerly by the prophets of old!

I do not believe that the history of the world records as great a miracle as Deseret now is. The history of the sacred volume does not contain a record of as great and wonderful a miracle as the fleeing of this people into the wilderness, robbed of every earthly thing that could make life desirable, driven before the muskets of the Christian mob, exposed to the vicissitudes of new climates, and exploring into the mountains in a new and desert country, and contending with every difficulty that the devil could introduce, and with all the clamor and calumny that could be invented to harden the hearts of men and women against them. In the midst of all this, they rejoiced, and after locating themselves in the wilderness, a thousand miles from settlements in a place that was pronounced by all scientific travellers to be uninhabitable, and there producing the bounties of life in great abundance, and to see how it has arisen in splendor, in every respect, I say it is a wonder and a marvel far beyond any other recorded upon this earth. The fact of it was, before we were driven from the United States, we petitioned the Governor of every State in the Union for an asylum where we might be permitted to enjoy the blessings of our religion unmolested; and all our petitions were treated with cruel neglect. When our enemies drove us into the wilderness, a great share of the Christian world felt like saying, they will starve to death, the Indians will destroy them, and we shall have done with Mormonism; and they concluded that, in the eyes of posterity, they would give us such a bad name as to justify their cruel actions towards us, and as we should be sure to perish, there would nobody live who would tell the truth for us, and that would be the end of the matter.