

DISCOURSE

By PRESIDENT BRIGHAM YOUNG, Tabernacle, June 3rd, 1855.

REPORTED BY G. D. WATT.

The blessings bestowed upon the Saints are in many instances considered sacrifices, and for this reason I have concluded to say a few words upon the law of consecration, surplus property, and tithing.

The law of consecration was revealed previous to the brethren's going to Jackson County, or about the time they went; after they left Jackson County and went to Caldwell, inasmuch as the people did not understand why they should be called upon to consecrate, for if a man possessed more than he needed, the Lord was welcome to it anyhow, but if a man did not possess more than he really thought he needed, they concluded there should be no such law as the law of consecration, or the law of tithing, and in consequence of many questions being asked upon the subject, a revelation was given after the Prophet had cried unto the Lord saying, "O Lord show unto thy servant how much of the property of thy people thou dost require for tithing."

This revelation was given in February, 1831, and I will read a part of it, commencing at the 8th paragraph. "If thou lovest me, thou shalt serve me and keep all my commandments: And behold thou wilt remember the poor, and consecrate of thy properties for their support, that which thou hast to impart unto them, with a covenant and a deed which cannot be broken, and inasmuch as ye impart of your substance unto the poor, ye will do it unto me, and they shall be laid before the bishop of my Church and his Councillors, two of the Elders, or High Priests, such as he shall or has appointed and set apart for that purpose. 9. and it shall come to pass that after they are laid before the bishop of my Church, and after that he has received these testimonies concerning the consecration of the properties of my Church, that they cannot be taken from the Church, agreeably to my commandments, every man shall be made accountable unto me, a steward over his own property, or that which he has received by consecration, inasmuch as is sufficient for himself and family."

It is hardly worth while for me to say anything about the disposition of the people, still, when a person can realize that men do not know themselves, we consider it proper to tell them who they are, what they are, and how they feel. It would not be worth while for me, or for any other person to talk about their dispositions, the nature of their intentions, their attachments to the world, their sympathies, passions, or any thing of the kind, were it not that people are often blinded in their minds, and do not know themselves: hence it is proper enough to make a few remarks about themselves.

I will read another revelation given in April, 1832. "Verily thus saith the Lord, in addition to the laws of the Church concerning women and children, those who belong to the Church, who have lost their husbands or fathers; women have claim on their husbands for their maintenance until their husbands are taken, and if they are not found transgressors, they shall have fellowship in the church; and if they are not faithful, they shall not have fellowship in the church, yet they may remain upon their inheritances according to the laws of the land.

Paragraph 2. All children have claim upon their parents for their maintenance until they are of age: and after that they have claim upon the church, or, in other words, upon the Lord's store house, if their parents have not wherewith to give them inheritances. (And the store house shall be kept by the consecrations of the church, and widows and orphans shall be provided for, as also the poor: Amen."

There is another revelation still prior to this time, stating that it is the duty of all people who go to Zion to consecrate all their property to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. This revelation was referred to at the April Conference in 1854. It was one of the first commandments, or revelations given to this people after they had the privilege of organizing themselves as a church, as a body, as the kingdom of God on the earth: I observed then, and I now think that it will be one of the last revelations which the people will receive into their hearts and understandings, of their own free will and choice, and esteem it as a pleasure, a privilege, and a blessing unto them to observe and keep most holy.

It is time the privilege of consecrating their property was given to the people, it is the will of the Lord they should enjoy this blessing and privilege, those who choose to hand over their property, to whom? to Him who has given them everything they possess; He owns all they possess, and they have no property, more or less, only that which actually belongs to the Lord, and he deals it out and bestows it where it seemeth him good.

It is not for me to rise up and say that I can give to the Lord, for in reality I have nothing to give. I seem to have something, why? Because the Lord has seen fit to bring me forth, and has blessed my efforts in gathering things which are desirable, and which are termed property. He has instituted a plan and order, has organized this planet, and peopled it by his wisdom and power. He has given me my being upon this earth which is his, for "The earth is the Lord's" and all that pertaineth to it, all the elements, no matter how they are organized, no matter what element it is, it is the element the Lord has brought together to compose the earth. Was it his in the beginning? It was. Did he cause the atoms of elements to come together to organize the earth? He did. He did bring forth the earth, and formed and organized it as it was in the beginning and made it perfect, pure and holy.

To whom do these elements belong now? To the same being who owned them in the beginning. The earth is still his, and its fullness, and that includes each one of us and also includes all that

we seem to possess. It includes all the elements in whatever shape, form, or condition, and wherever they are situated, whether in the native state, or in a state of organization for the comfort and benefit of man.

The ability which we have to bring them together we have received of the Lord, by his free gift, and he has made us capable of performing many things for his glory, for his wisdom, and for the exaltation of those creatures he has brought forth and made. Has he not endowed mankind with intelligence? He has created them but a little lower than the angels. They have received wisdom, knowledge, and understanding, and are organized to receive power, glory and honor. If they are industrious, prudent, and filled with understanding to know from where these favors emanate, of course they will attribute, all the power and goodness to the honor, and glory of the being who bestowed them.

As I have already observed the people are ignorant; they do not know themselves, do not understand their own organization, or from whence they are, if they did there would be no necessity of talking to the people upon these points. We are here on the earth, we live, and find ourselves endowed with wonderful powers, and it seems as though we, as individuals, were perfectly independent of every creature or being throughout the immensity of space. We cannot see our superiors, and we do not fully realize from whence we have received anything we now have in our possession. This is in consequence of our short sightedness, of our want of understanding, and of our lack of the knowledge of eternal beings. Herein is where mankind fail, lacking that which we might have in our possession, viz: the light of the revelations of Jesus Christ, the light of the Holy Spirit, the light of heaven. This is the privilege of the Latter-Day Saints, but they do not enjoy it as much as they might; consequently it is right to talk about these matters, and to instruct the people.

If we could perceive and fully understand that all the ability and knowledge we have, every good we possess, every bright idea, every pure affection and every good vision of mind from our infancy to the present time, are all the free gift of the Lord; and that we of ourselves have nothing original, we should be much better prepared and far more ready to act faithfully and wisely under all circumstances. Every good thing is in his hands, is subject to his power, belongs to him, and is only handed over to us for the time being to see what use we will make of it.

If we will improve, be faithful and diligent in all the blessings bestowed upon us, we then have the principle of increase, and this is the great blessing given to man, and was the promise which Abraham received at the hands of the Lord. Abraham was fearful he would not increase and multiply his posterity on the earth, though he might increase in power, wisdom and knowledge himself, and reflected, "I have no children, or even prospect of them, to rise up and bless me, or to honor and revere my name in coming generations." The Lord, however, gave him this promise, "You have been faithful, and gained wisdom and knowledge in every blessing I have bestowed upon you; and now I will give you a promise that you shall yet have a posterity, and it shall multiply upon the face of the earth, and finally, the end of the number thereof no man can tell, for your seed shall be as numerous as the sands upon the sea shore, or the stars in the firmament, and to their increase there shall be no end." The same blessing was promised to the Lord Jesus Christ. It was the privilege of Abraham to receive knowledge, wisdom, and understanding, but this did not satisfy him, he wanted to see his children multiply. When Abraham has passed a certain ordeal and proved himself faithful, he will receive honor, power, glory, and exaltation, which he is made as capable of attaining in the future as those were who acted previous to his day. Were not this the case, the intelligence, the power of the mind, the spirit that is placed in the body, and all that pertains to life in this stage of action, or prior to our coming into the world, are not made honorable; and if they are not honored by the creature, by the principle that is placed in him, that organization is liable to decompose. Can you understand this? For instance, let a man or woman who has received much of the power of God, visions and revelations, turn away from the holy commandments of the Lord, and it seems that their senses are taken from them, their understanding and judgment in righteousness are taken away, they go into darkness, and become like a blind person who gropes by the wall. Many of you witness this almost daily. Such will continue to go on the retrograde path until they are decomposed; while those who are faithful will continue to increase, and this is the great blessing the Lord has given to, or placed within the reach of the children of man, even to be capable of receiving eternal lives.

To have such a promise so sealed upon our heads, which no power on earth, in heaven, or beneath the earth can take it from us, to be sealed up to the day of redemption and have the promise of eternal lives, is the greatest gift of all. The people do not fully understand these things and have them not in full vision before their minds, if they did I will tell you, plainly and in honesty, that there is not a trial which the saints are called to pass through that they would not realize and acknowledge to be their greatest blessing.

I will give you my reasons for this; if Adam had not sinned, and if his posterity had continued upon the earth they could not have known sin, or the bitter from the sweet, neither would they have known righteousness, for the plain and simple reason that every effect can only be fully manifested by its opposite. If the saints could realize things as they are when they are called to pass through trials, and to suffer what they call sacrifices, they would acknowledge them to be the greatest blessings that could be bestowed upon them. But put them in possession of true principles and true enjoyments, without the opposite,

and they could not know enjoyment, they could not realize happiness. They could not tell light from darkness, because they have no knowledge of darkness, and consequently are destitute of a realizing sense of light. If they should not taste the bitter, how could they realize the sweet? They could not. They would be like a machine, and could not approximate to the standard of the present enjoyment of the brute, and probably not even to that of the vegetable kingdom. To know the bitter they must taste it; they must be made acquainted with the evil there is in existence, or they cannot realize the good. If the people could see and understand things as they are, instead of saying, "I have sacrificed a great deal for this kingdom," they would understand that they had made no sacrifices at all. They have received the blessing of the knowledge of God, to know and understand things as they are, that they may contrast between the evil and the good, between the light and the darkness, between that which is of God, and that which is not of God, between that which is calculated to exalt and glorify the people, and that which is calculated to carry them down to destruction and waste them away, until they would be no more.

It is a curious idea, but one in favor of which there is much testimony, that when people take the downward road, one that is calculated to destroy them, they will actually in every sense of the word be destroyed. Will they be, what is termed annihilated? No, there is no such thing as annihilation, for you cannot destroy the elements of which things are made. But Jesus will take the kingdom, and reign until he has destroyed death, and him that hath the power of death, which is the devil. The people think that many of the revelations of the Lord are hard, and say, "the Lord has given this revelation to try me, to try the strength of my faith." It is the Lord's design that his people should have an experience; hence I will not dispute for one moment but what it was the will of the Lord that we should be made acquainted with darkness, and subjected to vanity.

In my fullest belief, it was the design of the Lord that Adam should not take of the forbidden fruit, and I believe that Adam knew all about it before he came to this earth. I believe there was no other way leading to thrones and dominions only for him to transgress, or take that position which transgression alone could place man in, to descend below all things that they might ascend to thrones, principalities, and powers; for they could not ascend to that eminence without first descending, nor upon any other principle.

I do not dispute but what you and I, naturally, should love the world; this I verily believe. I believe the Lord has designed from ages immemorial, that we should be in darkness and ignorance, and at the same time I believe it is his will that we should receive light and intelligence in order that we may understand true principle, and the true position which the saints should take to contrast continually between the evil and the good. I believe all this, just as much as I believe anything else pertaining to mankind. It is then the design of the Lord that mankind should be placed in this dark, ignorant, and selfish state, that we should naturally cling to the earth; for, as it was said here last sabbath, the earth is very good in and of itself and has abided a celestial law, consequently we should not despise it, nor desire to leave it, but rather desire and strive to obey the same law that the earth abides, and abide it as honorably as does the earth.

If we do abide this law thus faithfully, we are sure to get our resurrection and exaltation, for then we can see and understand things as they are. Then instead of concluding that the Lord has drawn us into difficulties, and compelled us to do that which is unpleasant to our feelings, and to suffer sacrifice upon sacrifice to no purpose, we shall understand that he has designed all this to prepare us to dwell in his presence, to possess his spirit, which is right and intelligent, for nothing but purity and holiness can dwell where he is. He has so ordained it that by the natural mind we cannot see and understand the things of God, therefore we must then seek unto the Lord, and get his spirit and the light thereof, to understand his will. And when he is calling us to pass through that which we call afflictions, trials, temptations, and difficulties, did we possess the light of the spirit, we would consider this the greatest blessing that could be bestowed upon us.

When the Lord gave the revelation instructing us in our duty as to consecrating what we have, if the people then could have understood things precisely as they are, and had obeyed that revelation, it would have been neither more nor less than yielding up that which is not their own, to him whom it belongs. And so it is now. But what vain and foolish principles and ideas have crept into the world, and have occupied the minds of the people! They are far from the true principles of salvation, and godliness; and the world has sunk so far in wickedness, wretchedness, misunderstanding, and every kind of ignorance, and every species of wickedness which can be devised and introduced by the devil and the people combined, that even some of the saints are almost persuaded to think that the Lord has called upon them to consecrate, to give up something which they consider their own, but in reality is not, to somebody that never did own it. Some of the people feel thus, and it is in consequence of the wickedness that is on the earth. The Lord has not called for one farthing's worth which is not his own. The people could not own it, and if they did, have they power to preserve it? No. Can they preserve their buildings from the raging elements of fire? No. Have they power over their grain to keep it from mould, to preserve it from blight, and from the ravages of insects? No. Have they power to preserve their animals in life? No. Can they do these things independent of the power of the Lord Almighty? No. It is a vain and foolish thought for men to think they own anything of themselves, for they do not. It is here in our possession, but how came it so? They do not know. Life is here, but do they

know the power that gave it, or the mode of its coming? Vegetation and animals in great variety, teem upon the face of the earth, but are mankind familiar with the secret springs of their growth and existence? Men ought, in the first place, to find out how these things came, and who produced them. They will acknowledge at once that there never was a house which was not built, and understand the principles of human art, but do not fully understand the operations of nature, though they proceed upon simple and natural principles.

Hence they see the mountains and do not know how they are made, the grass, but do not know upon what principle it grows; the cattle come and go, but they do not know their first origin. Mankind spread abroad upon the earth, but do not know how they came here, and are not familiar with the workings of the power that sustains them. This the people ought to find out in the first place, and then they will know that the earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof, and that there is an eternity of matter yet to be organized. When the saints find out the truth as it is, they will learn that they have nothing to consecrate in reality, that they have nothing to give to the Lord, because they hold nothing but what already belongs to him. We seem to possess much, and if we are faithful and endure to the end we will be crowned, and then the Lord will say it is enough, you have proved yourselves faithful. Comparatively speaking, he will talk with them as a father does with his children. To one son he says, "go and improve that farm, though I do not deed it to you;" to another he says, "take that farm," and to a third, "take this," and all upon the same conditions, "and I will see what you will do with these my farms." They think the farms are already theirs, but they are mistaken, for the father did not deed the farms to them. The eldest son fences, plows, and improves it, builds a house and a good barn upon it, plants an orchard, raises cattle, and makes the possession much more valuable than when the father put it into his hands. "Now John," says the father, "you have proved yourself a wise and faithful steward. I will now give you a deed of this property which I have owned so long, that it may be your property." He says to William, "how is it with your farm?" "Well, father it is much the same as when you gave it to me to improve; I have not done much; I raised a little wheat and corn."

"Where is your house William? O I was not sure that the land was mine, and I did not build one." "Why did you not build a barn?" "Well I did not know that I was going to possess it, so I did not put myself to that trouble, as for an orchard, I was not going to set one out for you to give to some other of the boys." "You are an unfaithful steward, and you can go now and get you a farm, and I will take this that you might have improved and possessed for an everlasting inheritance, and give it to John, for he has been faithful." The parable delivered by Jesus Christ is a fit illustration of this principle, wherein he likens the kingdom of heaven to a man travelling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods; "and unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one" &c. The one who received the one talent hid it up; he was unfaithful and unprofitable, and so his master took away from him the one talent, and gave to him that had ten. So it is with the Lord in all things. If men are faithful, the time will come when they will possess the power and the knowledge to obtain, organize, bring into existence, and own. What of themselves, independent of their creator? No. But they and their creator will always be one, they will always be of one heart and of one mind, working and operating together; for whatsoever the Father doeth so doeth the son, and so they continue throughout all their operations to all eternity. John will be counted worthy to receive his inheritance, but William will be disinherited, and that which he seemed to have will be taken from him, and given to the faithful steward. What have we that is really our own to consecrate? Nothing at all. What is our duty? It is our duty to improve upon every blessing the Lord gives to us. If he gives us land, improve it; if he gives us the privilege of building houses, improve it; if he gives us wives and children, try and teach them the ways of the Lord, and exalt them above the dark, degraded, and sunken state of mankind, &c., if he gives us the privilege of gathering together, let us sanctify ourselves. In his providence he has called the Latter-day Saints from the world, has gathered them from other nations, and given them a place upon the earth. Is this a blessing? Yes one of the greatest the people can enjoy, to be free from the wickedness of the wicked, from the calamities and clamor of the world. By this blessing we can show to our Father in Heaven that we are faithful stewards; and more, it is a blessing to have the privilege of handing back to him that which he has put in our possession, and not say it is ours until he shall say it from the heavens. Then it is plain that what I seem to have I do not in reality own, and I will hand it back to the Lord when he calls for it; it belongs to him, and it is his all the time. I do not own it, I never did. He has called upon the people to consecrate their property, to see whether they could understand so simple a thing as this. When they bow down to worship the Lord, they acknowledge that the earth is his, and the cattle upon a thousand hills; and tell the Lord there is no sacrifice they are not willing to make for the sake of the religion of Jesus Christ. The people were crying this continually among the churches when the book of Mormon came forth, and the Lord spoke through Joseph, revealing the law of consecration, to see whether they were willing to do as they said in their prayers. In their weekly meetings they have told how the Lord has blessed them and forgiven their sins, what glorious visions they have had, and have declared that the Lord was present, and that they had angels to visit them, and they felt so good that they would give all for Christ. Said the Lord to Joseph, "see if they will give their farms to